Social Policy and Populism: Welfare chauvinism and identity politics in a Europe on the brink of Brexit

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Reviewing the relationship between social policy and the contemporary populist radical right: welfare nation state and social citizenship

Abstract

Whilst populism has a long-standing relationship with social policy, the recent emergence of radical right populism as a considerable political force across Europe and beyond compels us to think further about this relationship. The aim of this review essay is to bring together literature on populism, welfare chauvinism and social citizenship in order to highlight the role social policy plays in the rhetoric and political approach of the populist radical right. This essay reviews, how, by developing artificial distinctions between culturally homogeneous ‘people’ and corrupt ‘elite’, the populist radical right generates interpretations of social citizenship that confers social rights based on of cultural or ethnic belonging, rather than as a matter of right. By simplifying the nature of complex social policy problems, radical right populism further problematizes the mainstream social policy agenda. Consequently, radical right populism will continue to present a significant challenge to progressive and inclusive social policy.

Keywords: populism, welfare chauvinism, social citizenship, social policy

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Introduction

Social policy is becoming an increasingly important focus for the populist radical right in Europe and beyond. The aim of this review article is to set out the conceptual landscape for thinking about the intricate relationship between welfare and nationalist far-right populism from a social citizenship perspective. The rationale for doing so has been driven by a new dynamic in terms of the depth and breadth of radical right populism in Europe and how this is contributing to increasingly narrow understandings of social citizenship. Indeed, the relationship between social rights and ethnicity has become part of the mainstream discourse in many Western democracies. As recent electoral results convincingly demonstrate, populist radical right parties have become central actors in many European Union member states: Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden Finland, Austria, France, Poland, Greece, and Hungary all host populist radical right parties exhibiting sustained electoral success through nationalist and anti-immigrant political strategies that hinge largely on narrow, nationalist conceptualisations of social citizenship.

These trends have been the focus of several academic studies that have investigated the emergence and success of the European populist radical right (Mudde, 2007; Hainsworth, 2008; Nordensvard and Ketola, 2015; Wodak et al. 2013; Berezin 2009, 2013; Bustikova, 2014; Rydgren, 2007; Carter, 2005; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Taggart, 1998; Szcerbiak and Taggart, 2008; Usherwood and Startin, 2013; Fekete, 2018). At least in part, this success stems from the strong (re)emergence of nationalist and anti-immigration agendas in European politics and welfare nation state politics (Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Mews and Mau, 2013; Van Der Waal et al., 2013; Nordensvard and Ketola, 2015; Norocel, 2016;). In this review we suggest that it is critically important to better understand the welfare policies and welfare rhetoric linked with the populist radical right approach to social citizenship, not least because of the role social citizenship plays in the mainstreaming and normalisation of radical right political agendas in contemporary European societies.

It is the absence of an ideological core that enables the populists in general but also radical right in particular to attach itself to the dominant, hegemonic ideological approaches (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). The approach can be at the same time 'chameleonic' (Aslanidis, 2016) or antagonistic in nature (Laclau, 1977). Mudde sees populism as 'a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ''the pure people'' versus ''the corrupt elite'', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004: 543). Mudde and Kaltwasser drill further into the thin centredness of populism by describing it as an ideology that demonstrates "an identifiable but restricted morphology that relies on a small number of core concepts whose meaning is context dependent' (2013a: 150-151) and which leaves space for adjustment and adaptation on the bases of changing perceptions, practices and needs of different societies (Freeden 1998: 751). Freeden goes even further, suggesting that the populist radical right 'is simply ideologically too scrawny even to be thin … It is emaciated rather than thin-centred' (2018: 3). The distinction between 'people' and the 'elite' is important as it highlights the strong tendency for populism to be more about 'form' of the argument rather than 'content' (Laclau, 2005a). However, in the case of the radical right, this quickly morphs into a question of how exclusively one ought to define 'people' and radical right populism

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could fall into what some would call both an exclusive concept and an excluding process (Berezin 2009; Betz 2001; Rydgren 2005) with significant potential consequences for social citizenship and social rights.

As we have argued elsewhere, radical right populism tends to link welfare and social policy with the relevant nationalist project (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2015). In this review we explore the links between citizenship and radical right populism, highlighting the flexibility of the populist approach in incorporating multiple understandings of social citizenship within its remit. The populist radical right has for a long time argued that welfare and social policy has been designed, delivered – even purposely sabotaged – by corrupt elites that ignore the interests of the people, which in this case means the native common men and women (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Van Der Waal, De Koster and Van Oorschot, 2013; Reeskens and Van Oorschot, 2012). The populist radical right argument concentrates on two basic but fundamental critiques of welfare and social policy. First of all the wrong people administrate welfare and social policy, so its design and delivery are not in the interest of the native 'common man'. Secondly, the focus of the critique hones in on questions of access to welfare, which in turn implies that the corrupt elites have given access to undeserving migrants in support of multiculturalism. This is seen not only to undermine the nation state but also to diminishes the quality of welfare and social policy (Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018).

Following this introduction, the second section of the article is focused on discussion of social citizenship and how the different conceptions of citizenship relate to the populist radical right. The third section will discuss how radical right populism as a thin ideology can team up with either a nationalist neo-liberal social citizenship or with a more nostalgic nativist social democratic social citizenship – or indeed a combination of both. The fourth section discusses the changing and chameleonic nature of radical right populism in general and welfare chauvinism in particular. We conclude the paper with the importance of national context of understanding how radical right populism links up with particular understanding of social policy.

Social Citizenship and Social Policy

Any discussion involving welfare and social policy tends to be rooted in a certain understanding of positive social rights associated with particular welfare services. Welfare begins with our membership in a political community which confers us particular rights and duties. Indeed the radical right populists' focus on re-defining the 'people' in increasingly narrow terms tends to be motivated precisely by this relationship between membership in a political community and the welfare rights that setm from this. The questions focus on both the *content* of social citizenship and whether welfare offers policies based on 'equity', 'equality' or 'need' (Enser-Jedenastik, 2018) located on the continuum between extensive redistributive policies and a far more limited liberal laissez-faire market approach and *access* to social citizenship, problematising who counts as a citizens and to what extent should non-citizens have access to social services. However, before moving further in our discussion it might be useful to determine with what we mean with citizenship in this context. The meaning of citizenship is rather ambivalent and constantly adapting to new normative and ideological contexts. This fluidity is well illustrated by Smith's outline of different understandings of citizenship evolving through time (2002).

- First, a minimal understanding of citizenship refers to a set of political rights

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granted to citizens in order to participate in the political processes of self-governance. Harking back to ancient Greece, this understanding confers citizenship to an exclusive group of members in a political community (*polis*). In this model, public policy is executed through a partnership between the 'elite' who have been granted citizenship rights (as well as duties), and the polis. Here citizenship is less about social rights as the main focus is determining the right of self-governance.

- The second conception of citizenship is both more inclusive in membership, going beyond a male elite, and more limited in being more concerned with liberal citizenship focused on legal status as the key determinant of 'full membership in society' (Holston and Appadurai, 1996: 187). Or as belonging in a political community that comes with rights (political, civil, social) and duties (taxes, laws) (Smith, 2002: 105; see also Marshall, 1950). Citizenship becomes associated with certain legal implications of belonging to a particular community and social policy the means to meet the citizens' particular social rights.
- The third definition extends the second conception beyond the nation state. It substantially expands the idea of citizenship to include virtually any form of membership that implies right or duties, to the extent that citizenship could refer to anyone 'who belongs to almost any human association, whether a political community or some other group' (Smith, 2001: 105). Whilst such usage of the concept is largely metaphorical, by decoupling citizenship and the nation state, it lends credence to multicultural (Kymlicka, 1996) and cosmopolitan (Linklater, 2007) conceptions of citizenship, moving towards a recognition of global citizenship rights and duties (George and Wilding, 2002).
- The fourth approach also looks outside the state and highlight the potential role for civil society organisations to facilitate a model of active citizenship. Popularised by the work of Robert Putnam, citizenship here expands to include membership in bowling clubs, bird-watching associations and other social organisations. This represents an increased focus on the individual citizens with a concern to improve 'certain standards of proper conduct' (2002: 106). Premised on the assumption that 'participation in civic organizations inculcates skills of cooperation' as well as a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavors' (Putnam, 1993:90). Importantly this active, or responsible citizenship tends to be anchored in a sense of individual responsibility aligned with neoliberal understandings of individual agency vis-a-vis the state (Delanty, 1997).

What Smith's whirlwind tour of the history citizenship helpfully demonstrates is the malleability of citizenship as a concept adaptable to any given social and political context. This is particularly true of social citizenship, the content of which is under constant review and varies widely between countries, making it particularly attractive target for populist radical right rhetoric.

Social Policy as a foundation of citizenship

Nationalism and populism might appear as slightly odd bedfellows. As Freeden points out, nationalism tends to be defined with reference to external political enemies while populism is aligned against domestic enemies (2018). However, in relation to

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dominant forms of modern citizenship, what Purcell describes as 'liberal-democratic/Westphalia' (LDW) citizenship, or a system where 'individual political actors agree to a "social contract"' within a nation state, 'sovereign in its territory' (2003: 565). In this way, as Hjerm and Schnabel point out, 'national identity suggests some kind of perceived or felt homogeneity – whatever people consider as uniting (e.g. a shared language, value system, institutional framework or just the idea of 'us' against 'them')' (2012: 347). The nation state also represents a source of solidarity among people who may never meet face-to-face, creating what Anderson described as and 'imagined community' (1983). Community is based on a more abstract idea where the bonds of solidarity are created among people who never meet each other 'yet in the minds lives the image of their communion' (1983: 6-7). As the subsequent paragraphs demonstrate, to a significant extent this imagined community tends to be concretised and made real by social policies.

T.H Marshall's (1950) now classic conceptualisation of citizenship rights, which is rooted in the second conception of citizenship outlined above, proposes that full citizenship rights have been achieved through a struggle where groups claim their rights from state or the sovereign. A sense of struggle is palpable in Marshall's threefold model of citizenship rights that comprises of civil, political and social rights. Civil citizenship refer to those rights that are necessary for us enjoy individual freedom, such as freedom of speech, religion and fair treatment before the law and emerged in the early 18th century as necessary preconditions for successful capitalist economic systems (Wagner, 2004: 280). Political rights refer to the ability of individuals to participate in the political process, to hold office and to vote. Finally, social element has to do with access to a 'modicum of economic welfare and security' that is guaranteed through the provision of education, housing, healthcare and pensions as a matter of right (Marshall 1950: 11). This was in part an effort to guarantee the working classes a certain living standard independent of the market. Social rights realised through the welfare state, therefore, were the pinnacle of social citizenship and social solidarity. However, given that civil rights perceive of the citizen as an individual requiring protection from state interference while social rights promote state intervention, a degree of conflict between negative (civil) and positive (social) rights is inevitable (Wagner, 2004: 280).

There are two contrasting approaches to acquiring citizenship that grants access to these kinds of rights. The first is a blood-based system of citizenship (jus sanguinis) of which Germany is a classic example. The core principle of citizenship is based on a genealogy of belonging to the nation. The second is a territorial-based system of citizenship (jus soli), exemplified by France, where citizenship is based on territory – one has to be born on the territory of France in order to acquire French citizenship (Brubaker, 1992).

In the context of present-day nation states welfare is the most important arena for the performance of such solidaristic practices. Kpessa, Béland, Lecours (2011) and Blyth (2022) make the point that social programmes associated with the welfare state play an important role in the development of national identity. Welfare services and the solidaristic practices associated with welfare states differ between countries, further solidifying the links between social policy and national citizenship. This is best demonstrated in relation to the idea of welfare regimes, which each create their own forms of citizenship practices (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The liberal (United States, Switzerland, and Australia), corporatist (Austria, France, and Germany) and social democratic (Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark) approaches each

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incorporate different emphasis on rights. In a liberal citizenship regime, the state relies 'on markets to allocate social rights emphasizes civil and political rights' (Isin and Turner, 3:2002). In corporatist states, the social rights are important, but they are not universally available. Social rights are most important in the social democratic countries where the state 'provides universal benefits such as free vocational or higher education' (Isin and Turner, 3:2002).

However, at the same time there have been developments, broadly associated with globalisation that have begun to dilute the distinctions between the welfare arrangements of nation states. Scholars describe the Nordic universal and egalitarian system creating social services that are *de-coupled* from nationality or ethnic origin. Universal welfare services should not discriminate any citizens (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003:196).

Radical right populism and social policy

The concept that is at the core of the populist radical right, populism, may benefit from some further discussion. For some, populism is an inherently democratic concept, offering a highly valuable mechanism for a range of normally silent voices to be heard in the political debate (Canovan, 1999; Laclau, 2005). It serves a counterhegemonic function and is therefore ultimately a 'productive force that may serve as the catalyst for a profound realignment' (Kriesi, 2014: 361). For others, populism should be reserved for a narrower group that does not include all anti-elitist actors. Müller, for example, identifies both anti-elitism and anti-pluralism as characteristics of populism, combined in a heady mix with particular claims to a 'moral monopoly of representation' (2016: 2-3). Significantly, from a social policy perspective, Müller further argues that this tends to lead to a lesser concern with genuine alternative policy trajectories, which are replaced with efforts to discredit their mainstream political rivals as uninterested in what really matters to voters (2016). This, ultimately, serves as the central justification for the anti-pluralist argument in favor of the tyranny of the majority and demonstrates a core problem of populist politics in relation to social policy: the black-and-white choice between rule by the 'people' or rule by the technocratic (social) policy and political elite.

As has already been mentioned, populism is probably best understood as a 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde, 2004: 544) that is largely premised on an anti-elitist ideational narrative (Laclau, 2005b). Based on ambiguous generalizations that crudely demarcate boundaries between the 'elite' and the 'people', where the former are characterised as corrupt and failing to serve the best interests of the latter. At the same time the 'people', by representing the simple majority (i.e. the general will), possess an innate legitimacy to challenge elite rule (Mudde, 2010). This approach can be summarised in four concepts. Initially, the two key groups of actors - the 'people' and the 'elite' are both treated as uniform categories, followed by an assumption that their relationship is largely hostile. Thirdly, the populism is anchored in the principle of popular sovereignty, followed fourthly by the valorisation of the 'the people' and denigration of 'the elite' (Stanley, 2008: 102). Roodjuin's similar fourfold, characterisation adds a fifth concept: the proclamation of crisis (Rooduijn, 2014: 573).

Implications for social policy

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The populist radical right approach to politics contains substantial implications for social policy. In part, the populist radical right draws on nativism and the aspiration for an ethnically singular nation. Therefore, despite the importance of populism, for commentators such as Cas Mudde, the populist radical right refers to a party family where 'nativism, not populism, is the ultimate core feature of the ideology' (2007: 26). This core narrative built on recent significant structural changes around globalization, migration and disappointments of the post-industrial era. As such, the narrative aspires a return to the 'golden past' of the 1960s and 1970s, and conjures up an image of a nation whose difficulties can be explained by weakening of its core cultural identity through processes of globalisation and multiculturalism.

Of particular concern here are the efforts by the populist radical right to reimagine the welfare state as a welfare *nation* state. This reimagination refers to the particular understanding as to who makes up the 'people' that the welfare state consists of. Thus, rather than necessarily questioning the legitimacy of the redistributive welfare state, it becomes reframed in narrower terms as belonging to a sovereign and exclusive political community confined within clearly defined borders (xxxx). Such policy positions, drawing on explicit welfare chauvinism, Enser-Jedenastik (2018) argues, are more prominent in countries that support welfare programmes that draw either on principles of equality (universal) or need (means-tested). Otjes et al. (2018), when comparing the economic policies of seven populist radical right parties across Europe, also find a 'unified nativist' response that draws distinctly on welfare chauvinist rationales. These tactics are effective. As Schumacher and van Kersbergen (2014) show, mainstream parties do adapt to the welfare chauvinist rhetoric by racheting up their critique of multiculturalism as well as taking on more pro-welfare positions.

The populist radical right's argument has therefore, two basic but fundamental critiques of welfare and social policy: the first problematises access to social citizenship in welfare chauvinist terms, drawing on arguments that draw on explicitly ethnic or cultural criteria and arguing that multicultural policies diminish the overall quality of welfare. The second accuses the bureaucratic elites of administrating welfare in ways that fail to serve the interest of the native 'common man', where the corrupt elites have opened social citizenship to undeserving migrants that in so doing undermines the welfare state (xxxx). In the next two sections we will review the two sides of this anti-elitist argument, the corrupt elites and the true, incorruptible 'people'.

Welfare and corrupt elites

A critical focus on the elite and mainstream political leadersip is an important aspect of populism. This is seen to be supporting a particular set of interests that hinders welfare and social policy, reflecting a critical attitude towards mainstream politics in general (Rydgren, 2007). In the worst case, social policy is part of cultural elites' propaganda. Nordensvard and Ketola show how radical right populism portrays economic globalization, mass-immigration and Europeanization as an elite project that supports multiculturalism at the expense of the nation state. Moreover, the anti-elitist argument suggests that the policy and political elites use external interests (globalization, immigration, EU) to further their own interests and power. By prioritising EU policies, giving into globalisation and opening borders to immigrants, this elite has neglected the interests of the nation (2015).

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As Kriesi observes, in populism 'the people are paramount' (2014: 362) and moving onto identifying three ways to conceptualise the people as: political (people as sovereign), cultural (people as a nation) and economic (people as a class) (2014; see also Mény and Surel, 2000). However, as Katsambekis and Stavkrakakis (2017) prudently remind us, the relationship between 'people' and 'nation' is highly context dependent and historically determined, making it very challenging to draw generalisable rules about the nature of this relationship. To a significant degree, these conceptualisations of the people are made meaningful by reference to welfare policies, for example through arguments that legitimate a narrow policy agenda favoring the social rights of the ethnic (working class) majority at the expense of the political elites and cultural minorities. This amalgamation of nativist sentiments with particular rearticulation of the 'people' in narrower terms poses considerable challenges to the mainstream approaches to social policy. Conflating the definition of 'people' with the representatives of a particular ethnic identity amounts to no less than rearticulating the rules of access to social citizenship and social justice.

The effectiveness of the argument that combines anti-elitism and welfare chauvinism appears, at least to some degree, to hinge on the existing levels of inequality. This emerges from Enser-Jedenastik's (2018) findings which suggest that programmes based on need and delivered on means-tested bases are among the most likely targets for welfare chauvinistic critique, as well as with the findings of Van Der Waal, De Koster and Van Oorschot (2013) who identify an association between high levels of means-tested, selective welfare services and welfare chauvinism. Mewes and Mau (2013) conclude that the "civilizing" impact of globalisation tends to be differentiated based on socio-economic status, with higher socio-economic groups benefitting more from this.

Indeed, De Koster, Achterberg and Van der Waal (2013: 4) suggest that the social agenda of the populist radical right is specifically focused on the interests of the native 'common man'. The populist radical right not only argues against welfare for foreigners, but also criticizes the way welfare is arranged and delivered in a manner that neglects the interests of the 'common man'. This perception that the needs of migrants in general are given preferential consideration at the expense of 'natives' is a common feature of populist radical right rhetoric in Europe and beyond (Spinney and Nethery, 2013). In the view of the populist radical right, social citizenship is not designed with the poor common people in mind who are in genuine need of support. Rather, the main beneficiaries are the civil servants who are provided with well-paid jobs within the welfare state and whose actions support the "welfare scroungers" (De Koster et al. 2013: 6).

Welfare and the true citizens

However, such straight forward definitions of citizenship as those put forward by the populist radical right rarely reflect the complex reality of lived citizenship. There are different scales of being a citizen in practice and we need to differentiate between the experiences of living at a place and being a full member of society with all rights and duties that accompany it. Hettne (2000: 35), for example, argues that citizenship should be perceived of as a variable that can range from being substantial to being degraded to mean nothing. These qualifications are important in the context of welfare chauvinism and radical right populism, as they focus on both the rules of access to welfare as well as the nature of the welfare rights granted to citizens. The

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broad argument here is that citizenship rights ought to be differentiated on the bases of belonging: since migrants and ethnic minorities belong 'less', we need to rethink both their overall access to welfare and the content of the welfare services they are entitled to. In this context, the relationship between the nation state and nationalism becomes an important variable in understanding the access versus content debates.

The interactions between nationalism and social policy have gained attention among scholars in recent years. Béland and Lecours (2005; 2008) investigate such linkages in multinational contexts of Canada, United Kingdom and Belgium and a great deal of the research to date has been focused on developed, multinational states (Banting 2005; McEwen 2006; Boychuk 2008; Béland and Lecours 2008). Alesina and Glaeser (2004) point to 'racial heterogeneity' in the United States as the reason for the absence of a redistributive welfare state. Citizens, they conclude, are more likely to grant wider social citizenship rights to others from their own group, which leads the authors to link the limited redistribution of resources through the welfare state to views on minorities. However, others challenge the impact of nationalism on social policy. Both Taylor-Gooby (2005) and Gerdes (2011) question the association between welfare and immigration, arguing that the links are far more nuanced and have to do with types of welfare programmes (Taylor-Gooby, 2005). Gerdes, in his study of Danish municipalities, fails to identify an association between immigration and public spending (2011). Nevertheless, the European populist radical right discourses towards the welfare state remain closely linked with nationalism and in this way challenge the general trends in the development of welfare policies in Europe.

At least in the European context, the dominant understanding of citizenship has become increasingly disconnected from the ethnic origins of the nation state. For example, the social democratic approach to welfare with its universal and egalitarian policies and principle of non-discrimination has been argued to create services that are decoupled from nationality or ethnic origin (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003: 196; Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Residency has become an important point of entry to social citizenship rights, underpinned by a gradual 'denationalization of solidarity practices' (Mau and Burkhardt, 2009: 241). The impact of deeper integration of European nations on national sovereignty has sparked negative reactions against access to social rights based on residency, because it dilutes the nation's role in social citizenship (Sainsbury, 2006).

As access to social policy becomes disconnected from ethnic origins, questioning the legitimacy of this can be found at the core of the populist radical right problematization of welfare policy. In counterpoint to the expansion of denationalised citizenship rights, the populist radical right have begun to reframe socioeconomic rights as the exclusive currency of those citizens with cultural, even ethnic affinity with the nation state (Betz and Johnson 2004; Evans et al. 2001; Faist, 1994; xxxx). The populist radical right discourse therefore suggests that social citizenship needs to be closely associated with an ethnic and sovereign nation state. The definition of the 'true people' in the populist lexicon is strongly connected with a need to re-define welfare access in narrower terms.

Social citizenship and populist radical right populism: context and contradictions

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The 'classical' populism of the radical right was largely modelled around a synthesis of neo-liberalism and nationalism, with, as suggested above, an active agenda to reduce the size of the welfare state. The re-engineering of the welfare state is now centred around processes of marketization, responsibilization and new governance arrangements which focus more on market actors than traditional social movements (Salamon, 1993; Barnett, 2003; Petersen and Hjelmar, 2014). According to this view, 'individual freedom could only be achieved by *liberation from* various forms of *state regulation*, and *through the market,* in the form of individual choice' (Thörn and Larsson, 2012:264). Kitschelt's and McGann's typology of parties of the radical right is one early example. They identified anti-establishment populism, authoritarian capitalism and welfare chauvinism as the three vote-winning strategies available for radical right parties, highlighting authoritarian capitalism as the 'master case' for the radical right, as it was deemed to guarantee 'a high electoral return given that it can appeal to a cross-class alliance' (1995: 19).

However, authoritarian capitalism is not the only game in town. As Hans-Georg Betz (1994: 107) has argued, the populist radical right in Europe is having to respond to the changing behaviour of modern voters who 'increasingly tend to privilege issue-and value-oriented forms of participation over ideology-oriented ones'. Here Betz distinguishes between two ideal types, national populism and neoliberal populism, and points out that the ideologically-driven libertarian and neoliberal politics have been gradually pushed aside by value-driven politics of xenophobia and racism. Wodak et al. (2013: xviii) further identify two phenomenon, the 'Berlusconisation' and 'Haiderization of Europe', alluding not only to the divergent paths radical right populist parties in Europe have taken, but also highlighting the influence party leaders are deemed to have over party strategy and its performance at the ballot box.

Recalling the thin, even 'emaciated' ideological centre (Mudd, 2010; Freeden, 2018) and the context dependent meaning of the few core concepts (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013), it is therefore not surprising that the welfare chauvinism of the populist radical right is constantly adapting to prominent themes about inequality, identity and culture. Indeed, one can envisage a continuum of approaches between neo-liberal welfare nationalism focused on the smaller, business like welfare state on the one hand, and restorative social democratic nationalism aiming to reconstruct welfare to its former glory on the other. However, the larger, more extensive welfare state would only be deemed possible where welfare can be restricted to its own 'true people'.

The interleaving of cultural arguments in the social citizenship debate lends an additional dimension to welfare chauvinism. To what extent should social citizenship be acquired through being part of an ethnic community, or culture or both? This shows one of the largest contradictions of radical right populism: the linkages between race and culture, as well as the attempts to delink them. That race and culture could possibly be intertwined is downplayed as a way to mainstream the overall discourse but also to distance the populist radical right from biological racism and being an extension of national socialism.

This cultural turn has become a hallmark of the populist radical right in contemporary Europe. Yilmaz (2012), for example, argues that culture has become the new 'common sense' through which the world around us is being ordered and organized. For example, the whole idea of ethno-pluralism and *Nouvelle Droite* in France during the late 1960s and 1970s was very much influenced by Gramsci's

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notion of cultural hegemony, which was based around struggles of cultures rather than party politics. Rydgren (2007) also elaborates that this counterhegemony was about adopting core ideas of their opponents and imbue them with nationalist content. 'Departing from the left's notion of *difference*— on which the doctrine of multiculturalism (that is, the idea that migrants should have the right to preserve habits and traditions of their home countries) is largely based— the notion of ethno-pluralism states that, to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples, they have to be kept separated' (Rydgren, 2007: 244). This assumes that the mixing of ethnicities would lead to cultural extinction (Griffin 2000, Taguieff 1988) and that cultures might be different, incompatible, and incommensurable (Betz and Johnson 2004, Taguieff 1988). Soysal (2009: 5–7) has gone on to argue that culture has 'become the predominant mode of addressing citizenship, security, and even economy, which were conventionally considered to be distinct from culture'. Cultural arguments return as key components of the new common sense by which social citizenship is being defined. We argue that radical right populism has in some variegated form linked itself to a cultural understanding of citizenship (people from similar cultures are welcomed, or those who reject their cultural origins and join a new culture), which distinguishes it from traditional far right groups who still profess the importance of race and nativism.

This further problematizes membership in a nation, where some argue that becoming citizen means rejecting former identities and assimilating with mainstream culture, while others closer to classical far right highlight the importance of the biological race. These points create contradiction in both defining the nature of citizenship and who has access to its rights and obligations. These points create contradictions in both defining the nature of social citizenship and who has access to its rights and obligations. However, these contradictions are part and parcel of radical right populism as a thin-centred ideology.

Despite the rich array of options in how to approach the questions of social citizenship and welfare chauvinism, the common denominator across them is the clear intent to reduce the complex and contingent policy issues into simple black-and-white choices. In this way, the populist radical right's approach to social policy is at odds with the true nature of social policy problems and the policymaking processes required to tackle these problems. Generally speaking, social policy problems can be described as 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber 1973). They are complex and ambiguous, long-lasting, and there are various perspectives to them. There are no solutions that are undisputable, nor can they be solved by focusing on one perspective or approach at a time but rather the solutions are usually multidimensional and multidisciplinary. The challenges are also complex and systemic by nature (Holland 1995; Room, 2001), which means that various dimensions of activity and diverse actors are needed for a sustainable change. Addressing such policy challenges in a complex and volatile environment requires a collaborative approach that incorporates the views and interests of a wide range of stakeholders (Loorbach 2007). Instead, the populist radical right problematizes this by presenting one set of views (the ethnically dominant, working class view) as the only legitimate source of solutions.

This 'wicked' nature of social policy problems has meant that the populist radical right's approach has been particularly successful when employing the critical language of welfare. Indeed, crises play an important role in the populist radical right's engagement with social policy. As Moffitt (2015) compellingly argues, crises are central to populist politics, not as an objective category of events that elevate

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populist politics to the public consciousness, but rather in the sense that 'populist actors actively perform and perpetuate a sense of crisis' (2015: 195). In short, populist parties 'spectacularize failure' and through their public 'performance' are able to propel a sense of crisis (2015: 198). Although they may not always be the most prominent problems on the radar of the populist radical right, social policy problems are particularly helpful in this regard. Indeed, a crisis narrative has been frequently associated with welfare developments ever since the 1970s and which has been added to by the challenges of supranational integration within the EU. As Schierup, Hansen and Castles (2006: 3) have observed, the notion of a 'social crisis and the breakdown of established identities and solidarities, focused on social rights of citizenship, have to varying degrees been exploited by nostalgic and reactionary populism that proposes "cultural difference" as the rationale for excluding all those who do not belong to "the nation"'. By proclaiming welfare crisis resulting from uncontrolled immigration in health services, education or housing, it becomes possible to reimagine the 'people' the welfare state consists of in relatively simple terms as those who share a degree of cultural similarity.

Conclusion

The prevalence a thin-centred ideology, with crude distinctions between 'people' and the 'elite' who are perceived in an antagonistic relationship, lends itself to particular strategies in relation to social policy. In short, these strategies have involved approaching the content and access of social citizenship through a simplified lens that interprets social rights as being conferred through a particular ethnic or cultural belonging. Moreover, the strategy crudely distinguishes between the different sets of interests of the 'corrupt' bureaucratic and political elite on the one hand and the 'true' people of ethnically and/or culturally homogeneous origin on the other hand. In other words, instead of aiming to grasp the true nature of deep and complex social problems, the narrow populist worldview deliberately simplifies them.

The tendency towards simplification, underpinned by a thin ideology, explanations that reference homogenous and antagonistic social groups, valorised 'people' and a corrupt 'elite' has been an effective strategy in garnering support for welfare critique grounded in welfare chauvinism. The resultant myopic approach to wicked social policy problems around the nature of and access to social citizenship are a core part of the explanation for the successes of the European populist radical right in recent years. The relationship between social policy and the contemporary radical right ought to remain part of an active research agenda, as these policy-related discussions - even in their deliberate simplicity and essentialism - is what make the otherwise thin ideological content meaningful in local contexts.

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