

Populism and Religion in the Theory of logics as a unit of explanation

Populismo y Religion en la teoría de lógicas como unidad de explicación

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RESUMEN

El presente trabajo analiza una de las intersecciones existentes del vínculo entre política y religión. Ante el progresivo avance de fenómenos sociales que pueden visualizarse entre la política y religión, esta investigación marca como objetivos el examinar ante la teoría de lógicas el vínculo entre política y religión a través del populismo ante la noción de que el populismo se deriva de la idea judeo-cristiana de que el pobre es bueno y su posible co-existencia en las esferas de lo político y lo religioso, así como sus estructuras analizadas a través de la teoría del discurso en el pensamiento de Ernesto Laclau y otros intelectuales de la escuela de discurso de la Universidad de Essex. Ante los resultados obtenidos de esta investigación podemos comprobar que existe un vínculo entre política y religión ante el concepto de populismo y como este se configura en el discurso en las dimensiones y estructuras tanto de lo político, como de lo religioso. Así el desarrollo de esta investigación aporta a una futura línea de investigación dónde a través del análisis del discurso se pueda examinar rasgos populistas en los relatos de actores políticos y religiosos.

Descriptores:

Política, religión, populismo, discurso, vínculo, teoría, investigación, análisis, sociales, fenómenos.

ABSTRACT

The present work analyzes one of the existing intersections of the link between politics and religion. Taking into account the progressive advance of social phenomena that can be visualized between politics and religion, this research marks as objectives to examine by the theory of logics as a unit of explanation the link between politics and religion through populism before the notion that populism derives from the Judeo-Christian idea that the poor are good and their possible co-existence in the spheres of the political and religious, as well as their structures analyzed through the theory of discourse in the thought of Ernesto Laclau and other intellectuals of the discourse school of the University of Essex. Given the results obtained from this research, we can see that there is a link between politics and religion as an appeal of the concept of populism and how it is configured in the discourse in the dimensions and structures of both the political and the religious. Thus, the development of this research contributes to a future line of research where, through discourse analysis, populist traits can be examined in the accounts of political and religious actors.

Keywords:

Politics, religion, populism, discourse, link, theory, research, analysis, social, phenomena.

Introduction

Politics and religion have always linked to the social interactions in our environment. The possible relationship that could exist between populism and religion is examined in an experimental sample of multiple political and social phenomena, such as populism and religion in contemporary Greece, discourse analysis of the Pope's narrative, and the appeal to religion in the decisions expressed in multiple discourses by heads of state in Latin America.

In a theoretical analysis, the understanding of logic in Ernesto Laclau's thought, and that of other scholars such as Glynos, Howarth and Stravakakis, allows us to obtain a vision that could encompass the relationship between populism and religion through the construction of the object, the generation of abstractions and the formation of identities.

The lack of published works that analyse the relationship between populism and religion makes the development of the question that has been raised important. The different types of logic such as political, social and fantasmatic logics, will allow us to analyse and find intersections between populism and religion, through the deconstruction of their meanings and the relationship they have with discourse, the formation of identities, empty signifiers and populism as a concept.

Populism and religion share a relationship in several social spheres, although there is no direct link between them, and the form of constitution of their concept in both cases comes from antagonistic relationships in society. Not only does populism acquire the ability to simplify the political spectrum; as is well described by Stravakakis (2002), in many cultures, religion plays a significant role in the ideological establishment of the state. Populism and religion are, therefore, ways of identifying the disposition of any actor or political agent that operates in a discursive

field in which the notions of the sovereignty of the people, populism and freedom of religion represent central elements of the political imaginarium.

In the logic approach, we can find a clear link with Laclau's notions of dislocation. The relationship between religion and politics produces a possible connection through the existing articulation between the 'discourse' (proposed by religion) and 'contingency'. The formation of empty signifier products of this articulation is what shaped the path of our question in the relationship between politics and religion. Based on this relationship, four dimensions of social relations are displayed: the political, the ethical, the social and the ideological. They will play an essential role in the explanation of the relationship between populism and religion.

The incompleteness that our society represents in a synchronic way (social logic) seems to be well interpreted by the religion, which, in turn, finds in populism the diachronic public contestation (political logic). The formation of dislocated social groups in the antagonistic relationship is encompassed in a narrative and ideological framework (fantasmic logic) that discourse, as a central meaning of identity, could form in this link. An analysis of this significant and innovative relationship is therefore important.

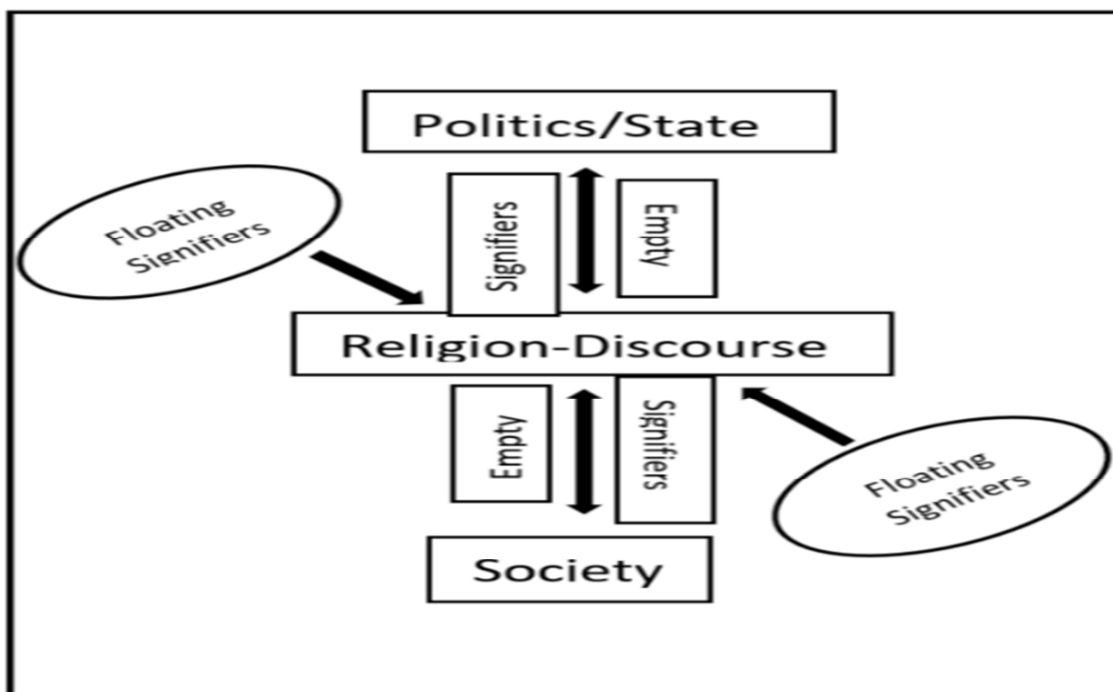
Populism and Religion

Populism and religion have few studied links in political and social sciences, and the relationship has not managed to attract the attention of academics or society in general. Multiple events show a particular relationship between these two aspects. However, they are either not conspicuous or lack concrete actions or facts.

One of the scholars who has focused on the study and relationship of populism and religion has been the political theorist Yannis Stravakakis, his native Greece being the centre of the study of this relationship. There is a religious current in many Western countries, expressing the populist movements with the notion of a universe divided between the heaven of the good and the hell assured to the bad. According to Laclau (2005), in the populist imaginarium, the people acquire infinite virtues. The manual worker, the simple and poor man, embodies a political ideal, while the bureaucrat and the parasite banker are the enemies of society. This would explain the Judeo-Christian idea studied by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1887),¹ that the poor are good and that the populist discourse is not only related to politics, it also fulfills low-class goals in the religious discourse.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *Genealogy of Morals*, explains the relationship that existed on the etymology of the word good, how it has changed the relationship and affection it had, the construction of identities through the term in the social and historical development of the human being. The good and the bad, served as a distinction in the medieval era of the actions or reactions that the nobles had to differentiate themselves from the commoners and the lower social stratifications. The church reversed the term and coined the same for the actions of the less favored, vindicating it in the social sphere and identifying the Judeo-Christian idea that the poor are good.

The discourse in this form is constituted as an essential aspect of the political relationship with religion, this being a way to convey the phenomenon of populism to the link between society and the state as a social relationship. This 'structural incompleteness', as described by Laclau (1996), ensures that the state-society link found in the discourse and contingency of religion is a response to these social demands, articulating the empty and floating signifiers and



ensuring that the social structure is a two-way process, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Social Structure by Religion

According to Laclau (1996), an empty signifier can only arise if there is a structural impossibility. The religious discourse is thus the missing aspect of the social structure, completing it and making it viable, as shown in Figure 1. Religion allows the structural insertion or non-dislocation Laclau (1996) of incongruent social groups, but this would not allow us to determine that there is a relationship between populism and religion. However, the studies on populism by Latin American theorists such as Germani and Di Tella allow us to have an approach to find this relationship.

The idea that populist discourse fulfils goals in the face of institutional deficiencies in the state or religions is evidence that populist mobilisation represents a deviation in the habitual transit from a traditional to modern society (Germani, 1969). Populist practices arise from the failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate political subjects within a relatively stable social order. For this reason, the narratives given as a result of the populist discourse seek to generate new forms of identification in times of instability and misalignment, rather than the previously established social values (Panizza, 2009; p.9). Laclau, in his book *Emancipation* (1996) maintains that the situation that leads to a populist rupture is one in which a plurality of demands coexists with a growing inability of the institutional system to absorb them. In this process, a populist identity arises from the dislocation of the specific identities of the

owners of the particular demands (marginalised social spectrum) and their reconstitution in the imaginary unit of the people.

The social imaginarium is a central axis in the analysis of the relationship between politics and religion, especially in the specific case of religion and populism. A religion exemplifies a social grouping that has acquired what Di Tella (1976) would call 'incongruent groups'. This refers to dislocated and out-of-context social segments, such as the impoverished and lower classes, who are not yet accepted in the higher circles, or to displaced ethnic groups. These are social sectors that accumulate resentment and may develop vengeful attitudes against an establishment that they consider unfair.

An interesting thing about this phenomenon is that Di Tella situated it in the underdeveloped regions in their link to democracy; however, we find that this premise gives us a perspective of analysis of society in the relation of politics and religion, where the vast margin between an elite and the lower social classes, coined as incongruent groups, has led to a form of institutional break in which these groups do not find an answer within the system, and articulate their response in the discourse of religion rather than the institutional restructuring of the state.

Germani and Di Tella complete Laclau's notions related to populism; the impossibility of a society and empty signifiers. Nevertheless, to answer the question posed, it would be necessary to understand the analysis from the logics of critical explanation, and these will allow us to employ a different field of study in considering the relationship between populism and religion.

Key concepts of logics approach | Material-Methods

The study of the logics within the social and political theory has allowed us to understand empiricist analysis and the historical processes of our society Howarth & Glynos (2007), which in turn has helped us to understand how phenomena differ and to restructure our society. For Howarth and Glynos, the logics represent a way of examining society, and based on the ideas of Mouffe and Laclau on logics, the authors developed several analyses of theory in the social sciences and introduced the definitions of social logic, political logic, and fantasmatic logic. Expanding on the work of another political theorist, Yannis Stavrakakis, one of the significant contributions that it makes is the dimensions of the socio-political axis (Figure 2), being an explanation of the notions of dislocation and contingency. Dislocation enables the development of two dimensions in which to characterise aspects of a practice, and the concept of public contestation allows them to develop two further dimensions. By public contestation, we mean the norms which are constitutive of an existing social practice in the name of an ideal or principle, just as dislocation served as a device for the articulation of the fundamental ontological postulate Howarth & Glynos (2007).

Although for Howarth and Glynos, public contestation may be another response to the dislocation, they clarify that these elements are at different analytical levels. Thus, this term could help us to understand the political-social axis (Figure 2), in political and social relations. As the authors explain, the dislocation and the public answer allow us to translate a fundamental axiom in the understanding of contingency and the social realities in general.

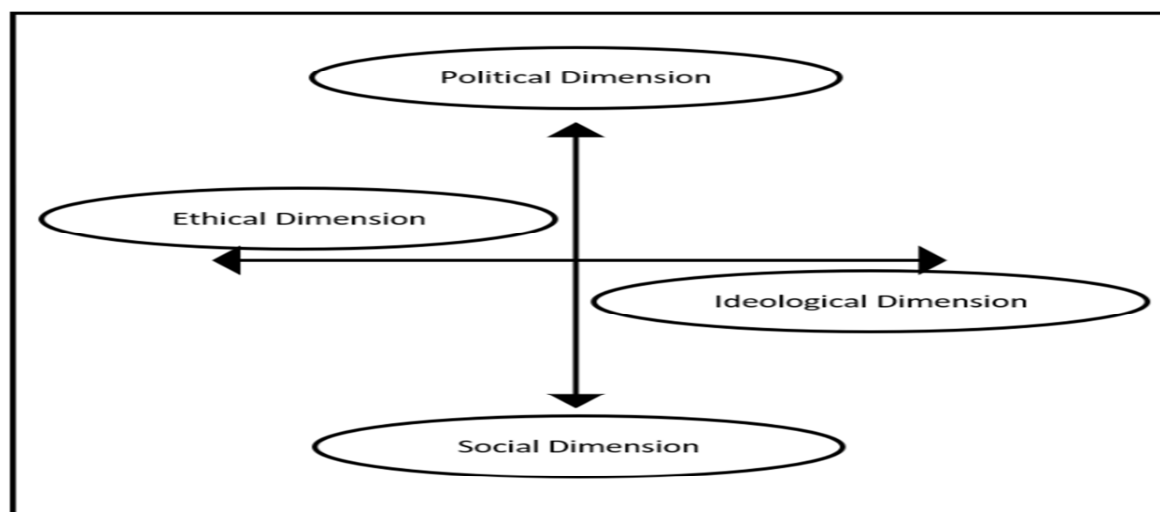


Figure 2 - Political-Social Axis (Glynos & Howarth, 2007)

The social dimension in Figure 2² notes the aspect of social relations in which subjects are absorbed in their applications; that is, for whom the contingency of social relations has not been registered in the mode of public contestation. The political dimension seizes that aspect of social relations in which subjects articulate their sense of dislocation by reactivating the uncertain foundations of existing social relations in the name of a principle or ideal. The ideological dimension designates that aspect of social relations in which subjects engage in their practices in a way that respects the contingency of social relations Glynos & Howarth (2007).

These four social dimensions are in turn, reflected by the analysis of social, political and fantasmatic logics which play a leading role in the understanding of social events from political and social theory. However, here our understanding of logics will be as units of reasoning. Glynos & Howarth (2007). So, by logics as units of explanation, we can understand that the logics capture something about the rules and the narrations, and the ontological suppositions that, together, make a practice or regime conceivable, comprehensible and susceptible.

Taking into account the explanation of logics will help us to understand the relationship between politics and religion. By social logic, we must understand a 'normal' and uncontested ideal of synchronic analysis of events in society, which are relatively stable patterns, subject to norms and self-interpretations by the people who make up that social spectrum. By political logic, we must understand a diachronic system since it allows us to see the expressions of difference and equivalence in society, this being a clear example of representing the political spectrum, in which we can find the conduit of satisfactions and demands that these logics have drawn on the elements, social groups or individuals; the same ones that typically appeal to an existing social norm or a future or next projected form. Finally, by fantasmatic logics, we must understand the ideological notion that was missing in considering the logics as units of

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Glynos, I. & Howarth, D 2007, *Logics Of Critical Explanation In Social And Political Theory*, New York, NY: Routledge, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

EBSCOhost, viewed 13 December 2017.

explanation. In it are the elements of fantasy, such as a narrative of ideals and obstacles, a logic where the elements of desire are involved, enjoyment as transgression and reflection in the imagining of 'the other'.

A logics approach to populism and religion – Results

The reason for the lack of research on the relationship between politics and religion may be that there has been a cyclical desire to approximate the relationship between politics and religion, but both scholars and society more widely could consider these elements as effects of dual realities, thus causing lack of interest in both parties. Current expressions of populism in different parts of the world have gained strength for different reasons, however, and unlike other times there have been links that have allowed us to gain interest in investigating populism and its possible relationship with religion. In Italy, as in Argentina, the mass media has begun to raise ideas about whether the Pope is a populist in the Catholic religion or whether his discourse has populist traits. Such events reopen the debate concerning the elements that our question has raised.

In search of a theory that will help us to identify the possible relationship between politics and religion through populism, the concept of logic has given us a broad spectrum of thought to be able to find a relationship between these aspects. The logic of articulation with its notion of the logic as a unit of explanation has allowed us to develop and describe an approach that analyses both phenomena within the same social structure. As shown in Figure 1, the incompleteness of the social structure would seem to find a way to be complete when conducting the discourses that are presented as demands and satisfaction; these demands would be born through the idea of differences that exist in the society, while the satisfactions respond to the collective notion of well-being. Unlike the classic idea of analysis of populism proposed by Laclau, the insertion of logic here did not just group different concepts that would help define the link between populism and religion but also incorporated comparative analysis on links of populism with other aspects of social systems such as democracy and populism.

Panizza (2005) described populism as a social phenomenon of eclectic qualities that allows it to adapt to different realities and political contexts, which would generate triggers of populism in the relationship between the political and the social. Stavrakakis (2005) defined this type of analysis as a symptomatic reading of populism, which allows us to understand that populism is a mirror in which democracy sees its shortcomings reflected as a system. Panizza, like Laclau, finds in the discourse a form of analysis of populism as a phenomenon, but the notions described by Laclau (2000) of floating signifiers, empty signifiers and the impossibility of a society allow us to build a scheme with which to compare the political and religion relationship, in the same way as democracy and politics.

To explain in a more practical way, we develop Figures 3 and 4, both of which will allow us to understand the application of concepts in the analysis of populism and religion. Figure 3 represents our interpretation of how populist discourse is analysed by the theorists in the relationship between populism and democracy, while Figure 4 allows us to see the relationship between populism and religion.

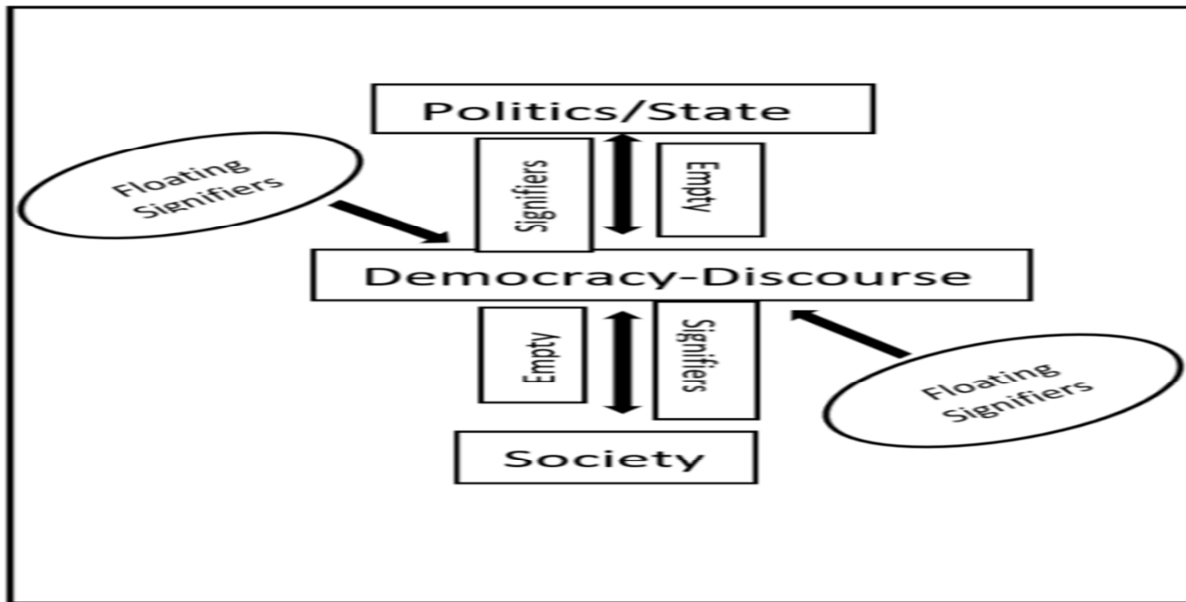


Figure 3 - Social Structure by Democracy

In Figure 3, the social structure based on democracy is very similar to Figure 2 based on religion. In each, the discourse is a key factor that allows us to see the notions of floating signifiers and empty signifiers reflected, how identities are constructed through discourse, and how they are conducted through democracy or religion, building mutual support that makes a two-way social structure process feasible. One of the reasons why we can determine so much similarity between the two is that they share the same social imaginariun, which is why their construction through the discourse is the same. According to Laclau (2005), the populist discourse holds that the recipient gives the meaning that their mind wants or is looking to complete; therefore, the meaning of the discourse would not be in who issues it, but in who receives it and the meaning that they want to give. The discourse is then articulated between the one who issues the message and the one who receives it through the floating signifier, since the one who issues it gives an empty signifier. This floating signifier acquires context through the social imaginariun and the understanding of each ideal.

The idea that populism is purely a political phenomenon seems to have no place in our development because, as we saw in Figures 1 and 3, populism is in society and would be activated through discourse. In turn, populism would reinforce the incomplete structure of society and allow us to obtain stability in this structure. In Figure 4, we will see this in a comparative way, and how we manage to contrast this fact.

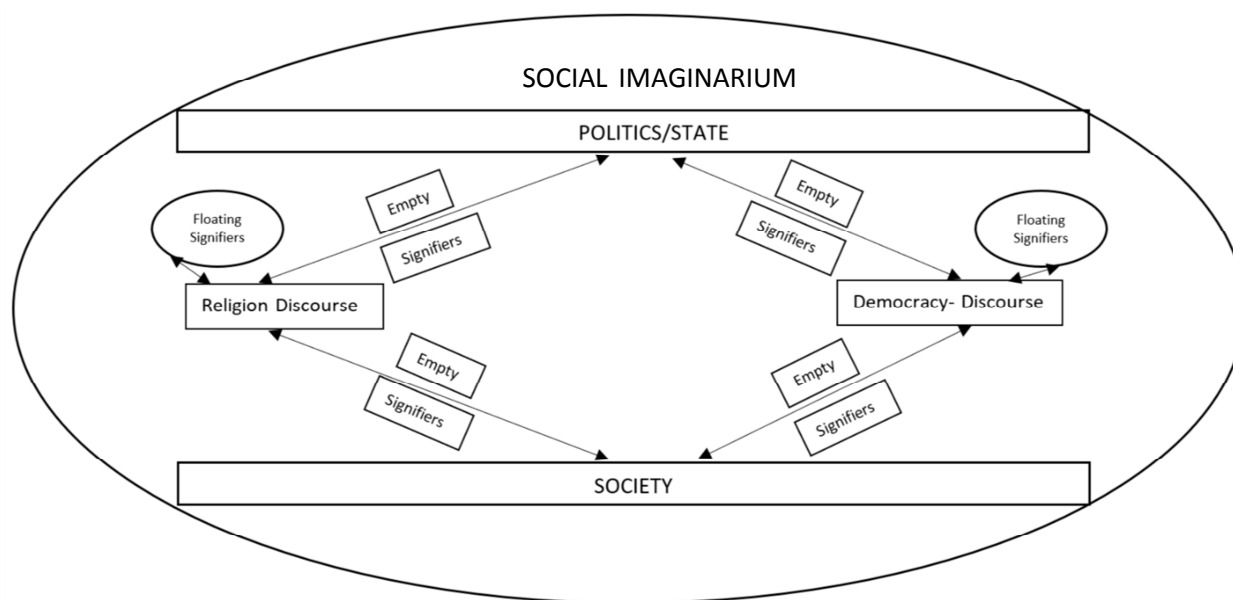


Figure 4 - Social imaginarium structure in religion and democracy – discourse

Figure 4 shows a representation of the social imaginarium, which allows us to visualise how the religious and democratic discourses (populist or not) coexist in the social structure. The discourses that are issued by politicians with empty signifiers are conducted through two institutions, religious or democratic, where they lead the existence of empty and floating signifiers so that society can interpret them with a firm meaning. While the spheres of the political and the religious share the same social imaginarium, they do not have any correlation; they only function in the same way in their existence within the social imaginarium. Both would be structures that would help maintain the structure of society; even if they did not complete the structure, at least they would allow it to function in a political, religious and social relationship. The social structure is a two-way process, and should not be analysed from the politics towards society or vice versa; the two processes, although they go through the same system, do not have a defined hierarchical structure. The society in both processes establishes its idea of equivalences and demands produced by any of the two systems in the social imaginarium, religion or politics, and both represent different ideas for the interpretation of discourses, being where actors of both spheres could develop discourses with populist traits.

The four social dimensions that we could obtain from logics will allow us to understand their application to the theory on the functioning of the political and religious discourse in the same social structure and imaginarium. They will also help us to explain the representations of Figures 1, 3 and 4 in their connection with the political, social and fantasmatic logics. This will help us to understand the relationship between populism and religion in its social meaning.

The representation of the political and social axis developed by Glynos and Howarth (2007) plays an essential role in our explanation of the relationship between populism and religion, as it encompasses the dimensions of the political, social, ethical and ideological. The political and the

social have a direct relation to each other, represented in Figure 1. The dimensions of the ethical and ideological are what allow us to understand the link between religion and populism, and were the most formative aspects of the social imaginarium. Their meaning for society is acquired uniquely by each member who lives in the same social imaginarium, and this facilitates discourses with empty signifiers and the existence of floating signifiers. Most religions in their basic idea seek an integrating discourse that applies to each of the members who live in the same system, making them feel represented by it and not becoming dislocated groups that conflict with the structure of society. The dimensions of the political and social would also represent the direct relationship between the state and society, and although they do not need the ethical or ideological dimensions for their existence, it would seem that they work better when the religion or democracy conduct them as institutions of the social structure.

The logics of theory and explanation (as a unit of explanation) in their notions of the fantasmatic, social and political have allowed us to obtain a form of analysis of the link between politics and religion through discourse which, populist or not, becomes a crucial element of the social structure. According to Panizza (2008), populism seems to be a mirror in which democracy visualises its deficiencies as a system for society, and although in a different sphere, could find in religion another mirror in which to be reflected. The political and religious spectres within the same social imagining share many conditions in their environment, which makes them very similar to each other, but populism, with its eclectic capacity and adaptability to different environments, shows that it could inhabit both discourses: facilitating the creation of identities (or affiliation to existing ones), integrating its members and limiting the generation of dislocated social groups.

Discussion

During this essay, we have analysed the possible links between politics and religion using a logics approach. We find in the discourse an element that has allowed us to detect a parallel axis; therefore, we start from the discourse as an element that both points of analysis (politics and religion) have in common. The linking of politics and religion is born through a subject that is very accepted today in academia, populism. The rebirth of populism in recent years through political actors has led academia (science and political theory) to develop research that involves populism as its centre of analysis. The most recent research has opened different lines of enquiry towards populism, from trying to measure it, as do the vast majority of political corporativists, or from the political theory, as initially analysed. Both in political science and in political theory, the current tendency and question of thought focuses on knowing if this is a purely political element, or could be seen in other social spheres. Not only has academia taken a particular interest in populism; in turn, the mass media, in its attempt to understand social events and inform the public, has used and added to its vocabulary the expression 'populism', either to address a politician as an individual or more recently towards the Pope.

To understand populism, it is necessary to define a concept for its interpretation, since there is no academic consensus on its definition, and its interpretation plays a fundamental role in the development of the essay. For this reason, the Laclauian definition of populism Laclau (2005) has been used to enable us to find an answer to our question about the link between religion and politics. The notion of analysis that populism is born of the Judeo-Christian idea that the poor are good, as Nietzsche (1887) proposed, is a first approach in the subject. However, since then, there has been no research that has provided more information for the analysis of the relationship of

politics and religion with populism, except the Greek cases mentioned above (Stravakakis, 2002 p.224-243). Once we identify a definition of populism, and having taking into account that the discourse would be the axis of analysis of our essay, there was the need to define aspects adjacent to populism, such as: dislocation, empty and floating signifiers Laclau (2000), social imaginarium, and incongruent or dislocated groups Di Tella (1976), and the notions of political, social and fantasmatic logics and the social dimensions Glynos & Howarth (2007). All of them were part of the theoretical framework that allowed us to find an answer to our question.

The answer is evident: logics have allowed us to see an approach to populism that had only analysed it as a political phenomenon. However, it would seem that populism is not only be a phenomenon of the political, but of society in general. (Panizza, 2008; p.30) in its explanation of populism as a mirror of democracy, at some point populism could also be a mirror in which religion through its discourse reflects its shortcomings, through its idea of unity and social integration. Figures: 1, 3 and 4 allowed us to visualise the relationship between the social dimensions of populism and religion that exist. Figure 2 allowed us to locate our analysis and link it with the theory of logics. Although politics and religion occupy different spheres within the social imaginarium, as Figure 4 allows, both politics and religion share the same social imaginarium within a society. Therefore, in its social structure, as Figures 1 and 3 show, it is feasible that the populist aspects are generated in the speeches of the actors within their spheres, but that the messages with floating and empty signifiers acquire meaning in the political relationship, and society makes it possible to obtain a structure which, even if not complete, at least works. The answer does not allow us to say that there is a correlation between the politics and religion in the relation between them, but it seems that there are social phenomena such as populism that could inhabit their respective spheres. This finding could direct future lines of research that involve a link between religion and politics, such as analysis of the Pope's discourse to find out whether it has populist traits, empirical and historical analysis of populism in the founding of states (Latin America, Africa) and the linking of populism to other social institutions and areas.

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