

# Populist radical right protectors of the *folkhem*: Welfare chauvinism in Sweden

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## Abstract

The article scrutinises a version of welfare chauvinism taking shape in Sweden, by concentrating on the concept of *folkhem* (the [Swedish] people's home), and examines how it was expressed in the 2010-2014 parliamentary activity of the Sweden Democrats. It offers an analysis of how the welfare chauvinism project is first contextualised in the party documents, and subsequently articulated in the party-endorsed parliamentary motions. The article is an analytical contribution to welfare studies and to analyses of the populist radical right, providing a critical inquiry into welfare chauvinism in Sweden. The article is also an empirical contribution to the study of the populist radical right in Sweden.

## Key words

cultural racism, *folkhem*, gender equality, Sweden Democrats, welfare chauvinism

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## Introduction

The ongoing political debate in Sweden about the future of its welfare model mirrors similar developments elsewhere across Western Europe, whereby nativist resentment towards extending welfare provision to migrants is presented rhetorically as a defence of the interests of the native 'common man'. This strategy has been commonly labelled 'welfare chauvinism' (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Derks, 2006; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2006). In Sweden this particular device has coalesced around an emerging political force: the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, henceforth SD). Through its name, the SD appropriates the discourse of Swedish democracy grounded in popular movements. The SD is commonly considered to be part of the family of populist radical right parties (cf. Hellström et al., 2012; Jungar and Jupskås, 2014; Norocel, 2010; Rydgren, 2006). Even more so, the SD's proclaimed commitment to democracy rests on thinly veiled racist foundations, since it was founded through the merger of several neo-Nazi and extreme nationalist fringe parties in 1988 (Hellström and Nilsson, 2010: 57–58; Jungar and Jupskås, 2014: 221). However, the SD's welfare chauvinist appeals went unanswered by the other political forces. With this in mind, the present study aims to scrutinise the variety of welfare chauvinism taking shape in the Swedish context, and to examine how it was expressed in the parliamentary activity of the SD, in the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle.

The party gained parliamentary representation in the aftermath of the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections, receiving 5.7 per cent of the votes. It consolidated further its parliamentary presence in the 2014 Swedish parliamentary elections, with 12.9 per cent of the votes and coming in third in terms of number of parliamentarians (MPs) in the Swedish parliament (*Sveriges riksdag*). In recent opinion polls, the SD seems to have consolidated further its support, hovering over 15 per cent. Several researchers attributed the SD's electoral breakthrough to its nostalgic appeals to an idealised and sanitised version of the Swedish welfare model, which was built during the extensive social-democratic ascendancy in government throughout most of the twentieth century, popularly referred to as the *folkhem* (in English, the '[Swedish] people's home') (Hellström et al., 2012: 195; Norocel, 2013: 5). The SD also employed the *folkhem* nostalgia as a means to consolidate a coherent political platform for its welfare chauvinist agenda.

While the future of Swedish welfare and the need for new policy responses to migration were prominent subjects in the last two Swedish parliamentary elections (2010 and 2014), the majority of Swedish parties, both left and right, initially chose to resist the SD's outright welfare chauvinist appeals. Aftershocks of the 2008 economic crisis were also felt in Sweden, but the governing bourgeois centre-right coalition continued its policy of openness. A policy initiated in 2008 when it lifted most of its labour migration barriers for third-country nationals against strong social-democratic opposition (Schierup

and Ålund, 2011: 58–61; Spehar et al., 2013: 179–181). In the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle the centre-right coalition maintained its collaboration with the left-leaning Green Party, forging a comprehensive framework agreement in 2011 which granted illegal migrants the right to healthcare and education (Spehar et al., 2013: 183–184).

Although departing from different premises, mainstream parties in Sweden generally seem interested in transforming the *folkhem* into a multicultural welfare model (cf. Phillimore, 2010: 9–11; Schierup and Ålund, 2011: 47–51). In light of these political developments, Sweden is somewhat of a European exception. The Swedish political mainstream did not blindly follow the sections of the electorate who favoured connecting the two subjects – welfare provision and migration, respectively – towards a welfare model narrowly designed for those deemed legitimate and deserving, built on the logic of belonging to the ethnic majority (cf. de Koster et al., 2013; Mewes and Mau, 2013; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Rydgren, 2013; van Oorschot, 2006). This in turn has allowed the SD to profile its policy proposals as ‘the only Swedish-friendly’ parliamentary activity; a follow-up to its electoral slogan ‘Give us back Sweden!’ It is precisely the SD’s endorsed parliamentary motions that are of interest here, with the aim to bring out the welfare chauvinism manifestations in Sweden.

This article is organised in six sections. The following section presents the study’s theoretical building blocks. Then previous research is introduced concerning the position of the Swedish populist radical right in debate about the future of Swedish welfare. The methodological approach, which entails a critical stance towards the problem of representation in political discourse, is subsequently presented and the collected empirical material is then detailed. The results of the analysis are arranged in two sections: the first details the SD’s problem of representation of welfare chauvinism in Sweden, whilst the second presents the effects that are identified as desirable in the SD’s articulation of welfare chauvinism. The concluding discussion reflects on the analytical and empirical implications arising from the study.

## **Conceptualising welfare chauvinism - the populist radical right agenda**

Research on contemporary socio-political transformations across Europe argues that populist radical right parties critique the uneasy transition to postmodern societies in Europe, the perceived problematic nature of multiculturalism, and the alleged challenges that native populations, generically described as ‘the people’, may experience (cf. Jungar and Jupskås, 2014; Mudde, 2007). The populist radical right generally describes these challenges as a situation that pits the hardworking natives, the ‘silent (ethnic) majority’ whom they claim to represent, against the allegedly undeserving migrant ‘other’, whereby migrants are lumped together into a generic category – the

'other' – to signal their inherent difference from the people. Such political posturing echoes the growing sentiment among certain sections of the electorate towards a delimitation of welfare provision to overlap narrowly the native majority's ethnic boundaries, and less so towards a disbanding of the welfare state altogether as it was previously thought (cf. Mewes and Mau, 2013: 229; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012: 121; van der Waal et al., 2013: 165). This is conceptualised in the field as welfare chauvinism (cf. Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Derks, 2006; Mudde, 2007). This term captures, on the one hand, the populist radical right's claim to represent the interests of the people by maintaining their solidarity bonds and providing welfare benefits and rights even in these less favourable circumstances. Considering the ongoing economic and political crisis, these circumstances pertain to unrestrained economic globalisation (e.g., deindustrialisation, extreme mobility of capital, and precariousness on the job market) and supra-national political transformations (e.g., the consolidation of a much criticised European institutional architecture, and its disconnection from the European citizenry). On the other hand, the concept identifies chauvinism as a key aspect aimed at ensuring the survival of the welfare state: the exclusion of migrants from welfare provision, which is regarded as a proprietary right of the native ethnic majority (de Koster et al., 2013: 6; Mudde, 2007: 47).

The interest here is to examine how welfare chauvinism is articulated in the Swedish context. This is done by taking into consideration some other conceptual elements that underpin the populist radical right's claim to represent the political interests of the people. In this respect, welfare chauvinism is employed in combination with appeals for restoring 'traditional values', and reinforcing order and authority. More precisely, the populist radical right combines welfare chauvinist stances with authoritarian arguments, opposing liberal permissiveness and tolerance of migrants, ethnic minorities, and other groups that are deemed to deviate from the 'common man in the street' standards (cf. de Koster et al., 2013: 5; Rydgren, 2006: 11). An important issue here is the distinction between the native people and the migrant 'other', conceptualised as cultural racism in the contemporary context in which, at least formally, biological racism is condemned. Such a distinction builds on the assumption of inherent cultural differences between the two groups, whereby the 'traditional culture' of the natives serves as the infallible standard against which the culture of the migrant 'other' is measured. In this context, the culture of the migrant 'other' is, with few exceptions, deemed to be inferior, backward, and incompatible with the culture of the ethnic majority (cf. Her-  
vik, 2011: 35–38; Keskinen, 2013: 226–227).

A case in point is the populist radical right approach to policies aimed at addressing gender inequalities. Populist radical right parties oftentimes aim to water down ambitious gender equality policies and even encourage renouncing feminism, with the justification that gender equality is a fait accompli across European polities. Studies evidence, however, that these

parties choose to approach gender equality policies instrumentally, as a means to distinguish between the 'gender-equal' ethnic majority and the 'deeply traditionalist and patriarchal' migrant 'other', rather than as a means to ensure all women's equal rights in society; consequently, the nominal gender equality endeavour becomes a discrete cue for cultural racism (cf. Keskinen, 2013; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012, 2014; Norocel, 2010, 2013; Towns et al., 2014). With this in mind, the authoritarianism of the populist radical right is understood here to explicitly combine appeals for tougher policy regulation on matters of law and order, with the formal use of gender equality policies as a mere means to separate the emancipated native majority from the allegedly backward traditionalist migrant 'other'.

## Reclaiming the *folkhem* - a welfare chauvinist project

A few explanations are necessary to understand the emergence of welfare chauvinism in the Swedish context. To begin, the *folkhem* represents the foundational concept for Swedish welfare, heralded as the epitome of the 'Nordic model' of the social-democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The development of comprehensive welfare provision in Sweden was coupled with the consolidation of a democratic form of government on equalitarian principles under a successive series of social-democratic governments throughout most of the twentieth century. The *folkhem* served as a unifying concept for a political project envisaged to symbolically offer a protective roof for the (implicitly homogeneous) Swedish people, both men and women, consolidating the idea of a gender-equal welfare state. In other words, the *folkhem* not only is deeply ingrained in Swedish society but it also constitutes a discrete marker of the welfare state's inherent Swedishness, one that distinguishes the Swedish 'natives' from the country's 'other' inhabitants (Andersson, 2009: 240; Kettunen, 2011: 87).

The *folkhem*'s golden age – a couple of decades around the middle of the twentieth century – was marked by the belief that a prosperous future could be achieved through carefully planned social engineering coupled with rational modernisation. This was manifested, however, through tight social control, social marginalisation, and forced sterilisation of those deemed 'unfit' – particularly ethnic minorities and pauper women (Andersson, 2009: 230; Norocel, 2013: 7). These negative aspects notwithstanding, the formal stipulation of gender equality as one of the *folkhem*'s foundational principles has enabled the discrete distinction between gender-equal native Swedes, both men and women, and their immediate 'other', who is consequently deemed unable to meet these ideals for gender equality and women's emancipation (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012: 16–17). In other words, gender equality has become an ethnic marker for the Swedish natives. In the past three decades, however, Sweden witnessed a dramatic 'shift to the right', which determined a continuous rollback of welfare provision, and increased ethnic diversity as

a consequence of growing migration flows (Schierup and Ålund, 2011: 47–51). These developments were accompanied by social-democratic attempts to adapt the concept to the new socio-politic and economic realities, at various moments by discussion of the *folkhem*'s openness to multicultural influences or by adding an environmentally-conscious perspective to it, though always echoing a nostalgic revalorisation of the concept's indisputable Swedishness (Andersson, 2009: 238–241; Hellström et al., 2012: 195).

The SD's exploitation of *folkhem* nostalgia was part of a sustained effort to reinvent itself as a socially conservative political force, and quietly distance itself from earlier biologically racist and blatantly xenophobic ideas. Consequently, previous analyses concentrate on the SD's ideological positioning to incorporate welfare chauvinist elements into its various political manifestos, and how the political mainstream reacts to this, by studying either the party magazine or how the major media outlets present the newly emerging political landscape, or how the SD's women activists employ a 'care rhetoric' to justify cultural racism (cf. Hellström and Nilsson, 2010; Hellström et al., 2012; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012, 2014; Norocel, 2010, 2013; Rydgren, 2006; Towns et al., 2014). Several of these studies identify this *folkhem* nostalgia to be an important instrument for the SD to accuse the political mainstream parties of ineptitude on migration matters, thereby connecting the contemporary challenges faced by the Swedish welfare model to the allegedly unrestrained migration, which is claimed to be the main cause of the deterioration of welfare provision for ethnic Swedes (cf. Andersson, 2009; Hellström and Nilsson, 2010; Hellström et al., 2012; Norocel, 2013). Such a strategy enabled the SD to proclaim itself as the only defender of the *folkhem*. Another important finding is that the SD appears to couple its *folkhem* appeals with tougher approaches to law and order, and demands for a return to traditional gender roles and rejection of feminism (cf. Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014: 53–54; Norocel, 2010: 180–181; Towns et al., 2014: 243). These notwithstanding, to date there are no critical analyses of the SD's parliamentary activity on social policy issues.

## Methods and empirical material

The present study employs a methodological apparatus that builds on a critical conceptual framework for analysing the production of meaning in political discourse (among which, of interest here are political documents and policy proposals). It is an amended version of the 'what's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2001, 2009, 2012), which 'starts from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change). Following this thinking, policies and policy proposals contain *implicit* representations of what is considered to be the "problem" ("problem representations")' (Bacchi, 2012: 21; italics in original).

The empirical material is also analysed critically (Bacchi, 2012: 22–23), in a manner inspired by textually-oriented discourse analysis (Fairclough, [1992] 2006), with the aim to reveal the means by which language is employed as a medium to establish and reify power relations (Fairclough, [1992] 2006: 55–61). The present analysis is nonetheless concentrated on the textual and discursive levels, thereby less ambitious in terms of investigating the dimension of social practice in discourse (cf. Fairclough, [1992] 2006: 73–96).

The methodological approach at work here then enables an examination of the assumptions present in populist radical right political discourses concerning ‘the problem of the *folkhem*’, and the political ends that are identified as desirable for this endeavour, consequently mapping out the articulation of welfare chauvinism in Sweden. It entails identifying the deep conceptual premises operating within the studied problem representation (i.e. the populist radical right imperative to restrict welfare to the ‘deserving’ Swedish ethnic majority), unveiling its underlying presuppositions and assumptions, indicating which effects are identified as desirable, and how the subjects (both the ethnic majority and migrant ‘others’) are constituted in this context (cf. Bacchi, 2001: 73–74, 2009: xix; Fairclough, [1992] 2006: 101–130).

There are two types of empirical material analysed in this article: political documents (elections manifestos and a party principle programme) and party-endorsed policy proposals (parliamentary motions). The first set of empirics consists of the SD election manifesto drafted on the eve of 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections, titled ‘99 propositions for a better Sweden’ (SD, 2010), and the one prepared for the 2014 Swedish parliamentary elections titled ‘We choose welfare!’ (SD, 2014); and the SD principle programme adopted in 2011 (SD, 2011), which explains at length the party’s ideological foundations. The selection of these documents is anchored in the study’s theoretical framework concerning welfare chauvinism as conceptualised by the populist radical right and is aimed at shedding light on its specific manifestation in Sweden. Concomitantly, the analysis of these documents allows a detailed mapping of the assumptions (Bacchi, 2009: 4–10) that underlie welfare chauvinist problematic representations in Sweden.

The second set of empirics consists of parliamentary motions during the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle, available on the archive of the *Riksdag*, put forward in five standing committees, which deal with those policy areas closest to the study’s purpose:

the Committee on the Labour Market (*Arbetsmarknadsutskottet*), which manages policy areas concerning the labour market and working life, integration and discrimination on the labour market;

the Committee on Justice (*Justitiekommittén*), which deals with policy areas pertaining to the public prosecution service, police service, correction system, etc.;

the Committee on Cultural Affairs (*Kulturutskottet*), which addresses matters concerning culture, media, religious communities, etc.;

the Committee on Social Insurance (*Socialförsäkringsutskottet*), which manages policy matters on financial security for families and children, and for the elderly, national pensions, but also issues of Swedish citizenship and migration; and

the Committee on Health and Welfare (*Socialutskottet*), which addresses the policy areas pertaining to welfare and care services for children, the elderly and disabled, and social welfare in general.

The choice of standing committees is anchored in the study's theoretical conceptualisation of welfare chauvinism, whereby the populist radical right parties display a synergistic interest in welfare and cultural policies, focussing not just narrowly on those policy areas dealing explicitly with welfare provision (e.g., labour market, social insurance, and health and welfare policies), but more widely on those that reflect the populist radical right exclusionary and authoritarian agenda (e.g., culture and justice) (cf. de Koster et al., 2013; Mudde, 2007; Norocel, 2013). From a total of 582 motions signed by the SD MPs the selection was narrowed down further to those party-endorsed motions that I consider to reflect closer the party line on the discussed matters. Twenty party-endorsed motions were thus collected covering the analysed period, distributed across parliamentary sessions and standing committees as described in Table 1. Although these motions were roundly dismissed by the other parliamentary forces, their

**Table 1.** SD-endorsed motions in chosen standing committees in selected parliamentary sessions.

<i>Standing committee</i>	<i>Parliamentary session</i>			
	<i>2010/11</i>	<i>2011/12</i>	<i>2012/13</i>	<i>2013/14</i>
Committee on the Labour Market	2010/11:A292 2010/11:A390	–	–	2013/14:A399
Committee on Justice	2010/11:Ju388	2011/12:Ju411	2012/13:Ju288 2012/13:Ju289	2013/14:Ju379
Committee on Cultural Affairs	2010/11:Kr320	2011/12:Kr319	2012/13:Kr296	2013/14:Kr302
Committee on Social Insurance	2010/11:Sf371 2010/11:Sf372 2010/11:Sf373	2011/12:Sf352	2012/13:Sf316	2013/14:Sf314
Committee on Health and Welfare	2010/11:Sf385 2010/11:So535	–	–	–

analysis enables the critical inspection of the policy measures identified as desirable (Bacchi, 2009: 15–18) in the SD's articulation of welfare chauvinism in Sweden.

## The besieged *folkhem* - party programme analysis

At first glance, the *folkhem* is used rather sparingly in the analysed material, particularly when compared to the more specific concept of welfare (*välfärd*) and its declinations, such as 'welfare state' (*välfärdsstat*, and even *välfärdsland*), 'welfare system' (*välfärdsystem*), etc., in the same material. More clearly in the 2010 election manifesto, the *folkhem* is mentioned only once, whilst welfare appears twice (SD, 2010); six times (as opposed to twenty times for welfare and its derivative forms) in the party principle programme, which confirms the party's ideological 'social-conservatism grounded on a clear nationalist foundation'<sup>1</sup> (SD, 2011). There were no references at all of the *folkhem* in the second election manifesto, as opposed to a total of only twelve occurrences for welfare and derivative forms, given the manifesto's proclaimed intention to 'choose welfare' (SD, 2014).

Looking closer, however, a clear hierarchy between the two concepts comes forth. For instance, in the first manifesto, welfare on its own narrowly refers to provision of social services for the elderly (particularly pensions and state subsidised geriatric care) (SD, 2010: 4). The *folkhem*, in turn, is associated with the entirety of Swedish welfare (family welfare and free education, law and order, and healthcare services) (SD, 2010: 5–7). In the party principle programme and the later manifesto, though the *folkhem* does not appear as often as welfare in a lexical form, it is implicitly mentioned through the constant referral to 'Swedish welfare', 'our welfare model', Sweden as a 'welfare country', and more simply to the Swedish nation as the foundation for 'our democracy and our welfare' (cf. SD, 2011: 3, 15, 23, 30, 2014: 3, 6, 21). Exploring the discursive construction of social reality then (cf. Bacchi, 2009: 4–10; Fairclough, [1992] 2006: 101–136, 169–199), these lexical constructs indicate the inherent Swedishness of the welfare model in question, binding it to the *folkhem* concept.

With this in mind, the *folkhem* is described in the party documents as enveloped in a nostalgic aura, with frequent references to how it looked at its zenith (cf. SD, 2010: 5, 2011: 21, 2014: 3, 7). The SD proclaims its vision to restore/reinvent it, 'whereby the feeling of belonging is not founded on class solidarity but rather on national affiliation and identity, in which all citizens are guaranteed a physical, economic and social security' (SD, 2011: 34). This image is contrasted to the present situation in which the welfare model is under serious strain, the *folkhem* portrayed as being on the brink of collapse at the hands

of the (unwelcomed) migrant 'other'. Such an image has a wide circulation within the SD; in fact, it represents a recurring theme among the various party members' representation of contemporary Swedish society (cf. Hellström et al., 2012; Norocel, 2013; Towns et al., 2014). The SD proclaims its intention to preserve and protect 'the *folkhem* built on shared foundational values' and 'the Swedish people's right to develop their culture on their own terms'. While maintaining that it strives to 'help people in need', the SD warns, however, that 'Swedish welfare and the country's wellbeing come first' and explains such a stance through adopting a 'responsible entry policy'. The means to achieve these goals are, according to the SD, to reintroduce the 'assimilation policy' of the *folkhem*'s golden era, in accordance with which 'migrants shall adapt into the Swedish society and not the other way around', and more specifically, to 'stop the Islamisation of the Swedish society' (cf. SD, 2010: 5, 2011: 3, 15).

In the SD documents, Muslim faith is indistinguishably tied to Islamism (as extremist religious and political ideology), thereby enabling the narrow identification of less desirable migrant 'others' as Muslim. This leads to appeals to counter these migrants' 'Islamist influence over Swedish society, and to limit severely migration from the Muslim countries' (SD, 2011: 27). In this way, the *folkhem* is closely identified with a welfare chauvinist project underpinned by 'Swedish Christian' values, since few 'other ideas and institutions have been as influential as Christianity and the Swedish Church in the formation of the Swedish culture. [...] Knowing and understanding the Swedish Christian cultural heritage is an important key to understanding our country's history, culture, and its current development' (SD, 2011: 27).

Opposition to the presence of the Muslim migrant 'other' in the *folkhem* is motivated by the SD in two ways. On the one hand, the SD argues for the Swedish culture's superiority. Such a claim is made indirectly, by assimilating the *folkhem* to other cultural manifestations that 'are better than others at safeguarding the basic human rights, democracy and create material wealth, good healthcare, and a high level of education and equality before the law' (SD, 2011: 20). On this matter, the SD identifies the *folkhem*'s founding values: 'law and order, community-building traditions, society-bearing institutions, and historically proven well-functioning natural communities, such as the family and the nation' (SD, 2011: 3). Consequently, the SD principle programme emphasises the imperative for the 'welfare state to survive in the long run is that the society enforces an ethic that strengthens the connection between rights and obligations, and emphasises that those who unrightfully benefit from [welfare] support, to which they are neither entitled nor in need, in practice steal from their fellows' (SD, 2011: 34). Moreover, cultural superiority seems to imply also a healthier nation, since it is the migrant 'other' that is suspected of bringing diseases (e.g., tuberculosis, HIV, and Ebola) within the *folkhem*'s safe enclosure (cf. SD, 2010: 5, 2014: 7). This needs to be understood in the context in which the SD constantly portrays migration

as the main reason for the dissolution of social solidarity, and the crumbling of moral values in Swedish society, often implicating the migrant 'other' as dishonest claimant of welfare provision (cf. Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014: 49; Norocel, 2013: 11–12).

On the other hand, the *folkhem*'s preservation requires a continued homogeneity of the people inhabiting it, or as the SD puts it, there 'must be a foundational common identity in order to ensure that those who have more than they need are prepared to share with those who have less. [...] For this reason, there is an inherent opposition between welfare and multiculturalism' (SD, 2011: 34). In other words, the acceptance of the Muslim migrant 'others' in the *folkhem* is conditioned by their unreserved embrace of Swedish culture, and clear disavowal of their cultures of origin; to achieve this the SD envisages, as previously mentioned, a 'responsible entry policy', which entails a drastic reduction in the number of migrants allowed entry into Sweden, accompanied by an unapologetic assimilation policy directed at the newcomers (cf. SD, 2010: 5, 2011: 15, 21, 23, 2014: 7).

When it comes to gender based discrimination and means to improve 'Swedish gender equality', from close analysis of the empirical material, two interconnected policy areas emerge. First, the SD considers that gender equality policies have already achieved their purpose, since gender equality is at present an inherent value of the *folkhem*, and consequently any further advances on this policy area would only have negative effects. Reflective of such a stance, the SD signals its commitment to prevent the financing of 'gender responsive pedagogy' from taxpayers' money, considered to be an extreme manifestation of feminism (cf. SD, 2010: 7, 2014: 17). This echoes the official party line that goes against the wealth of research concerning the social construction of gender, and the structural discrimination still present in Swedish society (cf. Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014; Norocel, 2013; Towns et al., 2014). The SD argues that 'there are innate differences that lead women and men to see from different perspectives, and therefore to act differently on subject matter'; consequently, 'the SD advocates for a formal approach to equality, whereby neither women nor men are to be treated any different on the basis of their gender. If this then may lead to men and women not doing everything in exactly the same manner, in exactly the same measure, it is not deemed problematic by us' (SD, 2011: 25).

Secondly, while Swedish women and men are presented as equal, the SD points an accusatory finger at those who have not yet embraced gender equality: the Muslim migrant 'other'. Previous research has evidenced how the SD explicitly connects the oppression and discrimination of women to a specific religion – Islam (cf. Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012, 2014; Norocel, 2010, 2013; Towns et al., 2014). Examining the empirical material more closely, it is seen that the oppressive traditionalism of the Muslim 'other' on these matters is connected by the SD to the assumed cultural inferiority of

the migrants' home countries. As such, the veiled women, living under 'religiously-motivated and honour-related oppression in Sweden' are deemed to be in need of 'increased state support' because 'in our Sweden there is no place for misogynistic religions and ideologies'; the first step to enable their emancipation is 'to forbid the wearing of fully-covering veils in public spaces' (SD, 2010: 5, 7). This misogyny is believed by the SD to run much deeper than that; in the already discussed hierarchy of cultures, female genital mutilation, still performed in remote and extremely conservative communities across the Muslim world, is identified as a 'destructive aspect', which justifies relegating the entire culture of the Muslim migrant 'other' to a position of subordination. The SD's civilising mission is laid bare: 'we hope that the countries that practise this barbaric custom choose to abolish it and that they confront and counter the misogynistic attitudes that form the basis of it' (SD, 2011: 20).

To sum up, the SD established their political endeavour to safeguard the *folkhem* as a socially conservative nationalist project, whereby the Swedish welfare model is to be conceived along a welfare chauvinist line of reasoning, which emphasises the proprietary right of the native ethnic majority over welfare provision. The *folkhem* itself and its Christian roots are indicated as cues for the cultural superiority of the native Swedes, a superiority that functions as a means to cement the people's solidarity around the *folkhem*, and as a device to justify the provisional acceptance of the Muslim migrant 'other' on the condition of their assimilation into the native majority. This is further demonstrated by the SD's ambiguous relationship to gender equality, which is instrumentally used to differentiate further between an allegedly civilised and gender-equal Swedish majority, and the conservative traditionalist Muslim migrant 'other'. With this in mind, the following section of the present study details how the welfare chauvinist *folkhem* is taking shape in the SD's policy proposals presented in the Swedish parliament during the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle.

## **Defending the *folkhem* from undeserving others - policy analysis**

If the mere number of SD-endorsed motions in a specific parliamentary committee may be considered an indicator of the party's interest in the policy issues the respective committee addresses, the picture that comes forth strengthens further the argument that the SD has a decidedly chauvinistic approach in its manner of addressing issues pertaining to the Swedish welfare model. More clearly, only one SD-endorsed motion was presented to the Committee on Health and Welfare (2010/11:So535) during the studied period contradicting, in a sense, the SD official line, which claims the party's interest to be in the welfare of Swedish citizens. In a similar manner, the number of motions submitted in the Committee on the Labour Market

(2010/11:A292; 2010/11:A390; 2013/14:A399) is slightly smaller than the number of party-endorsed motions in the Committee on Cultural Affairs (2010/11:Kr320; 2011/12:Kr319; 2012/13:Kr296; 2013/14:Kr302). Comparing these two committees, it appears that the SD was more consistently preoccupied with enforcing a specific understanding of the *folkhem's* cultural tenets, rather than maintaining a continuous interest in the welfare model's intricate workings. Similarly, the frequency of SD-endorsed motions in the Committee on Justice (2010/11:Ju388; 2011/12:Ju411; 2012/13:Ju288; 2012/13:Ju289; 2013/14:Ju379) and in the Committee on Social Insurance (2010/11:Sf371; 2010/11:Sf372; 2010/11:Sf373; 2010/11:Sf385; 2011/12:Sf352; 2012/13:Sf316; 2013/14:Sf314) illuminate the SD's particular interest in policing the *folkhem's* external boundaries, in tune with the party's welfare chauvinist endeavours as documented in the analysis of its political documents.

The much discussed 'responsible entry policy', heralded by the SD as its key policy proposal to restore the *folkhem's* fortunes, is in fact acts to reduce the level of migration to Sweden by 90 per cent, a level more in line with those in neighbouring Denmark and Finland, and basically to reintroduce an assimilation policy designed to ensure the access to welfare provision by the 'right' type of migrants. This is needed, according to the SD, because of the country's limited capacity to absorb the 'wave of low-skilled migrant workforce', the result of 'an irresponsible open entry policy', in the context of the ongoing economic crisis that has already caused soaring unemployment rates among the native low-skilled workers, and has hit Swedish youth particularly hard (2010/11:Sf371: 1; 2013/14:A399: 9). Several economic, social, and cultural problems are identified by the SD: the pressure on the Swedish job market by such a 'large low-skilled migrant workforce leads to market imbalances', and a rush to the bottom on matters of waged work; this in turn causes difficulties for offering welfare provision to 'those in real need' – unemployed people and sick native Swedes; migrants are also suspected of welfare tourism, coming to Sweden to enjoy undeserved social benefits, constituting yet again a strain on the *folkhem's* financial resources; finally, claiming that at present migration is 'massive', the SD duly identifies it as the source of 'social, ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions', 'increased segregation and rootlessness', and criminality (2010/11:Sf371: 1; 2010/11:Sf385: 4, 8; 2011/12:Sf352: 7; 2012/13:Sf316: 5; 2013/14:A399: 3, 9). Nothing is mentioned, however, about the double exclusion of migrants at the hands of the Swedish ethnic majority: containment to precarious low paid jobs and isolation in remote and stigmatised neighbourhoods (Schierup and Ålund, 2011: 51–53).

Some motions point to how the *folkhem* may be safeguarded: a tougher approach to law and order (more severe punishment for such cases as forced marriage, human trafficking, and terrorist activity in Sweden) that must lead to expelling the offenders to their country of origin to serve their sentences,

and even stripping them of their Swedish citizenship (2010/11:A292: 1; 2010/11:Sf371: 1; 2011/12:Sf352: 7). Another SD policy proposal (mandatory health-screening for migrants) serves a double purpose: to ensure that the migrant 'other' does not represent a health hazard to the native population, and to constitute a comprehensive database of the entire migrant population legally present within the *folkbem*'s borders (2010/11:So535: 1). Some others raise the threshold for membership in the *folkbem*, demanding tougher requirements for acquiring Swedish citizenship: 'a significant period of residence in the country [...] during which to prove willingness to assimilate and engagement in the common matters of Swedish society', 'a mandatory citizenship test to attest the migrants have acquired Swedish language skills, and have embraced the fundamental values of Swedish society', and 'a signed contract that confirms their loyalty to Sweden and commitment to obey Swedish laws and customs' (2010/11:Sf385: 8).

A more detailed description of what the SD considers as constituting the *folkbem*'s fundamental values and its traditional customs is provided in the motions aimed at preserving its national character and countering the alleged negative effects of multiculturalism (2011/12:Kr319: 6; 2012/13:Kr296: 3; 2013/14:Kr302: 4). In this context, Christianity is confirmed as a key tenet of Swedish culture, which 'served as a social binder bringing us together, and formed the basis for the development of a democratic, peaceful, and solidarity welfare society' (2011/12:Kr319: 3). However, the Christianity legacy is dealt with expediently, more as a means to justify opposition to multicultural policies intended to accommodate other religious denominations rather than as a policy end in itself – particularly focussing on the preservation of the cultural legacy represented by sacred architecture in Sweden (2011/12:Kr319: 4–6).

Last but not least, on matters of gender equality, it becomes clear that the SD has indeed a merely instrumental interest in the topic. In the analysed material the SD confirms its political stance, considering gender equality to be already achieved. Consequently, it wishes to discontinue the financing of 'gender responsive pedagogy', whose aim to introduce gender-sensitivity in teaching practices with the purpose of ensuring equal participation of boys and girls both in the classroom and in the society, was deemed to be 'an unscientific and ideologically motivated experiment with the identity and behaviour of the future generations of Swedes' (2010/11:A292: 1). In turn, improving the welfare provision for families with children seems to attract the SD's attention only inasmuch as it can serve as yet another reason for curbing migration (2010/11:Sf373: 1). Other than that, the SD regards women less as individual subjects, and more as potential victims of violence and rape at the hands of a thinly disguised (male) migrant 'other'. To be more precise, the SD is interested in increasing the state support provided to 'migrant women' who fall victim to 'forced marriages', 'honour-related violence', and 'religiously-motivated oppression', but also uses this as an argument to change

the open entry policy supported by the centre-right coalition, and to further tighten family reunification policies (2010/11:A292: 1; 2010/11:Sf385: 5; 2011/12:Ju411: 9). In other words, both native and migrant women are discursively constructed as the most vulnerable category in Swedish society, in need of protection from the potentially threatening (male) migrant 'other', a situation that yet again confirms his alienation from among the *folkhem*'s rightful inhabitants.

In sum, the analysed party-endorsed parliamentary motions show that the SD aims to safeguard the *folkhem* from perceivably undeserving migrant 'others', based on the imperative to preserve its Swedish national character. From a critical perspective then, this reveals the SD's efforts not only to shape social reality (the depiction of the *folkhem* as a welfare chauvinist construction) but also to identify a set of desirable solutions to address the described problem (to preserve and defend the said discursive construction) (cf. Bacchi, 2012: 22–23; Fairclough, [1992] 2006: 173–199). This is to be attained through a series of policies directed at strengthening and maintaining the *folkhem*'s cultural specificity, such as the instrumental emphasis of its Christian heritage, but also at policing the migrant 'other'. These policy outcomes are designed to be achieved with the help of both conducive means (elevated value for Swedish citizenship as a cue for cultural superiority) and coercive methods (comprehensive registration of migrants on Swedish territory, tougher approach to law and order, threat of expulsion and removal of their Swedish citizenship). The gender equality policies, or the lack thereof, serve as a litmus test here to highlight the SD's compulsive preoccupation with the inescapable difference of the migrant 'other' disguised under the alleged concerns for women's emancipation.

## Concluding discussion

The article has scrutinised the version of welfare chauvinism that is taking shape in Sweden, and how this has become articulated in the policy proposals put forward by the SD in the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle. In so doing, the study has a twofold contribution to existing research. First, I consider the article contributes *analytically* to the field. Populist radical right scholarship so far has concentrated on the supply side of welfare chauvinism, identifying the concept as an important ideological tenet of the populist radical right party family, but rarely does it explore critically how welfare chauvinism is articulated in their policy proposals (cf. Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Derks, 2006; Jungar and Jupskås, 2014; Mudde, 2007). On the other hand, welfare studies have examined preponderantly the demand side for welfare chauvinism, investigating the reaction of voters to welfare chauvinist appeals voiced by the populist radical right (cf. de Koster et al., 2013; Mewes and

Mau, 2013; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; van der Waal et al., 2013; van Oorschot, 2006). With this in mind, the present study provides a critical inquiry into welfare chauvinism in the SD discourse, and offers an analysis of *how* the welfare chauvinism project is first contextualised in the SD party documents, and subsequently articulated in the party-endorsed parliamentary motions over the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle.

Second, the article also contributes *empirically* to the study of the populist radical right in Sweden. It consists of detailed description of how the *folkhem*, which is mobilised by the SD to articulate the welfare chauvinist project in Sweden, is first conceptualised in the party documents and later more clearly articulated in the SD-endorsed motions during the selected parliamentary cycle. The analysis departs from previous findings concerning the SD's incorporation of welfare chauvinist elements into its political documents, and how the party defended its interpretation of the *folkhem*, which is underpinned by thinly veiled cultural racism and antifeminist conceptions (cf. Hellström and Nilsson, 2010; Hellström et al., 2012; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012, 2014; Norocel, 2010, 2013; Rydgren, 2006; Towns et al., 2014). It evinces further the SD's attempt to enforce the *folkhem* as a socially conservative nationalist project, whereupon Swedish natives exercise a proprietary right over welfare provision and restrict access to only those few that are deemed worthy of it. In this context, the Christian roots of the *folkhem* are instrumentally underscored as a device to consolidate the specificity of the Swedish welfare chauvinist project and as a means to motivate only a conditional acceptance of the Muslim migrant 'other' under a stipulated assimilation into the Swedish ethnic majority. In this regard, the study confirms that on matters of gender equality the SD engages only at a declarative level, and does so mainly to confirm the innate superiority of the Swedish ethnic majority, and emphasise further the cultural difference of the migrant 'other', whose figure serves as a cue for a threatening Muslim foreign presence within the *folkhem*'s confines.

In late 2015 opinion polls suggested that the SD has the potential to become the second largest political party in the event of snap elections. In light of these results, some parties of the centre-right coalition, which lost the 2014 Swedish parliamentary elections, have seemed to seriously consider the political and electoral advantages of welfare chauvinism. Indeed, the centre-right conservatives and the liberals have argued for a more restrictive integration policy as a means to alleviate partially the financial burden on state finances and consequently to ensure an unchanged level of welfare provision for the taxpayers. These stances echo the SD's welfare chauvinist appeals analysed herein, though centre-right politicians have always been quick to maintain that their statements reflect the wider concerns of Swedish voters and less their direct attempts to appropriate the rise of the populist radical right. The SD-endorsed motions put forward during the 2010–2014 parliamentary cycle have been squarely dismissed by all other parliamentary

parties. It is yet unclear whether opposition to SD-endorsed motions might continue in the coming parliamentary cycle or if the other parties will in turn draft their own welfare chauvinist proposals; this appears to be a promising avenue for future research.

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## Note

1. The translations from Swedish are the author's if not stated otherwise.

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