

Published in *Critical Social Policy* 36(3), 1-19. (2016)

From Welfare Nationalism to Welfare Chauvinism. Economic Rhetoric, Welfare State and the Changing Policies of Asylum in Finland

Suvi Keskinen

Department of Social Research, University of Turku, Finland

Abstract:

The article analyses the role and effects of economic cost and welfare state arguments in Finnish immigration politics and policies. It argues for a need to distinguish between welfare nationalist, welfare chauvinist and welfare exclusionist discourses. Through an examination of the immigration programmes of the political parties and parliamentary debates and policy documents mapping the changes of asylum policy in 2009-2011, the article shows that welfare nationalism strongly characterises the way asylum and non-western migration is treated in Finnish politics. Welfare chauvinism is typical for right-wing populist argumentation, but is also used by individual politicians from other parties and by policy makers. Examples of welfare exclusionism were found in party programmes but not in the policy process. Moreover, it is argued that struggles over welfare benefits cannot be understood without an analysis of the cultural definitions of national belonging.

Keywords:

Welfare chauvinism, welfare nationalism, political parties, asylum policies, Finland

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and the growing support for right-wing populist parties, many European countries have witnessed an expansion of public rhetoric on migrants as an economic burden and a cause for increasing welfare costs. Not only is this rhetoric made use of by populists and the extreme fringes of parliamentary politics, but also many mainstream politicians and parties have engaged with such arguments. In the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway), where welfare subsidies and services are among the most extensive in Europe and the welfare state forms the cornerstone of national identities (e.g. Kuisma, 2007; Kettunen, 2011) one could expect such rhetoric to find fruitful soil and also lead to welfare chauvinist demands on reduced benefits for migrants. On the other hand, egalitarian principles are a central part of welfare state ideologies and can thus be expected to counter-act demands to exclude migrants from welfare benefits. There is thus a need to examine the dynamics and discourses around welfare state, immigration and benefits in specific historical contexts in more detail.

In this article, I analyse the role and effects of economic cost and welfare state arguments when discussing immigration from non-western countries in Finnish politics and social welfare policies. In order to do so, I have focused on two data sets: (1) the immigration programmes of the political parties, and (2) the parliamentary debates and policy documents that map the changing asylum policies in 2009-2011. I argue that we need to distinguish between welfare nationalism, welfare chauvinism and welfare exclusionism in order to understand the role that welfare state arguments play in relation to migrants and exclusionary political agendas. It will be shown how the welfare state ideologies of equal treatment are in

tension with the exclusionary demands for differential treatment of those who are perceived not to belong to the nation. Moreover, it is argued that the central discursive struggle in defining whether migrants with residence permit are submitted to policies denying them income support is foremost a struggle about definitions of national belonging and thus of a cultural character.

Broad surveys show that a large portion of citizens in the Nordic countries view migrants as less 'deserving' of welfare provisions than the rest of the population, and feel migrants should earn benefits either through work or citizenship. Yet, in comparison to other European countries, Nordic countries still stand out as reporting the highest numbers of those who think migrants are equally 'deserving' as natives and have the lowest scores of those willing to totally exclude migrants from welfare benefits (Reeskens and van Oorchot, 2012: 134; Mewes and Mau, 2013: 236-237). In this regard, Finland differs somewhat from other Nordic countries: lower shares of respondents are willing to provide welfare benefits to migrants unconditionally and a larger share deem citizenship a central criterion for such benefits than their fellow Nordics. In the following, it will be shown that Finnish political rhetoric and policy making also include strong resistance towards providing welfare benefits for those deemed not to belong to the country; however, this tendency is also counteracted by the egalitarian principles embedded in welfare state ideologies and legislation.

Nationalism and the welfare state

Finnish national identity is strongly entwined with the idea of the welfare state. Historically, the understanding of society in Finland was closely connected to the state, even to the extent that these two were treated as one and the same (Kettunen, 2008: 55-61; 2011: 82-83). The Nordic countries are known for the 'Nordic welfare model', namely, comprehensive and

universal social entitlements, legislation based on egalitarian principles and a broad set of public services (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990). The establishment of the welfare model was not only an economic and social process, but was also about constructing national identities. The Nordic model was branded as ‘exceptional’ and even superior to other political and social models of the time: it was presented as a progressive, egalitarian and internationalist achievement that followed the social democratic and broader leftist ideals of its leading forces (Kuisma, 2007). In the establishment of welfare institutions and policies, Finland was a latecomer that often sought to learn from the experiences of the other Nordic countries, especially Sweden. However, the Social Democrats never wielded as much political influence in Finland and while the welfare state, egalitarianism and universalism became the central tenets of Finnish national identity, the emphasis on solidarity or internationalism was never as strong in Finland as in the other Nordic countries.

Finland and the other Nordic countries locate themselves as part of the Western world and consider the Enlightenment tradition as an essential part of their culture (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012). Indeed, the progressive and egalitarian branding that presents the Nordic countries as being at the top of the world in achievements of welfare, social equality and gender equality is a leftist-liberal ideology that is conceived through its roots in the Enlightenment tradition. The national identities of the Nordic countries are also embedded in the idea of whiteness, although this is often an implicit and taken-for-granted notion (e.g. Hübinette and Lundström, 2011; Leinonen, 2012; Keskinen, 2013; Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen, 2014). For example, those marked out by their non-white bodies are often labelled ‘immigrants’ or ‘foreigners’ and exposed to racialising practices even if they were born and raised in the country. While the Nordic countries are usually treated as outsiders to colonial histories, recent research has shown the multiple connections the countries have had to colonial enterprises, economic relations and representations, as well as

the history of scientific racism (e.g. Rastas, 2007; Palmberg, 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012). The growing migration from non-western countries to the Nordic region has made these histories and their legacies in current societies visible, as well as challenging the taken-for-granted national narratives about homogeneity.

In the ongoing political and policy debates on immigration, welfare state and criteria for social entitlements, such notions of national heritage, histories and self-images form an archive from which to draw upon, but also to rearticulate and modify these imaginaries in the changing societal setting. Debates on the future of the welfare state, who is entitled to welfare provisions and who is counted in the national community have intensified during the post-2008 economic crisis. While economic rhetoric dominates these debates, notions of national belonging raise the logic of culture and identity.

In order to make sense of the current debates and political processes, I suggest that a distinction between welfare nationalism, welfare chauvinism and welfare exclusionism is useful. With *welfare nationalism* I refer to discourses and ideologies in which welfare and national identity are intertwined and welfare provision is based on national membership. In such discourses, the welfare state and its future are presented as a national concern that should be the focus of politics and economy. Immigration is discussed from the perspective of the nation-state and economy, not from that of migrants. With this definition, I largely follow Suszycki's (2011: 56) understanding of welfare nationalism as a 'commitment to the welfare-related national interests and ideas'. This is a broad phenomenon that covers different kinds of discursive formulations and political actors. *Welfare chauvinism* frames welfare provision as reserved only 'for our own' in the sense that belonging or non-belonging is based on (ethno)nationalist, othering and often racialising criteria. In such discourses and rhetoric, focus on welfare is secondary to exclusionary and racialised understandings of the people/nation. The national identity with its cultural aspects and the perceived deviance of

migrants is central for the understanding of 'our own'. This is largely in line with how Mudde (2007: 131-132) defines welfare chauvinism. Right-wing populist parties are the most consistent adopters of this kind of rhetoric and build their political agenda on such a view, but also other political actors can make use of welfare chauvinist rhetoric.

Thirdly, I use *welfare exclusionism* to refer to discourses and ideologies in which welfare provision is reserved only for a part of those who live and work in the country, not for all with a residence permit. This includes views and policies that deny or condition access to income benefits or social services for migrants and their descendants even after they have lived in the country for several years and gained permanent residence permit. This can be an extension of welfare chauvinist arguments that both excludes on basis of national identity and cultural aspects, and denies or conditions access to benefits from those perceived as 'others'. On the other hand, this may be an extension of welfare nationalist arguments in the sense that otherness and cultural identity are not emphasised but the national interests are deemed to require exclusionary decisions.

Economic competitiveness and Finnish politics

Economic rhetoric and concerns for the future of the welfare state have played a central role in Finnish politics since the severe recession of the 1990s. The discourse of 'economic competitiveness' gained a hegemonic position, turning into the shared and taken-for-granted starting point of most political parties and governmental policies (Kantola, 2002; Heiskala and Luhtakallio, 2006; Kettunen, 2008). The consensus around 'economic competitiveness' as the central national challenge was developed through an emphasis on expert and administrative knowledge, technocratic steering and perceived lack of alternatives. Finnish politics is thus heavily influenced by what has been called 'post-politics', namely, situations

in which 'ideological and dissensual contestation and struggles are replaced by techno-managerial planning, expert management and administration' (Swyngedow, 2010: 225). Under such conditions, the political sphere is closed down by means of consensus, managerial approaches and reference to undisputed facts (Mouffe, 2005; Crouch, 2004). Politics thus becomes more policy-making than a competition between different political views and agendas. A central question in the neoliberal 'competitiveness' discourse has been: can we afford the costly welfare state (Kantola, 2006: 173-175)?

While such changes towards post-politics and the rise of economic 'necessity' rhetoric are by no means limited to Finland, the country is probably a case *par excellence* of how such rhetoric was adopted across the political sphere and central administrators. Not surprisingly then, economic arguments and references to welfare state costs have been commonly used in immigration debates as well in the Finnish Parliament since the 1990s (Förbom, 2010).

As a result of increasing neoliberalisation, the welfare state rhetoric and policies have changed both in the Nordic countries and on the broader EU level. While the prevention of social exclusion is still framed as a central object for policies, the understanding of social exclusion has been narrowed: if in the 1970s social exclusion was discussed as the ability to exercise citizenship rights broadly (as in social, political and civil rights), today social exclusion is understood as exclusion from paid work or self-employment (Schierup et al., 2006: 16-17). In Finland, where social inclusion is the primary way of addressing migration in policies, the norm of employment is central and functions as the main criteria of the 'integration' of migrants (Jokinen et al., 2010; Davydova, 2012).

Finnish immigration policies especially towards asylum seekers have been strict ever since the first larger asylum seeker groups entered the country at the beginning of the 1990s.

Degrading labels like 'bogus asylum seekers', 'anchor children' and 'welfare refugees' have

frequently been used in parliamentary debates when the topic has been discussed (Lepola, 2000; Förbom, 2010). Nevertheless, a shift in Finnish politics occurred after the 2008 municipal elections when the right-wing populist party True Finns (1) gained a rise of support. Among the elected politicians were several who had campaigned on anti-immigration agendas and later became the leading figures of such politics in the Parliament. In 2011, the True Finns became the third largest party in the Parliament with 19% of the votes. Although the party remained in opposition after the elections, its effect on immigration debates and policies has been tangible. To some extent, the post-political consensus mode of Finnish politics has been shaken by these developments but, as will be shown, the strength of economic rhetoric and agreement over the need to secure the national 'competitiveness' continue their dominance providing a means for exclusionary rhetoric towards the racialised others.

After intense debates on immigration policies, and especially asylum seekers, the centre-right government tightened the asylum legislation in 2009-2011 in the direction that the anti-immigration politicians and activists had demanded. In a short period, several new regulations were established: stricter criteria for the family reunification of foster children, age testing, limited possibility to work for asylum seekers, reductions in benefit to cover the costs of family reunification, the requirement to start the family reunification process by those living outside of Finland, lower income benefits for asylum seekers and the possibility to reject a residence permit application if the applicant had lied about being underage or unmarried. Most of the regulations taken one-by-one did not represent a severe tightening of previous rules, but cumulatively their effect was to make the process very rigid. The restrictions on family reunification had enormous effects on certain groups, such as the Somalis (Pellander and Leinonen, 2014).

Material and methodology

Firstly, the data consists of the immigration programmes (2) of all Finnish parties that are represented in the Parliament (see *List of party programmes*). The programmes were generated between 2007-2015. The first immigration programme was put forth by the Green Party in 2007 and the most recent by the True Finns in 2015, but most parties created such programmes in 2010-2011. Before specific immigration programmes were constructed, immigration and integration were discussed within general party programmes. The rise of the True Finns Party and the intensified political debates lead to a heightened focus on immigration and integration questions. The other parties elaborated specific immigration programmes as a response to the rise of the True Finns and in preparation for the 2011 elections. The True Finns Party, however, did not have an immigration programme until 2015. To enable comparison, the Party's 68-page programme for the Parliamentary elections 2011 and the unofficial immigration manifesto from 2010 were also included in the data. The manifesto set the agenda for the coming official True Finns programmes and was thus deemed a central document to study.

Secondly, the data includes Parliamentary debates and policy documents that prepared the previously described changes in asylum regulations in 2009-2011 (see *List of policy documents*). The policy changes were planned and elaborated in the document commissioned by the Ministry of Interior entitled *Perspectives on Asylum Policy* (Näkökulmia turvapaikkapolitiikkaan, 2009), which compared Finnish regulations to the other Nordic countries' equivalents and suggested new policy initiatives. Income support for asylum seekers was heavily debated in the Parliament during 2009-2011 when the changes to the asylum policy were prepared. In order to detect the central discourses and rhetoric I have

analysed the Parliamentary debates on all legal changes to asylum policy during the period. A more thorough examination of the policy process has been conducted on one law – the Law on the reception of persons seeking international protection (Laki kansainvälistä suojelua hakevan vastaanotosta) that regulates income support. The law came into force 1.9.2011.

The methodology in the article is based on discourse analysis (Wetherell et al., 2001; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). The analysis has detected the central meaning making systems (discourses and specific forms of rhetoric) connected to the welfare state, asylum seekers and welfare benefits. The concept of discourse is used here in a Foucauldian way to refer to discursive practices and should not be understood only as speech but also as possible effects on policies and institutions. The analysis focused on how the topics of welfare state, national identity and the economic aspects of immigration were constructed in the studied texts and what kinds of rhetorical means (such as, argumentative positions) were used. Secondly, the analysis addressed the relationships established between different discursive structures and the discursive tensions that thus became visible.

Welfare nationalism, welfare chauvinism and welfare exclusionism in party programmes

The national ‘competitiveness’ discourse and the related dilemma of the costly welfare state feeds strongly into the rhetoric of the immigration programmes. The language of the economy and the need to reduce public spending dominates the way immigration and integration are discussed and taken a stand upon in the documents, as will be shown below.

The welfare state and its future are the concern of most parties. Welfare nationalist rhetoric is strong in many of the programmes by the mainstream parties. The Finnish welfare provisions

and the wealth of the country are presented as a special characteristic that attracts people from poorer non-western countries who seek to maximise economic benefits by choosing the most generous country in Europe from which to request asylum. In welfare nationalist rhetoric, asylum seekers are not discussed as persons fleeing war, conflict or political repression, but as a burden for the welfare state and public economy.

The Finnish welfare system is regarded as an attractive attribute that increases immigration to Finland. To prevent immigration from becoming an unnecessary burden for the Finnish social security system, there is a willingness to reduce the number of groundless asylum applications. (Centre Party 2010, 14)

The role of the welfare state and its future prospects are also central to the distinction that is made between successful and failed immigration in some immigration programmes. This rhetoric presents immigration as a potential asset for the economic competitiveness of Finland, but also as a possible burden for the welfare state. Successful immigration policy is understood as resulting in high employment rates and the social inclusion of migrants, while failed immigration policy is characterised as unemployment, the breakdown of employment regulations and rising tensions between ethnic groups. The third formulation brings in the cultural and identity aspects of migration, but in welfare nationalist rhetoric they are not made a central concern or given profound meaning. Welfare nationalist rhetoric often refers to the aging population that can cause problems for public funding through increased costs for pensions and the growing need for services (e.g. Christian Democrats, 2011: 2; Swedish People's Party, 2008: 1), but is here connected to demands for immigration to solve the problems of national economy.

A successful immigration policy can improve Finland's competitiveness, balance demographic changes and strengthen the welfare society. Correspondingly, a failed

immigration policy would create conflicts between different groups and cultures which would reduce national cohesion and welfare state structures. (National Coalition, 2010: 5)

For the increased vitality of our business and to make adjustments for the labour shortage in some areas, the distortion in the dependency balance and thus the sustainability of the deficit of the public sector, we also need work-related migration. Immigration must strengthen the public economy and the aim for immigrants is to become employed as often as possible and with the prevailing wages and terms of employment. (Social Democratic Party, 2010: 12)

While the welfare state rhetoric is based on egalitarian views, namely, everyone should be treated in a similar manner without discrimination, in welfare nationalist rhetoric this applies only to those who are deemed to belong to the nation. Since a residence permit is the criteria for national belonging, asylum seekers fall outside of the definition. They are, however, *de facto* residing in the country, which creates the need to explain their differential treatment. One solution to this logical dilemma is to establish two separate systems for income support. The division enables maintaining the idea of egalitarianism as the cornerstone of the welfare model, yet cuts off the link created by shared territory.

The income support of asylum seekers should be reformed so that the connection to general income support is cut out and a specific reception allowance for asylum seekers is created, bearing in mind that it matches the Nordic level. (Centre Party, 2010: 14)

Welfare nationalist rhetoric is exercised in the immigration programmes in a post-political manner: through a referral to undeniable facts and the future of the welfare state that can only be solved by the presented means. Instead of alternative agendas or disputes among the

parties, a consensus is created. The mainstream Finnish parties do not differ considerably in their focus on social inclusion and economic concerns when discussing immigration, but neither do they argue about culture and national identity, as in the immigration debates in many other European countries. Herein lies, however, a central difference between the True Finns and the other parties. While the other parties do not mention national identity or discuss cultural issues in passing, the True Finns electoral programme makes national identity a central question, as well as the perceived risks to it by increased immigration and the culture of migrant 'others'. This difference is not total though, since other parties make use of culturally exclusionary rhetoric to a minor extent. For example, in the foreword to the Social Democratic immigration programme the party leader uses the phrase 'when in Rome do as the Romans do' (*maassa maan tavalla*), which has extreme nationalist and racist connotations. She also argues against cultural habits like 'honour-related violence' and 'ritual slaughter', implicitly invoking the Muslim and non-western 'otherness'. Nevertheless, the programme focuses on social exclusion and predominantly uses welfare nationalist rhetoric. The True Finns programmes use both welfare chauvinist and welfare exclusionist rhetoric. The assimilationist demand for migrants to adopt the customs of the 'natives' brings forth the culture argument: the True Finns defend what they understand as Finnish culture and counterpose to other cultures. They present the majority Finns as those who embody 'governmental belonging' (Hage, 2000) and thus wield the power to define the culture and manage the nation. The cultural aspect is combined with welfare state and economic arguments.

The goal of the integration policy should be 'When in Rome do as the Romans do', because it is to the benefit of both the immigrants and the receiving society. Primarily, the customs of the country in the phrase refers to Finnish legislation, but also cultural norms are part of our society. Despite the growing individualism, the True Finns still

view that a Finnish culture prevails in Finland. This is also shown by the constant demands to increase multiculturalism. [...] Migration that is not work-related is expensive for Finland. It is important to process asylum applications quickly and effectively, so that the society's resources will be preserved. [...] The benefits Finland pays are still the most generous in the EU. (True Finns, 2011 : 40-41)

Both the True Finns 2011 electoral programme and the 2015 immigration programme are characterised by othering representations of asylum seekers and migrants who reside permanently in Finland, as well as demands to reduce the benefits of these groups. The measures put forth in the programmes include several welfare exclusionist formulations, such as the cutting of income benefits for asylum seekers who have received a residence permit to a maximum of 50 % of the general income benefit level; the restriction of places where migrants receiving income and housing benefits can live and making benefits conditional on living in these areas; and the requirement of self-support and non-use of social benefits as criteria for family reunification for all migrants, except refugees. Moreover, citizenship is presented as a 'reward' that should be evaluated on basis of the level of the 'integration' of the migrant. Integration is defined as proper language skills, not living on social benefits and a wish to live according to the rules of Finnish society (True Finns, 2015: 5).

The policy measures presented in the two programmes are largely the same; yet, a shift in the cultural rhetoric can be detected. While the 2011 programme emphasises and even glorifies Finnish identity and culture, the rhetoric of the 2015 programme focuses on the negative and racialising descriptions of migrants from Africa and the Middle East. These groups are essentialised and inferiorised on basis of both cultural habits and economic matters, such as employment patterns, illiteracy and reliance on social benefits. They are described as 'expensive free riders' and people who 'do not have the skills needed in the labour market, or for religious and cultural reasons do not want to adopt European notions of [gender] equality

and freedom of speech' (True Finns, 2015: 2, 7-8). The cultural otherness is evoked and tied closely to othering based on economic characteristics. The programme demands a reduction in the number of refugees and other (non-western) migrants and dehumanises these groups as mere economic costs, depriving them of any worth beyond the perceived economic usefulness/uselessness.

The two programmes were preceded by the unofficial 2010 *Nuiva* (3) manifesto by the anti-immigration group in the True Finns party. Most of the demands later presented in the official programmes were developed in the manifesto. While the harsh rhetoric of the manifesto was somewhat polished in the 2011 electoral programme, the 2015 immigration programme represents an officialisation of the racialising and dehumanising language earlier presented in the unofficial manifesto. Thus, it seems that in recent years the True Finns have moved towards harsher rhetoric that combines the racialisation of non-western migrants and welfare exclusionist demands.

The asylum debate and changes in policies

The immigration programmes of the parties were generated in close connection and partly influenced by the simultaneously ongoing debates and policy changes regarding asylum seekers in 2009-2011. In the following, I will show how and to what extent welfare nationalist, welfare chauvinist and welfare exclusionist rhetoric are drawn upon when policies are prepared and debated in the Parliament. This analysis also makes visible the political dynamics and counter-discourses that emerge when such rhetoric moves from political programmes to the preparation of policies. I first examine the process that led to changes in the legislation on income benefits for asylum seekers and then discuss the welfare rhetoric in the Parliamentary debates.

The Law on the reception of persons seeking international protection was drafted in 2010-2011. Previously, the reception of asylum seekers was under the same law as the integration of migrants with a residence permit. The division into two separate laws meant that the link between the general income support and the new benefit designed for asylum seekers, the 'reception allowance', was broken. In the policy documents, the change was motivated by the aim of clarity and unambiguity in rules (HE266/2010; HaVM 38/2010; PeVL59/2010). The division into separate laws and benefit types proved handy when the politicians wanted to reduce the benefits of asylum seekers. While such actions could be thought to pose a challenge to egalitarian principles, the separate systems erased the connection and institutionalised (the possibility of) differential treatment.

The law was the result of intensive and polarised debates in politics and the media throughout 2009 over the growing number of asylum seekers (Keskinen, 2009). In response to claims that asylum seekers received the highest income support in the EU and that especially the benefits of minor asylum seekers were disproportionate, the government reduced the income support for asylum seekers to allow a ceiling of 70 % of the general income support, compared to the previous 90 %. This was, however, not regarded as enough. A Ministry of the Interior report was commissioned on a rapid schedule to suggest changes to the Finnish asylum policies. The report largely elaborated the perspective and the arguments used in the policy changes regarding asylum discussed in this article.

The welfare nationalist rhetoric, identified in the previous section, also characterises the way the report argues for the need to change the Finnish asylum policy: 'The efficiency and flexibility of our system has to be increased, so that the expenses can be controlled. In addition to being costly, the long waiting times to receive a hearing are an attractive attribute' (Näkökulmia turvapaikkapolitiikkaan, 2009: 3). The discourse of 'attractive attribute' has a central position in all the studied policy documents and the Parliamentary debates. It is based

on an understanding that the ‘exceptionalism’ of the Finnish welfare state, especially its high income support, is attracting migrants to the country – notably, the wrong kinds of migrants. While it would not be a problem that educated, western migrants would follow the generous benefits and move to Finland, asylum seekers from non-western countries are framed as a threat to the welfare state.

That the reference point of the Finnish policy makers is, not only in this case but also in general, the other Nordic countries becomes evident in the 2009 report and the preparation of the law. The report makes a detailed comparison of income benefits for asylum seekers in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, which is replicated in the bill as well. The report states that the benefits are higher in Norway and Denmark, but lower in Sweden than in Finland. The welfare nationalist rhetoric is present in the statement by the Administration Committee that refers to the desire to reduce asylum seekers’ income benefit to the level of their Swedish equivalents, that is, the lowest of the Nordic countries (HaVM 38/2010: 2). However, the Committee was informed that the low level was under criticism and in the process of reformulation in Sweden, thus the Committee did not argue for new reductions to the Finnish benefit. The fact that the benefits in Norway and Denmark were higher than the ones in Finland did not raise questions about the ‘attractive attribute’ logic; neither did the fact that despite the lower subsidies, the number of asylum seekers to Sweden is many times higher than to Finland.

The preparation of the law makes visible the tension between the discourse of equal treatment – the egalitarian principles laid out in the Constitution – and the differential treatment embedded in the welfare nationalist rhetoric about the less ‘deserving’ groups whose access to income benefits needs to be cut severely. This tension is built into the 2009 report, which first states the need to evaluate whether the level of income support to asylum seekers is too high and forms an ‘attractive attribute’, but in the next sentence rushes to point out that

special attention will be given to the constitutional right to necessary income and care, as well as to concerns of parity and the prohibition of discrimination (Näkökulmia turvapaikkapolitiikkaan, 2009: 7). Due to the still strong position of egalitarian principles in the Finnish welfare state, there is a need to manage differential treatment so that no clear violation of these rules is shown. Thus, a report from the Committee for Constitutional Law was requested during the preparation of the law. The Committee pondered the subjective right to necessary income and care stated in the Finnish Constitution and noted the close relationship of this right to general income support. However, it concluded that the mere disentanglement of the proposed reception allowance (for asylum seekers) from the general income support was not problematic in light of the Constitution (PeVL 59/2010: 2). Since the reception allowance was interpreted to be close enough to income support, the Committee did not find the changes unconstitutional.

The welfare nationalist rhetoric and the balancing between egalitarian and differential principles are also evident in the bill of the law. It features tables of the expenses of the reception of asylum seekers and states that the aim of the law is to reduce the attraction that income support has for ‘bogus’ asylum seekers to Finland. In places, the text shifts into welfare chauvinist rhetoric, such as when the bill states that the primary function of the new regulations is related to its ‘signal’ effect. This signal is explained to mean that the asylum seeker is in the country temporarily and it is ‘not appropriate to give the impression that s/he has a similar right to income support in the form of money as those who live in the country’ (HE 266/2010: 34). Since the level of the income benefit for asylum seekers was reduced already before the new law, the bill is also able to state that there are no substantial changes in the benefit level.

The question of more or less ‘deserving’ groups and the tensions with egalitarian principles keep entering the debate on income benefits for asylum seekers. In the Parliamentary debate,

a conservative politician arguing that asylum seekers do not need as high income benefits as the 'Finns' was confronted with the question of how it is possible to survive with such a minimal sum when even managing with the normal income support in Finland is difficult. The politician replied by explaining that it was obvious that asylum seekers did not need as much, since they came from poor conditions and were used to getting by with little. According to the politician, they were even able to save money after paying for their living expenses, which constituted the 'attractive attribute' that the MPs needed to tackle (PTK 32/2010: 29-30). This kind of othering and essentialisation, that is, constructing asylum seekers as almost of a different species based on economic attributes, can be identified as welfare chauvinist rhetoric.

Welfare chauvinist arguments are also present in utterances that discuss unaccompanied asylum seeker children as 'anchor children' and in descriptions of asylum seekers as 'welfare tourists'. For example, when the reform of the Alien Act regarding age testing and the family reunification of asylum seekers was discussed in the Parliament, many speakers routinely referred to the matter as the problem of 'anchor children' and discussed minor asylum seekers in a homogenising and othering way (PTK 107/2009). A conservative politician both claimed that giving a residence permit to one child would lead to the whole extended family moving to Finland and presented doubts about the actual age of minor asylum seekers:

Why does the EU, why do we accept that children are used in this way as 'anchor children'? [...] Why does the family send a small child to seek for asylum? In principle, the child should be small, not a youth of 18 or 20 years. When then this small child is getting its family reunited [...] then in the same family there can be 15 people, a grandmother and parents and children and even foster children. This will definitely not do. (PTK 107/2009: 59-60)

Welfare chauvinist rhetoric is thus not restricted to True Finns politicians, but is used by some MP's from other parties as well. However, these politicians usually present welfare chauvinist views as their individual political agendas that exceed their party's politics, while the True Finns politicians speak in accordance with their party agenda.

The previous analysis of the Parliamentary debates and the process of preparing the law has shown that economic and welfare nationalist rhetoric dominate Finnish asylum politics and policies. It also identified elements of welfare chauvinism in asylum policy making, although these are rarer than the welfare nationalist elements. Welfare chauvinism appears more commonly in the Parliamentary debates, while the policy documents predominantly rely on welfare nationalist rhetoric. Welfare exclusionist rhetoric was not found in the Parliamentary debates or policy documents. On the other hand, the studied Parliamentary debates and policy documents are located in a time that preceded the two True Finns programmes and the rise of several anti-immigration profiled politicians in the Parliament after 2011 elections; thus, this does not rule out that notions of welfare exclusionism could be present in more recent debates.

Conclusions

The analysis has shown that overall the economic language and concerns over the financial costs of migration to the welfare state have a strong position in Finnish immigration politics and policy making. This is evident in the studied party programmes, Parliamentary debates and policy documents. The main part of such rhetoric falls within welfare nationalism, while welfare chauvinist rhetoric is present in the True Finns programmes and in the Parliamentary debates. Welfare exclusionist demands were only found in the True Finns programmes.

The distinction between welfare nationalism, welfare chauvinism and welfare exclusionism has proven useful to grasp the different forms and effects of economic and welfare state rhetoric in Finnish politics. While welfare nationalism draws on the national interests and concerns over the future of the welfare state, it does not include othering and inferiorising representations of the migrant others or glorify Finnish culture. This, on the other hand, is part of welfare chauvinist rhetoric that combines cultural otherness with economic arguments of migrants as a welfare burden. In welfare chauvinist rhetoric, economic utility (or the lack of it) functions as a criterion for exclusion and as a means for essentialising certain ethnic/racial groups: especially migrants from Middle Eastern and African countries are portrayed as the ‘undesired others’, and presented as both culturally and economically deviant.

Welfare exclusionism was used to refer to demands according to which social benefits should be conditioned or denied from racialised minorities even if they had been granted residence permits. While some elements of this rhetoric were found in the True Finns programmes, at least during the studied period it did not play a major role in Finnish politics nor policy making. This rhetoric goes strongly against the principle of equal treatment in the Finnish Constitution, international treaties signed by the country and the political agendas of most Finnish political parties, which one could expect to pose hindrances for those aiming to enhance welfare exclusionism. However, as the restrictions on income benefit for newly arrived refugees in Denmark during the 2001-11 government in power show, egalitarian principles can be bent when agreements are made between right-wing populists and other parties.

All three understandings of welfare entitlements are based on a definition of who belongs to the nation and who does not, but the dividing line is drawn differently in each of them. The central question is thus how broadly or narrowly national belonging is defined – as a (legal)

right to residence, ethnic heritage, membership in ‘western civilisation’ or economic utility. Thus, ultimately the struggle about who is entitled to welfare benefits and services is about national identity and definitions of belonging. If the largest part of politicians define national belonging on the basis of majority ethnicity or ‘westernness’, instead of for example the legal right to reside in the country, rejecting or making conditional welfare entitlements from those who fall outside the definition – especially non-western migrants – can seem logical. In effect, the struggle over welfare entitlements cannot be understood without an analysis of the cultural definitions of national belonging.

The overall strength of the economic language and the post-political agreement on its relevance also in relation to immigration matters have paved the way for welfare chauvinist demands and stricter policies towards non-western migrants in Finland. The True Finns politics have not appeared very extreme in this sense, which is shown by the legislative changes that the centre-right government put forth in 2009-2011. However, among the Finnish politicians there is also a strong commitment to egalitarian principles and the social inclusion of migrants, as long as they have a legal right to reside in the country. The True Finns’ cultural othering of non-western migrants and the glorifying of Finnish culture have not been very eagerly adopted by politicians from other parties – a trait that distinguishes Finnish politics from that of many other European countries. Indeed, it seems that support for stricter immigration policies has been more easily gained by othering non-western migrants on the basis of economic arguments, such as increased welfare state costs or migrants’ perceived lack of employment skills, and thus the True Finns have chosen to emphasise such rhetoric.

Acknowledgements

The writing of this article was made possible by the funding of the Academy of Finland, grant 275032. I wish to thank the co-editors and the anonymous reviewers of this Special Issue for their valuable comments during the writing process.

Notes

1. The translation for the party *Perussuomalaiset* was True Finns until 2011, at which point the party decided to change the translation to the Finns Party. I have chosen not to use the term the Finns Party, since that would imply that the party represents all Finns. Instead, I use the old translation which was also in use during most of the period discussed in this article.
2. While in many countries a clear distinction is made between immigration and integration questions, in the Finnish context these topics are often discussed together. Thus, the immigration programmes also discuss both entry regulations concerning non-nationals and the social inclusion of those with a residence permit.
3. The Finnish word 'nuiva' is difficult to translate. It refers here to the self-identification of the anti-immigration politicians as those who focus on the negative effects of (non-western) immigration and the wish to put an end to it.

List of party programmes

Centre Party: *Keskustan eduskuntaryhmän maahanmuuttoasiakirja 2010.*

Christian Democrats: *Työ on paras kotouttaja 2011.*

Green Party: *Maahanmuuttajat töissä Suomessa 2007, Maahanmuuton haasteet ratkaistaan arjessa 2010.*

Left Alliance: *Maahanmuuttajapoliittinen toimenpideohjelma 2010.*

National Coalition: *Realismia turvapaikkapolitiikkaan, resursseja kotoutumiseen 2010.*

Social Democratic Party: *Reilu ja hallittu maahanmuuttopolitiikka 2010.*

Swedish People's Party: *Integrationspolitiskt program 2008.*

True Finns: *Nuiva manifesti 2010, Suomalaiselle sopivin 2011, Perussuomalaisten maahanmuuttoliittinen ohjelma 2015.*

List of policy documents

Näkökulmia turvapaikkapolitiikkaan. Kehitysehdotuksia ja pohjoismaista vertailua.

Sisäasiainministeriön julkaisuja 21/2009. Sisäasiainministeriö, Helsinki.

Records of discussions in the general assembly of the Parliament, committee reports and governmental bills: PTK 9/2009 vp, PTK 107/2009 vp, PTK 32/2010 vp, PTK 45/2010 vp, PTK 102/2010 vp, PTK 122/2010 vp, PTK 150/2010 vp, PTK 167/2010 vp, PTK 170/2010 vp, HaVM 38/2010 vp, HE 266/2010 vp, PeVL 59/2010.

References

Andreassen R and Ahmed-Andresen U (2014) I Can Never Be Normal: A conversation about race, daily life practices, food and power. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21(1): 25-42.

Crouch C (2004) *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Davydova O (2012) *Suomalaisena, venäläisenä ja kolmantena. Etnisyysdiskursseja transnationaalissa tilassa*. Joensuun yliopiston humanistisia julkaisuja N:O 57. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.
- Esping-Andersen G (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Förbom J (2010) *Hallan vaara. Merkintöjä maaahanmuuton puhetavoista*. Helsinki: Into kustannus.
- Hage G (2000) *White Nation*. New York: Routledge.
- Heiskala R and Luhtakallio E (eds) (2006) *Uusi jako*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Hübinette T and Lundström C (2011) Sweden after the Recent Election: The double-binding power of Swedish whiteness through the mourning of the loss of “Old Sweden” and the passing of “Good Sweden”. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 19(1): 42-52.
- Jokinen E et al. (2011) *Yrittäkää edes! Prekarisaatio Pohjois-Karjalassa*. Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.
- Jørgensen MW and Phillips L (2002) *Discourse as theory and method*, London: Sage.
- Kantola A (2002) *Markkinakuri ja managerivalta*. Viestinnän julkaisuja 6. Viestinnän laitos. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Kantola A (2006) Suomea trimmaamassa: suomalaisen kilpailuvaltion sanastot. In: Heiskala R and Luhtakallio E (eds) *Uusi jako*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, pp. 156-178.

Keskinen S (2009) Pelkkiä ongelmia? Maahanmuutto poliittisen keskustelun kohteena. In: Keskinen S et al. (eds) *En ole rasisti, mutta... Maahanmuutosta, monikulttuurisuudesta ja kritiikistä*. Vastapaino: Tampere, pp. 33-45.

Keskinen S (2013) Anti-feminism and White Identity Politics – Political Antagonisms in Radical Right-wing Populist and Anti-immigration Rhetoric in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 3(4): 225-232.

Keskinen S et al. (eds) (2009) *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Kettunen P (2008) *Globalisaatio ja kansallinen me*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Kettunen P (2011) Welfare Nationalism and Competitive Community. In: Suszycki A (ed.) *Welfare Citizenship and Welfare Nationalism*. NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research II. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, pp. 79-117.

Kuisma M (2007) Social Democratic Internationalism and the Welfare State After the 'Golden Age'. *Cooperation and Conflict* 42(1): 9-26.

Leinonen J (2012) Invisible Immigrants, Visible Expats? Americans in Finnish Discourses on Immigration and Internationalization. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 2(3): 213-223.

Leinonen J and Pellander S (2014) Court Decisions over Marriage Migration in Finland: A Problem with Transnational Family Ties. *Journal of Ethnicity and Migration Studies* 40(9): 1488-1506.

Lepola O (2000) *Ulkomaalaisesta suomenmaalaiseksi: monikulttuurisuus, kansalaisuus ja suomalaisuus 1990-luvun maahanmuuttopoliittisessa keskustelussa*. Helsinki: SKS.

Loftsdóttir K and Jensen L (eds) (2012) *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Mewes J and Mau S (2013) Globalization, Socio-Economic Status and Welfare Chauvinism: European perspectives on attitudes towards the exclusion of migrants. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 54(3): 228-245.

Mudde C (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mouffe C (2005) *On the Political*. London: Routledge.

Palmberg M (2009) The Nordic Colonial Mind. In: Keskinen S et al. (eds) *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 35-50.

Rastas A (2007) Neutraalisti rasistinen? Erään sanan politiikka. In: Kuortti J et al. (eds) *Kolonialismin jäljet*. Tampere: Vastapaino, pp. 119-141.

Reeskens T and van Oorschot W (2012) Disentangling the 'New Liberal Dilemma': On the relation between general welfare redistribution preferences and welfare chauvinism. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 53(2): 120-139.

Schierup CU et al. (2006) *Migration, Citizenship and the European Welfare State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suszycki A (2011) Welfare Nationalism: Conceptual and theoretical considerations. In: Suszycki A (ed.) *Welfare Citizenship and Welfare Nationalism*. NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research II. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, pp. 51-77.

Swyngedow E (2010) Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change. *Theory, Culture and Society* 27(2-3): 213-232.

Wetherell M et al. (eds) (2001) *Discourse theory and practice*. London: Sage.