

Published in *Critical Social Policy* 36(3): 321–329 (2016).

## **The Politics and Policies of Welfare Chauvinism under the Sign of the Economic Crisis**

Suvi Keskinen, Ov Cristian Norocel and Martin Bak Jørgensen

Abstract:

The ongoing economic crisis that emerged in the wake of the global recession in 2008, and followed by the more recent crisis of the Eurozone, has introduced new themes and remoulded old ways of approaching the welfare state, immigration, national belonging and racism in Northern Europe. This article identifies two main ways of understanding welfare chauvinism: 1) as a broad concept that covers all sorts of claims and policies to reserve welfare benefits to the ‘native’ population; 2) an ethno-nationalist and racialising political agenda, characteristic especially of right-wing populist parties. Focusing on the relationship between politics and policies, we examine how welfare chauvinist political agendas are turned into policies and what hinders welfare chauvinist claims from becoming policy matters and welfare practices. It is argued that welfare chauvinism targeting migrants is part of a broader neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state and of welfare retrenchment

Key words: welfare chauvinism, economic crisis, national belonging, neoliberalism, immigration

The ongoing economic crisis that emerged in the wake of the global recession in 2008, and followed by the more recent crisis of the Eurozone, has introduced new themes and remoulded old ways of approaching the welfare state, immigration and national belonging in many European countries. Several Northern European countries have witnessed the emergence and intensification of strong appeals for exclusionary politics, expressed in the growing support for right-wing populist parties, the shifts by centre-right parties to nationalist and border-controlling rhetoric (e.g. the British government's initiatives to restrict intra-EU movements from Romania and Bulgaria) and the sharpening of the debate about the future of the welfare state and entitlement to benefits. It has become more legitimate than ever to claim that welfare benefits should be reserved for certain groups alone, notably those considered 'natives' and bearing a self-evident right to belong to the nation, and to develop policies on such bases.

In this Special Issue, we analyse these processes through the concept of welfare chauvinism. Welfare chauvinism first emerged as a concept in the study of right-wing populism as a means to grasp the specific ways that these neonationalist and cultural racist parties make use of the welfare state and welfare benefit to draw the distinction between 'us' and 'them' – the natives that are perceived to deserve the benefits and the racialised 'others' who are portrayed as undeserving and even exploiting the welfare system at the cost of the 'rightful' citizens (e.g. Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Kitschelt, 1995; Mudde, 2007). Lately, the concept of welfare chauvinism has been adapted for research on attitudes towards welfare benefits and the right of migrants to receive benefits (cf. de Koster, Achterberg and van der Vaal, 2012; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Mewes and Mau, 2013; van der Vaal, de Koster and van Oorschot, 2012). Based on European Social Survey data, these studies have sought to identify how ordinary people view who is deserving of welfare provisions and under what conditions

they perceive migrants to have rights to benefits. The concept has slightly different meanings in these two research traditions and there is thus no shared agreement on how welfare chauvinism should be understood.

Instead of restricting ourselves to a single definition of welfare chauvinism, for the purpose of the present Special Issue we have chosen to let each contributor define welfare chauvinism in a manner that suits his/her approach and research topic. We have done this in order to examine and experiment with the usefulness of the concept in studying how the post-2008 economic crisis has changed, adjusted, and rearticulated the debates on immigration, race and national/European identities. In the different articles, two main ways of using and understanding welfare chauvinism emerge. Firstly, welfare chauvinism is used as a broad concept that covers all sorts of claims and policies to reserve welfare benefits to the ‘native’ population (the articles by *Martin Bak Jørgensen and Trine Lund Thomsen* and *Simon Gütner, Sue Lukes, Richard Stanton, Bastian Vollmer and Jo Wilding*). *Bak Jørgensen and Lund Thomsen* also discuss ‘weaker’ and ‘stronger’ forms of welfare chauvinism in order to make distinctions within the broad spectrum of political and policy phenomena targeted. Secondly, a stricter definition of welfare chauvinism is introduced in two contributions (the articles by *Suvi Keskinen* and *Ov Cristian Norocel*) where the concept is connected to an ethno-nationalist and othering political agenda, characteristic especially of right-wing populist parties and their adherents but also found in the rhetoric of other political parties and policy processes. This strict definition is combined with an analysis of the welfare nationalist interests and orientations that are shared by a range of political and policy actors (*Keskinen*) or a broader logic of welfare populism expressed by either right-wing populist parties or their supporters (*Norocel*).

## Economy, culture and welfare state

The articles in the Special Issue make it evident that economic issues and welfare benefits are closely connected to questions of culture and national identity when immigration is constructed as a central topic. Although often studied separately, the contributions of this issue point to the need to combine analyses of cultural and national belonging to those of economic and societal crises. Welfare chauvinism, whether understood as a broad policy orientation or a more narrow political agenda with (possible) policy effects, is not only a question of public economy or welfare provision but of definitions of who is entitled to benefits and services, who is considered part of the ‘community’ that produces/distributes welfare provisions and what such membership is based upon. In order to understand the currently rising tendency towards welfare chauvinism in (Northern) Europe, we must examine both changes in political economy and the cultural construction of national identities, as well as the role given to immigration and racialised minorities within such processes.

The recent economic crisis has strengthened the tensions and contradictions of the modern welfare state, manifested since the late 1970s and leading to the troubled era ‘after the golden age’ (cf. Agustín and Ydesen, 2013; Kuisma, 2007; Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006; Seymour, 2014). The restructuring of the welfare state in the wake of neoliberal policies and the post-Fordist production have led to growing social exclusion, new flexibility demands and regimes in working life, increased competition in the labour market and the precarisation of new groups, as well as growing urban segregation (Schierup and Ålund, 2011; Standing, 2011; Betz and Meret, 2012). These developments are characterised by ethnic, racial, class, and gender dynamics. Both marginalised ethnic minorities in segregated residence areas and

members of the ethnic majority working-class, among which the right-wing populist parties today recruit a large part of their support, are confronted with reduced employment possibilities and bleak prospects for the future. At the same time, restrictive economic policies and austerity measures have worsened the political crisis that has left large parts of the European populations deeply distrustful towards the established political system (Jørgensen and Agustín, 2015). While the political distrust is particularly evident in Southern Europe, it also provides a basis for understanding recent changes in Northern Europe, such as the rapid and massive rise of support for the populist the (True) Finns party in Finland, the prominence of the UKIP in the British elections, and the position of the Danish People's Party as the largest non-socialist party in Denmark after the 2015 elections.

Perceptions of national belonging and its criteria have also been in a state of flux recently. Especially since 2001, Europe has witnessed intense debates on multiculturalism and the alleged risks that Islam may posit to national cultures and security (e.g. Grillo, 2007; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010; Lentin and Titley 2011). National belonging has been defined on basis of heritage and culture, but also on commitment to liberal ideas. Not only right-wing populists but also many other European politicians have called for stricter assimilation policies of those portrayed as the 'illiberal others' and emphasised the 'core European values', including notions of free speech, gender equality, and sexual freedom (e.g. Lentin and Titley, 2011; Keskinen, 2012; Norocel, 2013). In such debates and through the policies that these have led to especially Muslims and non-western minorities are othered when framed as threats to European societies. The public responses to the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris 2014 and on the synagogue in Copenhagen 2015 have built upon this tradition, and while we have also witnessed attempts to challenge the increasing

polarisation and segregation it seems that the main effect is the strengthening of security discourses and policies.

Immigration and integration policies have reflected both these trends. The neoliberal influences have led to the strengthening of a selective logic that distinguishes between ‘desired’ vs. ‘undesired’ migrants. On matter of welfare provisions, this is articulated increasingly in terms of opposition between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ social groups (cf. van Oorchot, 2000, 2006; Schneider and Ingram, 2005; Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2012). Particular emphasis is given to the migrants’ presumed ‘utility’ to the nation and its welfare. On the other hand, the emphasis on national culture and liberal identities has been manifested especially in the regulation of ethnic minority families and gender/sexual relations, as well as in the strategies to combat radicalisation (Keskinen, 2012; Andersson, 2013; Norocel, 2013). The articles in this Special Issue show that both neoliberal arguments and othering cultural notions are drawn upon to support welfare chauvinist logic. In addition to recently migrated groups, also minorities with a longer history in European countries have become targets of these exclusionary definitions.

The Special Issue provides analyses of welfare chauvinism in countries that fall within two of the three welfare regimes, identified by Esping-Andersen (1990) and his followers. An example of the liberal welfare regime, the UK is also the country where neoliberal policies were first adopted on European terrain. Its policies have influenced conservative and ‘third way’ politicians in several countries across Europe. The majority of the studied countries, however, are examples of what are usually called the developed welfare states, or the social democratic welfare regime in the Nordic region. In these countries, neoliberal policies gained a foothold in the 1990s and 2000s although they are still characterised by universalist benefits

and broad public welfare services, when seen from an international perspective. While previous literature has shown that there is a link between the institutional arrangements and types of welfare entitlements (Larsen, 2006), in this Special Issue we investigate the various forms of welfare chauvinism articulated in and, to various degrees, implemented in these different welfare regimes.

### Welfare chauvinism as politics and policies

Against the previously described background, several of the contributions focus on the relationship between politics and policies. They ask: how are welfare chauvinist demands articulated, and how are welfare chauvinist agendas turned into policies and to what extent do they remain on the level of party programmes and political posturing in national parliaments? What hinders welfare chauvinist claims from becoming policy matters and welfare practices? In order to shed light on these questions, the contributions analyse how welfare chauvinism is expressed on different societal levels and what their relationships are in: parliamentary politics, national and local policies in relation to immigration and welfare, as well as the views of right-wing populist supporters. For instance, the article by *Ov Cristian Norocel* examines the demand (the native population) and the supply side (the right-wing populist parties) of welfare chauvinist policies, with special attention being paid to the different means to articulate welfare chauvinism in these contexts.

Moreover, three contributions to this Special Issue study the transformations of the various welfare models in Europe as a consequence of welfare chauvinist advances. The article by *Suvi Keskinen* unveils the strong welfare nationalist traits of the Finnish welfare regime,

which opens up the political debate for welfare chauvinist appeals even among politicians from mainstream parties, particularly on issues of asylum policies. In turn, the article by *Martin Bak Jørgensen and Trine Lund Thomsen* maps out the gradual transformation of welfare provisions in Denmark towards a hierarchical system of civic stratification, which legitimises welfare chauvinism. Recent welfare chauvinist developments in Danish politics show the relevance of this history. After the elections in June 2015, the new government stated that it would implement a 'new integration service for newcomers' allegedly making it 'less attractive for foreigners to come to Denmark and provide more incentives to work and contribute to Danish society'. The integration service will be half the amount of the regular social benefit. The article by *Simon Güntner, Sue Lukes, Richard Stanton, Bastian Vollmer and Jo Wilding* examines how welfare chauvinism functions as a bordering practice, which affects not only migrants and ethnic minority communities but also citizens deemed to be undeserving in the revised normative logic of welfare provisions.

Collectively the articles in this Special Issue investigate the politics, policies and practices of welfare chauvinism. They offer empirical answers on how welfare chauvinism is shaped during and after the recent economic crisis in North-Western Europe.

This Special Issue focuses on the links between the nation-state, the welfare-state, welfare chauvinism and immigration. The latter category has been the analytical lens through which the articles have engaged with the issue of welfare chauvinism. As stated explicitly in the article by *Simon Güntner, Sue Lukes, Richard Stanton, Bastian Vollmer and Jo Wilding*, chauvinism targeting migrants is part of a broader neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state and of welfare retrenchment. Since the 1980s, many, if not most, European nation-states have installed policy measures which have led to retrenchment of established rights. This path has taken different steps from workfare discourses to outright chauvinism. The 2008 economic



crisis accentuated this development and led to the instalment of austerity measures. These have hit the bottom of society the hardest and have generated public discourses of welfare abusers, among which racialised minorities, single mothers, the unemployed and ‘chavs’ (cf. Jones, 2011) are categorised. Austerity measures have produced new forms of hostility towards migrants and ethnic minorities, but these build on and gain their power from the exclusionary nationalist and racialising ideologies, policies and practices that are part of European history (cf. Keskinen et al., 2009).

## References

- Agustín OG and Ydesen C (Eds.) (2013). *Post-Crisis Perspectives*. Frankfurt am Main, DE: Peter Lang.
- Andersen JG and Bjørklund T (1990), Structural changes and new cleavages: The progressparties in Denmark and Norway. *Acta Sociologica*, 33(1):195–217
- Andersson B (2013). *Us and Them? The dangerous politics of immigration controls*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Betz HG and Meret S (2012). Right-wing Populist Parties and the Working Class Vote: What Have You Done for Us Lately? In Rydgren J (Ed.) *Class Politics and the Radical Right*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Esping-Andersen G (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Grillo R (2007). An Excess of Alterity? Debating Difference in a Multicultural Society, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (6), 979-998.
- Jørgensen MB and Thomsen T L (2012). Crises now and then – comparing integration policy frameworks and immigrant target groups in Denmark in the 1970s and 2000s, *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 14 (2), 245-262.
- Jones O (2001). *Chavs. The demonization of the working class*. London UK: Verso.
- Jørgensen MB and Agustín ÓG (2015). *Politics of Dissent*. Frankfurt am Main, DE: Peter Lang.
- Keskinen S (2012). Limits to Speech? The Racialized Politics of Gendered Violence in Denmark and Finland. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33(3), 261-274.
- Keskinen S, Tuori S, Irni S and Mulinari D (Eds) (2009). *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Kitschelt H (1995). *The Radical Right in Western Europe*. Ann Arbor, US: University of Michigan Press.
- de Koster W, Achterberg P and van der Vaal J (2012) The new right and the welfare state: The electoral relevance of welfare chauvinism and welfare populism in the Netherlands. *International Political Science Review* 34(1), 3-20.
- Kuisma M (2007). Social Democratic Internationalism and the Welfare State after the “Golden Age”. *Cooperation and Conflict* 42 (9), 9-26.
- Larsen CA (2006). *The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes: How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Lentin A and Titley G (2011). *The Crises of Multiculturalism*. London, UK: Zed Books.
- Mewes J and Mau S (2013). Globalization, socio-economic status and welfare chauvinism: European perspectives on attitudes towards the exclusion of immigrants. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 54(3), 228-245.

- Mudde C (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Norocel OC (2010). Constructing radical right populist resistance: Metaphors of heterosexual masculinities and the family question in Sweden. *NORMA: Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 5(2), 169-183.
- Norocel OC (2013). "Give Us Back Sweden!" A Feminist Reading of the (Re)Interpretations of the Folkhem Conceptual Metaphor in the Swedish Radical Right Populist Discourse. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 21(1), 4-20.
- van Oorschot W (2006). Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states, *Journal of European Social Policy* 16(1): 23-42.
- Reeskens T and van Oorschot W (2012). Disentangling the 'new liberal dilemma': On the relations between general welfare distribution preferences and welfare chauvinism. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 53(2), 120-139.
- Schierup CU, Hansen P and Castles S (2006). *Migration, Citizenship, and the European Welfare State*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Schierup CU and Ålund A (2011). The end of Swedish exceptionalism? Citizenship, neo-liberalism and politics of exclusion, *Race and Class*, 53(1), 45-64.
- Schneider A and Ingram H (2005). Introduction: Public Policy and the Social construction of Deservedness. In Schneider A and Ingram H (Eds.) *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy*. Albany, USA: State University of New York Press.
- Seymour R (2014). *Against austerity: How we can fix the crisis they made*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press Economics Books.
- Standing G (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London, UK & New York, USA: Bloomsbury Academics.

van der Vaal J, de Koster, W and van Oorschot, W (2012). Three worlds of welfare chauvinism? How welfare regimes affect support for distributing welfare to immigrants in Europe. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 15(2), 164-181.

Vertovec S and Wessendorf S (2010). *The Multiculturalism Backlash*. Abingdon. UK: Routledge.