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The Populist Divide in Far-Right Political Discourse in Sweden: Anti-Immigration Claims in the Swedish Socially Conservative Online Newspaper *Samtiden* from 2016 to 2022

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Abstract: In this article, I aim to show how populism can be used as an analytical category to make sense of how anti-immigration claims are articulated in far-right political discourse. I will do this by giving examples of and drawing attention to how the anti-immigration claims are articulated via the populist divide, namely anti-elitism and people-centrism, and delve into the issue of which people are mobilised against which elite in articulatory practice. I use narrative analysis to link individual newspaper texts to dominant storylines of the nation (master narratives) in the continuous construction of national identity. The material is based on 169 articles published in the socially conservative online newspaper *Samtiden* between 2016 and 2022 on national identity. The results from the narrative analysis indicate that far-right populist discourse conveys nostalgia for a golden age and a cohesive and homogenous collective national identity, combining ideals of cultural conformism and socio-economic fairness against the fragmentary political agenda of different elites, spelling out a message that everything was better before.

Keywords: populism; populist divide; far right; national identity; immigration; anti-immigration claims; Sweden; *Samtiden*

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1. Introduction

People have always moved in, out and between countries; national states have either promoted or conversely deterred these movements through implemented measures that limit or bolster the porosity of their borders. In 1960, only 4 per cent of the Swedish population was foreign-born, and the number gradually grew to 7.5 per cent in 1980 and 11.3 per cent by 2000. During the 21st century, there has been a considerable increase in foreign-born people in Sweden; in 2021, 20 percent of the total population is foreign-born [1]. In sum, migration to Sweden has been substantial over the past few decades, and emigration experiences have faded away from public memory.

Individual attitudes towards immigration are part of the identification process; they define who people see themselves as, belonging to the populist or the anti-populism camp [2].

Cas Mudde makes a rough division between (populist) radicalism and extremism in the far-right party ideology [3]. In short, populist radical parties refrain from using violence to pursue political aims; instead, they take political action and engage in political dialogues within the parliament and with potential coalition partners by peaceful means. Populist rhetoric radicalises mainstream concerns, for example, worries about segregation, law and order, and immigration. Extreme views on immigration contradict regular principles of liberal democracy and mobilise supporters in extra-parliamentary activities that could sometimes contain violence. However, the extent to which these claims and activities are considered extreme shifts over time, articulated and accepted differently in different countries, in or outside parliament, or even in government [4].

What were refuted as extremist views on immigration yesterday have become accepted as mainstream ideas today and, thus, considered common-sense knowledge shared by many people in the public, by respectable mainstream politicians, and by editorial writers [3]. From an analytical perspective, the focus should be on how the populist language is being used—following what, for example, the discourse analyst Ruth Wodak refers to as a discursive shift [5] in a discussion on the discursive implications of the recent blurring of mainstream and extreme views on European immigration.

2. Aim and Contributions

In this article, I aim to show how populism can be used as an analytical category to make sense of how anti-immigration claims are articulated in far-right political discourse. I herein demonstrate how the anti-immigration claims made by far-right proponents in the journal *Samtiden* are intertwined with and emerge from dominant storylines of the nation, what I henceforth refer to as master narratives in the processes of national identity construction.

My research question is the following: How are anti-immigration claims made by anti-immigration proponents in far-right political discourse in Sweden in the aftermath of the refugee reception crisis of 2015 and up to the national elections on 11 September 2022?

My study's starting point is that the anti-immigration claims in *Samtiden* are articulated via a populist divide. Two dimensions of the populist divide are of relevance here: The horizontal dimension refers to articulated differences between "the people", who belong here, and "the non-people" (the Other) who do not. The vertical dimension refers to articulated differences between the (common) people and the established elites. These two dimensions have in the literature on populism been referred to as people-centrism and anti-elitism [6].

The material is based on 169 articles published in the socially conservative online newspaper *Samtiden* between 2016 and 2022. This collection does not offer a total collection of all the manifested views inherent in far-right political discourse. However, it gives examples of and draws attention to how anti-immigration claims were embedded in processes of national identity construction in far-right political discourse in the studied period.

3. Background

Academic discussions have devoted much attention to the development of the mainstreaming of the radical right [7]: the slow democratic decay across Europe, the access to power of right-wing populist and anti-immigration parties, and even the descent into authoritarianism in several less consolidated democracies [8], and varyingly also in countries in Western Europe [3,9] (for additional empirical details). These developments indicate that traditional mainstream parties, both conservative and socially democratic, are increasingly open to introducing harsh policies on immigration. Before 2015, similar rhetoric underpinning such decisions was mainly limited to the populist radical right.

The development towards authoritarianism in the party-political field has changed how we analysts should approach issues of immigration and integration in public debate. As the policies of the populist parties are being normalised, so is populist discourse. This development is not a recent phenomenon; the normalisation process has been going on for decades [4,10]. It seems fair to suggest that the populist radical right has radicalised mainstream beliefs and is no longer an extremist fringe phenomenon [3,9].

However, before the refugee reception crisis in 2015 in Sweden, public opinion had gradually grown to become less hostile towards immigration, and the negative views were neither particularly salient to determine voter choice nor channelled via any traditional parties [11]. The Swedish anti-immigration party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), did not obtain enough support to enter the national parliament until 2010. Thus, for a long time, Sweden was seen as a deviant case in the trend of many European countries towards rigidifying asylum policies [12]. However, this development came to a halt in 2015. What

was once referred to as "Swedish exceptionalism" was no longer the case—considering Sweden's policy adaption to an EU minimum of accepting refugees and the increasing number of Swedes giving voice to negative views on immigration [12–14].

In his recent book on the far right, the scholar on populism Cas Mudde distinguishes between four waves in the historical development of the far right [3]. The first wave refers to the development of the neo-fascist parties after the end of the Second World War, 1945–1955. Several of these parties and movements were banned, attracted only a few extremists on the fringes of the political spectrum, and had low voting support. The second wave—labelled as right-wing populism—lasted between 1950 and 1980 and included the emergence of reactionary movements in, for example, France, Denmark, and Norway to stand up for the little man against the state. Thus, the focus of these movements was not explicitly directed against immigration but generally reflected a distrust of public institutions and less confidence in the state.

Mudde talks of a third wave that arose in the 1980s and consisted of various radical parties that combined neo-liberal economic policies against the state with cultural protectionism, which was referred to as the winning formula [3,15].

According to Mudde, despite their many differences and failure to communicate a joint common message, the populist parties and movements in the third wave could all be seen as normal pathologies and normal counter-reactions [16] [1] on the route towards infinite progress with endless technological achievements [3].

The emergence of the fourth wave in the 2000s, representing the current far-right situation, sets itself apart from the previous waves, Mudde explains. [2] In line with Mudde's history of the far right, far-right parties have now become normalised and embedded in the mainstream political discourse [3,5,7,9,17–20]. In sum, the far-right parties have radicalised mainstream beliefs and reformulated the very sense of normalcy; since to be "normal" is no longer tantamount to refraining from radicalism; instead, professing uncomfortable common-sense truths or voicing what everyone else is thinking is a way to connect to the normal and ordinary people. Consequently, "the mainstream" has gradually become more radicalised over time, as it aims to remain within the shifting boundaries of what is normal.

Sweden is not an exception to this fourth wave; the country exemplifies what Mudde described, i.e., the blurring of what counts as mainstream right and far right. On 17 October 2022, Ulf Kristersson, party leader of *Moderaterna,* became Sweden's Prime Minister. He chairs a coalition government, which, apart from his party, consists of the Christian Democratic Party and the Liberals [21]. The losers (in terms of electoral support) can govern thanks to the support of the Sweden Democrats (SD), who won 20.54% of the total votes. In the preceding governmental negotiations, the SD successfully elevated their own policies into governmental policies (specifically through the Tidö agreement) without having been assigned seats in the new government. This insider/outsider role appears to be a golden seat for the party, being able to implement its policies of resisting various forms of immigration and promoting strict policies on integration, without being responsible for the consequences thereof.

Generally, anti-immigration claims rest on opposition to immigration. The resistance to immigration can roughly be divided into two motivations: economy and culture [22]. The former aspect is typically associated with fierce ethnic competition for scarce resources; welfare for the natives is pitted against multiculturalism and diversity embracement. The latter element involves arguments such as that immigration threatens our culture; namely, immigrants are not seen as behaving the same way as we (the natives) do and do not adhere to the same social norms. It seems futile to suggest that it is only "the populists" who articulate threatening images of immigration regarding both economy and culture; it would be more accurate to state that the fear of the other has gradually become mainstream in Sweden and elsewhere.

In a recent study of discursive shifts in Poland, Krzyżanowski describes how it has become normal to talk about immigrants and refugees in a derogatory way. The topic of immigration as an immediate danger and immanent threat was initially enacted and then

diffused and perpetuated in Polish political discourse [23]. While scapegoating migrants is not a new practice, it has now become normalised, setting up new social values "while being strategically 'clad' in quasi politically correct and acceptable themes, arguments and statements" [23] (p. 7). The Polish example shows that anti-immigration claims in public opinion, the media, and the judiciary and harsh policy measures can also be implemented in regions where there are hardly any immigrants. [3]

Nevertheless, the increased inflow of immigrants does not automatically lead to more restrictive policy preferences and negative-opinion formulations. How the media and political elite react to refugee reception crises and which words they use affects popular opinion around these issues. It seems far too simplistic to merely rely on a narrative of an irrevocable populist wave that displays the same features everywhere, as indicated by Jan-Werner Müller [24]. Further, as empirically shown by Mudde, populism is context-dependent and thus displays a much more nuanced picture than any one-dimensional view of an omnipresent and ubiquitous populist wave might suggest [3].

4. Theory

In line with the discursive-analytical approach to populism, this article seeks to explore how populism is done rather than viewing it as a property of particular political actors [6], (p. 24). In much scholarly work and daily discussions, "populism" is frequently used as an insult in political speech raised by political competitors [10,25]. It connotes demagoguery and opportunism and views politics as short-term-oriented, without substance, and emotional and moralistic rather than rational and pragmatic [26].

However, populism could also be seen as a form of political protest [27] and a reaction towards the regular politics-as-usual [28] by offering promises of redemption. According to Panizza [29] (p. 23), "populism offers a promise of emancipation after a journey of sacrifice". From this perspective, populism enjoys an invigorative potential to fulfil demands of popular democracy, relying on promises of redemption that contrast the sometimes technocratic discussions, and inspiring more people to feel engaged in democratic politics, not leaving it to the privileged few to decide on what is good for everyone [10] (p. 59).

As a category of practice [4] in far-right populist discourse (articulated in, for example, anti-immigration claims on immigration), it embarks from a monolithic, essentialist understanding of what the people is and should be—it is thus inherently anti-pluralist. It is a danger to democracy if the losers in democratically held elections do not fully respect electoral defeats and to claim that they represent the authentic and genuine voice of the people, no matter what the election results say [24,31]. True. However, in line with the discursive-performative approach, it cannot be determined whether or not populism poses a danger to democracy simply on a theoretical level; instead, the analyst has to consider how populist communication is articulated in practice [32].

This study focuses on how anti-immigration claims in far-right political discourse intersect with narratives of national identity. Analytically, the populist divide, on the one hand, between the people and the elite (vertical level) and, on the other hand, between the people and the Other (horizontal level) can be used to analyse how populist communication manifests itself in practice.

5. The Populist Divide

Which people, then, are mobilised against which elite(s)? [5] Two dimensions of the populist divide are of relevance here.

The vertical dimension refers to articulated differences between the (common) people and the established elites. The vertical dimension has in the scholarly literature on populism been referred to as anti-elitism. The idea of a twofold opposition, at once vertical and horizontal, has been presented and argued for at some greater length by Rogers Brubaker [32]. The populist divide relates to directly protecting the people from those above, below, and outside. Popular sovereignty thus stands against various mediated interests and heralds majoritarianism at the expense of internal minorities.

The horizontal dimension refers to articulated differences between "the people", who "naturally" belong here, and "the non-people" (the Other), who do not. The horizontal dimension has in the scholarly literature on populism been referred to as people-centrism.

The strength of this approach is that while some analyses focus on nationalism instead of populism and others attempt to purify populism by separating it from (exclusive) nationalism [34,35], I here seek to accentuate the co-constituting nature in one analytical model, which allows cross-pollination between the two analytical concepts [32] (p. 61). Figure 1 illustrates both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the populist divide.

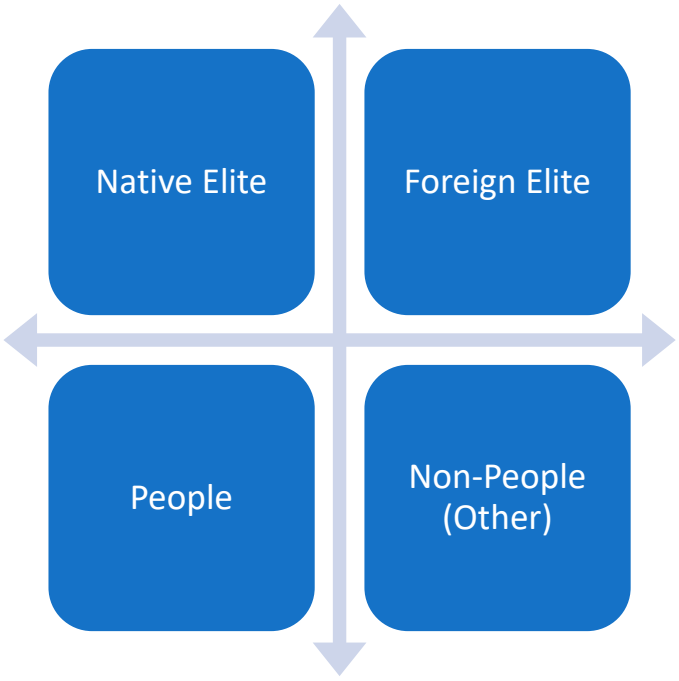

Figure 1. The Populist Divide in Political Communication.

5.1. Anti-Elitism

In the vertical dimension, the people stand against the established elites and the values they supposedly espouse. Whereas the native elite represent the views and interests of the native people, foreign elites (both people and ideas) are, sometimes, even more: aliens, since they have not been democratically elected by "us" but can still be accused of diluting and manipulating the views of "our" native elites. In general, elite communication contains disruptive elements, appeals to the united people, and pits homogeneity against fragmentation. However, conceptually, it is possible and necessary to also separate between different kinds of elites. The political elite generally represent the mainstream political parties in their respective countries. The media elite are the traditional media and public service. Based on a conviction that these sources of information disseminate fake news and hide the "real truth" from the people, the populists tend to seek information elsewhere in various parts of social media, outside the mainstream media. The economic elite are the privileged few who earn much more money and do not reside in the same districts as the common people. The moral elite are those who espouse politically correct knowledge instead of relying on common-sense knowledge. They believe they know what is best for you, even if this contradicts popular wisdom, and in refusing to listen to uncomfortable popular opinions; they put obstacles to the freedom of speech [36]. The popular resistance against the moral elite concerns the idea that "they" believe they know what is best for "us" who live in the real world, although they have long forgotten the people's true wishes and interests. Finally, the cultural elite are those who sometimes pretend to prefer abstract fine art, read challenging books, have high levels of academic education, and listen to opera

instead of appreciating popular culture, watching tv, appreciating performing arts, and listening to popular music [37].

5.2. People-Centrism

Confusingly, people-centrism can be associated with the lower strata of the (native) population and can also refer to the (native) populace as a whole. The emperor might not have clothes, but to keep the system functioning, you must keep admiring their imaginary robes [37]. This allegory shows a critical point concerning populism: even if our commitment to a common entity is based on a fairy tale, a mere fantasy, the belief in popular unity is essential for any system of democratic governance. Populist communication derives from "the people" as a category of reference, even if it is such a fantasy. Canovan distinguishes between three distinctive ways of appealing to the people in populist discourse [10] (p. 67), [28]. First, the appeals to the people could refer to "the united people" that stand against the (political) elite, who threaten to divide the people, causing social fragmentation and intellectual confusion with postmodernist heresy that disrespects and ridicules real facts. Second, "the people" as a category can refer more specifically to "our people", to those who naturally belong to "our" nation—not, for instance, immigrants who come here and commit crimes or do not behave like "us" and instead naturally belong to another culture. Third, Canovan [28] discusses the appeal to "the common people" against the educated and privileged cultural elites. Appeals to the common people suggest that the (cultural and/or moral) elites do not live in the real world and have therefore lost contact with ordinary citizens' everyday concerns and worries.

Nevertheless, the decision made by the popular majority forms the basis for democratic governance. Canovan [26] (p. 251) argues that "it is the invocation of political myths of past foundation and future redemption that enables the ordinary people to assume, through common action, the role of 'popular sovereign'".

Typically, in far-right political ideologies, immigrants belong to the category of non-people. The insiders are discursively united and share a sense of basic solidarity in a bounded community of shared moral values and cultural codes. The threatening outsider could be foreign, in the non-national sense, but does not necessarily have to be; co-nationals and co-ethnics may also find themselves on the outside for espousing outsider values or behaviours [32] (p. 57).

Norms, values, myths, and memories of a shared past are invoked in contemporary anti-immigration claims of what, vertically, separates the people from the elite (anti-elitism) and what makes "our" people unique and distinct from the non-people, who are thus not a natural part of "us" and "our" national community (people-centrism).

Political actors ascribe significance to certain narratives of the past [38] (p. 4), of what makes "us" unique and can, thus, potentially enjoy a moralising capacity and serve an ideological function to pursue a particular political programme. The nation's history forms an important bond of loyalty between the native population and the state. The forms of commemoration have repercussions on how we view society and how we demarcate its extent—who belongs to "the people" and who does not. How anti-immigrations claims are articulated is embedded in symbolic regimes of national identity construction [39].

In the political rhetoric of the far right, narratives of what makes a given nation special often rely on the story of a golden age from which modern society has fallen and which needs to be restored [40]. As the scholar of nationalism Anthony D. Smith [41] (p. 42) famously put it, a golden age constitutes "a standard of heroism, glory and creativity, which subsequent ages fail to match". Invocations of such a past gain resonance in popular notions of belonging together in an earlier, more homogeneous (national) society.

The image of a golden age evokes a time when the nation was "at its best"—when it constituted a clearly delimited space of culturally similar individuals: a heartland. According to Taggart [42] (p. 95), the concept of the "heartland" signifies "the positive aspects of everyday life". It is an image of an ideal world that is constructed retrospectively—a vision derived from the past and projected onto the present [42]

(pp.95–98). The heartland signals a deep sense of community, of horizontal comradeship, among "the virtuous people". In this imaginary, the native people share proprietary rights to their land. This involves the belief in a deep and continuous past, and it reflects deep scepticism of—at times, outright opposition to—the extension of such rights to newcomers perceived as "unworthy" [8,43,44].

6. Method

To analyse how anti-immigration claims are conjured in conjunction with processes of national identity construction, I will here employ narrative analysis. According to Somers and Gibson, narratives are based on emplotment [45]. Out of an infinite and chaotic reality, certain events are selected and combined to make them meaningful: they become episodes in a plot. The individual narratives which emerge in the articles (as chronicles, as regular news, as book reviews, or as explicit opinion pieces) cling to societal changes, either inside the country (native other) or outside it (foreign other). The individual articles thus reveal how particular viewpoints tap into widely shared narratives [46] (p. 463), what I here refer to as master narratives.

In the analysis, I will first discuss elements of anti-elitism in the material, divided into grievances against a different type of elite. Second, I will turn to the concept of people-centrism, divided into the three different discursive appeals to the people as the united people, our people, and common people. Individual narratives of what constitutes anti-elitism and people-centrism (see Figure 1) cling to larger master narratives of what constitutes the nation in the past, in the present, and, by way of extrapolation, the future [47].

7. Material

During and since the refugee crisis of 2015, the Swedish media environment has grown more permissive towards the SD. Previously, anti-immigrant claims had been directly or indirectly associated with the SD, whereas the media environment after 2015 does not necessarily link anti-immigration claims to the SD [48]. Explicit anti-immigrations views had previously been limited to social media (e.g., Facebook groups and other internet outlets) or to the commentary field under the opinion pieces or news articles in the mainstream press. In the early 2020s, fractions of what were previously on the outside have increasingly become part of the mainstream, and thus the distinction between social and mainstream media does not, at least not always, hold, which is in line with what Mudde refers to as a shift from normal pathologies to pathological normalcy in the study of far-right parties [3,16].

Samtiden is a daily updated news site with a "socially conservative" profile, according to its self-definition. It is owned by the SD, and its articles are generally congruent (although not identical) with the party line. The first editions came out at the end of 2014. Since 2016, Dick Erixon has acted as the editor-in-chief, and *Samtiden*'s ambition has been to stimulate a conservative ideological debate [49].

The selection of articles for this paper is based on the search word "national identity" in the *Samtiden* database. This search resulted in 169 articles offering views on political topics in this newspaper in chronicles, op-eds, book reviews, and so forth. What gives this particular weight is that it provides a platform for disseminating the political messages of the SD political party, which in the recent national parliamentary elections in 2022 became the second largest party in the national parliament. Dick Erixon frequently appears on national TV and radio as a commentator on recent events. The newspaper *Samtiden* thus constitutes an arena in which anti-immigration claims are communicated from an intellectual angle and gives rise to particular stories of the nation, thus giving examples of how the SD worldview is articulated in articulatory practice.[6]

8. Analysis

8.1. Anti-Elitism

8.1.1. Political Elite

Whereas the old Social Democratic leaders from the past are depicted as heroes of the nation, the new Social Democratic leaders are considered traitors of the nation [50] (pp. 62–63). The old Social Democratic leaders understood the value of appreciating a common identity from below in society to prevent individual freedom from degenerating into pure egoism. According to the newspaper, the traditional mainstream right also recognised the benefits of acknowledging community feeling and not merely individual freedom.

In an editorial dated 21 November 2018 [51], Dick Erixon refers to the former leader of the liberal-conservative party Moderaterna, Gösta Bohman (party leader between 1970 and 1981), and concludes the following:

> [T]he national community is necessary for a welfare state that can provide basic security, especially for those who do not have their own resources as backup. Without nationalism, no tax revenue to the state. Without nationalism, no democracy where everyone has an equal voice.

According to this reasoning, the old party leaders from both the right and the left had understood and appreciated the need for culturally similar individuals to belong to separable national communities; however, contemporary Swedish political parties appear to have forgotten this, with SD as the only exception [52].

While the emphasis lies on the national, the elite (both national and foreign, in the form of prominent political actors, such as Hillary Clinton or Emmanuel Macron) are used as examples of political leaders outside Sweden who have diluted their promises to their electorates.

In several articles, the frustration is not merely oriented towards the state politicians but also against state bureaucracy. Leading politicians, but also state administrators, are accused of mismanaging the country. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, this leads to a perhaps paradoxical take, which accuses the state (both the state and its leading administration) of doing too little rather than doing too much [53].

8.1.2. Cultural Elite

In the development of the universal welfare state, social reforms such as day-care and parental leave were implemented and facilitated to allow more men and women to join the workforce. These socio-economic reforms also had repercussions on sociocultural values (such as individual rights and family values, gender equality, and attitudes towards gay marriage).

Today, not only the issue of what should be decided by whom but, in general, the confrontation between progressive and conservative values is much debated everywhere. This conflict cuts across traditional partisan cleavages and cannot easily be connected to either side of the political spectrum. This value confrontation also lies at the forefront of many discussions in the conservative milieu. In an editorial dated 28 July 2019 [54], Dick Erixon recounts some prevalent messages from a conservative conference held in Washington earlier in July 2019. When recounting the message communicated by Cristopher deMuth from the think tank American Enterprise Institute, Erixon is lyrical and makes references to contemporary Swedish politics:

> In Sweden, we see the same arrogant denial of natural restrictions in the migration policy pursued for decades. The ruling parties (from M to V)[7] have deliberately allowed hundreds of thousands of people from foreign civilisations to come to Sweden—without having a plan for housing, schools, healthcare, social care, or a police force that can handle people from significantly more violent cultures.

Progressive ideals stand against national ideals of belonging together in separable nations. The value conflict between conservatism and progressive ideals cut across Europe and is

thus an international conflict with repercussions on processes of national identity construction. This brings to mind Ignazi's article on the silent counter-revolution, which heralded the emergence of the new right in France following the advent of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France [55]. In line with this doctrine, which Ignazi referred to as cultural racism, SD does not presuppose that some groups are superior or inferior to others but holds the view that the cultural differences between the native population and the others (the non-people) are impermeable and incommensurable.

In this worldview, nationalism and social conservatism are pitted against globalism; popular wisdom stands against elite arrogance [52]. This international value conflict has also made it impossible for the SD to start collaborating with the Social Democratic Party since their rhetoric has been focused on identity politics and, thus, on the sociocultural value dimension, instead of focusing only on socio-economic issues between left and right.[8]

The argument goes that the traditional parties' refusal to see these problems clearly is a revolt against reality; thus, the governing parties erroneously ignore that Swedish society (as any national society) rests on homogeneity, not heterogeneity [57].

8.1.3. Moral Elite

Popular grievances toward the elite can also take moral terms. Within this logic, the elite have lofty ideas on what is good for the people; although the people have two feet firmly placed on the ground and know better, the elite nonetheless decide for the rest. The elite turn to far-fetched academic reasoning around, e.g., postmodernist ideas about intersectionality and identity politics, which, if anything, refutes racial beliefs to accentuate differences between people and destroy community feeling. Discussions around identity politics obscure rather than approach the structural injustices from which the real people suffer [58].

A common trope in the grievances against the moral elite is that they only use fancy academic lingo to appear politically correct, which goes against the lived experiences of the real people who have suffered from the negative consequences of, e.g., the experiments of multiculturalism in suburban areas [59]. This grievance against academic work is its use by the elite to challenge common sense.

8.1.4. Media Elite

The discussion about the media elite is attributed to those who, instead of telling the truth, resort to left-wing, liberal, progressive, and thus utopian views. Therefore, liberal ideas of freedom of speech become totalitarian, and those who do not think alike are eternally stigmatised [60].The logic follows that sceptics towards immigration are represented in the media as fools or Ku Klux Klan fanatics, irrespective of their legitimate concerns; their opinions are notoriously ridiculed by the mainstream media [61]. Ideally, the public service should provide a platform for disseminating the people's voices on national TV and radio, even if this voice is sometimes uncomfortable to hear. Instead, the public service communication platforms tend to stand in the servitude of the (social democratic) state.

8.1.5. EU Elite

In 1995, when Sweden became a member of the EU, the debate around national sovereignty versus international solidarity was high on the political agenda (i.e., what should be decided by the EU and not Sweden and so forth). However, during the period of scrutiny, the EU does not feature much. This aligns with SD priorities, which no longer argue for Sweden leaving the union but for fighting against the federal, supra-national tendencies within the union instead.

8.1.6. Economic Elite

Socio-economic concerns about unequal distribution do not play a major role in the collected material. Even if community feeling is often praised in the articles, it is not directed at a particular unhealthy rich economic elite. [9]

8.2. People-Centrism

To make sense of what constitutes the dividing line between the people and the non-people in far-right political discourse, I here embark on three distinct discursive appeals to the people, as outlined in the above section on theory, and what narratives are used in the empirical material to refer to the united people, our people, and, thirdly, the common people. In the subsequent analysis, I interpret how these appeals to the people as inherent in anti-immigration claims in the individual articles in *Samtiden* are connected to dominant storylines (master narratives) of national identity construction.

8.2.1. The United People

The building of the universal welfare state after the Second World War involved a series of social reforms to improve the living standard of regular citizens. Foreign workers were recruited to fill labour shortages in the growing industrial and service sectors. From the mid-1970s onwards, immigration to Sweden changed character and increasingly included refugee migration. This democratic transformation and the lack of political will to prevent this dramatic shift with, for instance, naïve official positive views on multiculturalism have led to fragmentation and the lack of necessary social cohesion to avoid societal unrest and popular frustration.

Hence, a frequently used storyline in the collected material is based on the view that the national people were united before. However, the national populace has now become fragmented, with deplorable consequences resulting in gang violence and feelings of personal alienation, and a lack of commitment to national belonging:

> The national process of dissolution that had resulted from the left-liberal immigration and refugee policy, which was also the explicit intention when the decision was made in the Riksdag in 1975 to transform Sweden into "a multilingual and multicultural society", must be reconsidered. The previously culturally rooted national unity in Sweden is destroyed, which has already had very severe consequences. [62]

The appeals to the people as "the united people", which stand against the disruptive effects of the policies by the "new" elites, were detrimental to the feelings of community and joint belonging, which has paved the way for a deplorable "us and them" division, which thus risks national unity and gives rise to parallel societies instead, according to an article [63]:

> Other parties (but the SD, my emphasis) advocate multiculturalism, in reality, an effective way to tear society apart if the experiment is pushed too far. Unfortunately, community and trust risk eroding even within the people in the majority society.

The appeals to the united people in anti-immigration claims thus connote the danger of a disproportionate focus on minority rights over the majority will, leading to severe consequences for the (native) majority population. For instance, in Malmö (the third largest city in Sweden), the political secretary from (SD), Nima Gholam Ali Pour, asks who is going to be integrated when the ethnic Swedes become a minority in their own country [59]:

> The parties that neglect this issue deny the importance of culture, language, values and national identity/.../It is not that those who arrive in Sweden dump their values from their home country at the Swedish border. The many problems we have in Sweden today, such as honour oppression, forced marriage, female genital

> mutilation, segregation, parallel societies, etc., show that many immigrants bring their values to Sweden, which affects society.

The message is that the others should assimilate to become like us. Otherwise, cultural homogeneity and "our way of doing things" will be jeopardised. People-centrism herein connotes perseverance of national values against the border-transgressing ventures and utopian progressive ideas of the cosmopolitan elites [64]:

> Only if the West regains its national feeling and again shows that it is proud of what our civilisation has created—and in fact: almost everything that humanity today benefits from was discovered, developed, and created in the West—can we meet the challenges of the destructive forces of totalitarian countries.

People-centrism here connotes cultural homogeneity and thus presupposes a need to maintain cultural similarity in the national populace to uphold trust in public institutions and confidence between people in the same national community. That immigration as such disrupts societal relations and thus brings about fragmentation was (returning to Mudde) quite standard among anti-immigration parties previously (in the 1990s or earlier) and is now applicable to all over the political spectrum [3].

Anti-immigration claims in far-right political discourse connect to a meta-narrative of the nation of united people, against both the native who has let in too many (non-)people too quickly and against the foreign elite, the globalists who repeatedly violate the principle of one people belonging to one separable national community. According to this argumentative logic, immigrants represent an economic threat, by getting in and stealing our money, and a cultural threat, threatening our way of doing things.

8.2.2. Our People

The SD stands as a bastion that works to restore national solidarity and to return society to the golden age for our people. According to *Samtiden*, it is the SD that the voters should turn to maintain national solidarity and to restore a national society of equal individuals with a common history [65].

The People's Home metaphor shares common attributes associated with the so-called Law of Jante, which connotes human virtues of conformity and knowing one's place.

> Humility is a virtue. Team spirit and collective endeavour have served our small nation well. We do not exalt ourselves in self-sufficiency. We try to agree and reach a consensus before confrontation and conflict. [66]

This way of reasoning suggests that the new People's Home Party in Swedish politics is the Sweden Democrats. On 1 May 2017, Labour Day, Erixon gave voice to this opinion in an editorial:

> On 1 May, traditional messages from the labour movement are brought to life. But they have no bearing on current politics, where they instead raise identity politics, "racialisation", and radical feminism instead of defending the working people's conditions. In Sweden, Per Albin Hansson built the people's home, a conservative political idea that was merged with social-political reformism. Social democracy abandoned the class struggle for consensus, and abandoned internationalism for a national perspective. [67]

Dick Erixon develops this idea: "Freedom without a national story leads to distrust, polarisation, and permanent political wars" [68].

In a review of Jimmie Åkesson's (party leader of the SD) book on the modern People's Home, Erixon explains that "the People's Home sets the frames for a society in a global world" [66]. According to Erixon, the Social Democratic Party, already back when Per-Albin Hansson led it, both maintained the ideals of Swedish society rooted in conservative ideals and deviated from these ideals in the acceptance and realisation of the experiments of racial biology and forced sterilisations (ibid.). Apart from these terrifying examples of departure from the original People's Home idea, the "old" Social Democrats nourished such ideals as

national virtues (i.e., humility, diligence, loyalty, and duty) that underpinned the necessary social reforms which the SD now seeks to implement.

The metaphor of the People's Home combines cultural conformism and social cohesion [10] (p. 94). The People's Home is a familiar concept that brings emotive appeals for "our people" (ibid. p. 95). Thus, the "of the" people as "our" people conveys a vision of a homogenous citizenry of Swedish society after the end of the Second World War but before refugee immigration and the adoption of multicultural policies from the 1970s and on.

The references to remembering an imagined homogenous past occasionally go even further back in Swedish history. Not long before the classic invocation of the people's home, Sweden had endured experiences of mass emigration [69].

In its early history, SD often referenced figures of key historical importance, usually equipped with bombastic rhetoric emphasising the uniqueness of our nation that provides a natural home for "our" people and fuses patriotic sentiments amongst the national people.[10] Nevertheless, also in the recent political rhetoric of this party, war-like rhetoric is made prevalent in far-right political discourse to protect the nation from unwanted newcomers, also today [70].

These references to the (distant) past in the articles in *Samtiden* serve a similar purpose of painting the recent past (Swedish society with hardly any refugee immigration) in bright colours, contrasting contemporary turmoil. In addition, these references to the past emphasise a common spiritual foundation that forms the basis of the transformation of Swedish society into a veritable People's Home [8,10,17]. The ideals of cultural conformism show a historical continuity, with roots that go back to the nation's past; hence, the articles show that successful policy reforms' spiritual foundation has distinctively national heritage-based, anti-immigration claims in the material, thus knitting together our people to a natural home (the nation). According to basic democratic principles, each depends on a common demos and therefore does not cover the whole of humanity, the cosmos [71]. The dominant storyline herein is that we (the natives) naturally belong to the national *demos*, whereas the immigrants do not.

8.2.3. The Common People

The collective identity of being Swedish is anchored in a long Swedish national tradition; thus, newcomers (who do not share our memories of common roots) cannot easily acquire it. According to this logic, the common people unite in a common Christian cultural tradition but do not have to practice their Christian beliefs. This is the Swedish way, but the values and how those values should be implemented associated with Swedishness cannot be taught as abstract principles but must be experienced daily.

In a chronicle, it was articulated that the majority population, thus the common people, have had to suffer the negative consequences of careless immigration politics that have failed to listen to the legitimate worries of the common people [72]:

> This society may "function" in its own way, but it is clearly something different from what most people had imagined or hoped for ten years ago, with female genital mutilation, honour suppression, self-appointed moral police, and an abysmal misunderstanding between large social groups. Moreover, in many places, increasing rates of serious crime.

The appeals to the common people in far-right political discourse adhere to ideas of them as innocent victims of current socio-demographic transformation of no fault of their own. The dominant storyline herein is that we are normal, while they are extreme.

9. Conclusions

The analysis embarked from a discursive-performative approach to studying populism as a communicative strategy in articulatory practice. My analysis has shown how the populist divide is articulated in far-right political discourse in Sweden. Two dimensions of the populist divide are relevant here: the vertical dimension refers to articulated differences between the (common) people and the established elites (anti-elitism). The horizontal

dimension refers to articulated differences between "the people", who belong here, and "the non-people" (the Other), who do not, which reveals particular stories of the nation (people-centrism).

The material is based on 169 articles published during 2016–2022 (in the direct aftermath of the refugee reception crisis of 2015 and up to the most recent national parliamentary elections in Sweden in 2022), held in the socially conservative online newspaper *Samtiden* on the topic of national identity. To make sense of the anti-immigration claims articulated in the individual articles, I have conducted a narrative analysis, connecting individual narratives in the individual articles to master narratives (dominant storylines) to imagine one homogenous nation against both the native and the foreign other.

In the analysis, anti-elitism is sub-categorised into different kinds of elites. The mobilisation against the political elite concerned the mainstream right and the mainstream left. At this point, the reader might be reminded of the point made above [3,42] about the context dependency on which elite/s against which the political actors (in my case, proponents of the far-right political discourse in *Samtiden*) are rallying. According to my material, then, the old Social Democratic leaders understood the value of appreciating a common identity from below in society to prevent individual freedom from degenerating into pure egoism. This view does not only allude to the old social democratic elite but also to the politics of the old mainstream right. The anti-elitism in the articles is critical not only to contemporary politicians but also to the contemporary state bureaucracy that allows the implementation of foreign values and ideas.

Not surprisingly, this criticism against the political elite chiefly concerns the native elite, but in some articles individual politicians representing the foreign elite are mentioned as well; hence, Hillary Clinton before Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, or President Emmanuel Macron in France.

The discussion about the criticism of the cultural elite in far-right political discourse connotes an international value conflict between conservatism and globalism, from which the native elite have naïvely chosen the latter, according to the articles. Abstract, utopian principles of international solidarity stand against national belonging inside particular nation-states. The latter reflects the popular will of the majority, while the former triggers a sense of homelessness, according to the articles.

The moral elite use politically correct language to look down on the people on the ground and decide what is good for them over their heads, leaving them to suffer from the many negative consequences of immigration and the failure of integration politics, according to the articles.

The media elite connect to those at the top, accused of disseminating fake news and hiding the real truth from the readers more often than not, at least according to the argumentative logic in the articles. They refrain from showing the real picture and constantly fail to distinguish between news and views, thus the media fails to live up to the basic journalistic virtues of impartiality. According to this argumentative logic, this aligns with the whole public service media industry, populated by people with apparent left-wing, liberal, normative beliefs.

Grievances against the elite, at least in the collected material after Brexit, translate into few articles oriented towards the EU elite. Instead, the criticism is held in more general terms against supra-nationalisation. Theoretically, much of the criticism could be raised against the neo-liberalisation of the EU as a political project. Nevertheless, the discussion around anti-immigration claims is generally framed in cultural terms rather than in terms of immigration as an economic threat. This perhaps also alludes to the relative absence of grievances against the economic elite in my collected material; however, more studies need to come to similar conclusions before I can confidently state these conclusions. Based on the collected material in this article, what can be said is that socio-economic injustices are clad in a socio-cultural coat.

In analysing people-centrism, following Canovan [28], I embark on a tripartition between three discursive appeals to the people, as the united people, our people, and

the *common* people. Discursive appeals to the united people presuppose that the popular majority of the native Swedes share a joint past and a common culture. National cohesion is needed to distribute resources evenly among the nation's population. The master narrative envisaged here connotes that each nation presupposes a homogenous citizenry with full loyalty to only one nation-state and is thus not divided between conflicting loyalties.

The discursive appeals to our people in the collected material remind the reader that each people, naturally, belongs to one nation. Democracy, as a system of governance, refers to a particular demos to which not everyone can belong. The People's Home makes the connection between our people, our nation, and our state clear. Chronologically, the period immediately after the Second World War constitutes the golden age of national identity and the period in the history books associated with the label People's Home as a political metaphor to allude to this period in Swedish history. [11] The discursive appeals to our people thus suggest that we naturally belong here, whereas the others, the immigrants, do not.

The discursive appeals to the common people in anti-immigration claims emphasise that the national populace breeds a natural strength based on real-life experiences. The discursive appeals to the common people herein suggest that we are normal, whereas the others are diluted by extremism.

The results show that populism can be used as an analytical category (as anti-elitism and people-centrism) to bring forward knowledge of the articulatory practice and processes of national identity construction in far-right political discourse by asking the questions of which people are mobilised against which elite.

The results of the analysis indicate that far-right populist discourse conveys nostalgia for a golden age and a cohesive and homogenous collective national identity, combining ideals of cultural conformism and socio-economic fairness against the fragmentary political agenda of different elites, spelling out a message that everything was better before.

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Notes

1 What Ignazi labelled as the "silent counter-revolution", which he associated with the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen and *la nouvelle droite* (the new right) in France in the early 1970s. Bale and Kaltwasser provide further elaboration on the silent counter-revolution and the various manifestations of both reactions and counter-reactions to this in different countries [4].

2 The advent of the fourth wave follows from the eruption of three crises from which the far-right parties, electorally, have profited [3] (p. 20). These are, according to Mudde, the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the Great Recession of 2008, and the reception refugee crisis of 2015.

3 Similar studies have shown a similar development in Romania and Hungary, where appeals of national identity merge with chauvinistic welfare appeals [8]. (See in particular chapter 4 by Radu Cinpoes and Ov Cristian Norocel in this book).

4 See further Brubaker and Cooper [30] for an elaboration of this distinction in relation to the concept of "identity" in social science.

5 For a critical discussion on so-called populist ideational attitudes in populist communication, see further [33].

6 The views on national identity are not strictly limited to editorials or chronicles, but can also appear in other sections as well, as for instance in the genre of news articles (see the analysis). All the quotes in the analysis have been translated from Swedish to English by the author.

7 M stand for Moderaterna (the governing mainstream right party), while V (Vänsterpartiet) stands for the left party.

8 The incorporation of the socio-cultural value dimension has been accounted for in the so-called Gal-tan scale [16]. The growing attraction of so-called socio-cultural issues in European politics has been referred to as a socio-cultural shift [56].

[9] This is interesting in its own right; however, I refrain from drawing too strong of a conclusion based on this rather limited sample and can thus reveal more about the selection of articles; thus, it does not necessarily correspond to the totality of voices in the far-right political environment during the selected time frame.

[10] One such key figure in Swedish history writing is Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, a nobleman and miner in the province of Dalarna who mobilised peasants and mineworkers in his home area, which spread throughout the country. The rebellion has been seen as a Swedish awakening, a symbol of claims for national sovereignty [10] (p. 63).

[11] People´s Home has, historically, been used by the Social Democratic Party to realizing and administrating social reforms, what we today associate with the building of the universal welfare state [73].

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