SOCIAL POLICY AS A PROMISE OF ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY: FROM HISTORICAL MYTHS TO POPULIST FANTASIES IN DENMARK AND POLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

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The main purpose of this thesis is to account for the growing transformation of the welfare state into a moral and exclusionary entity across diverse European countries in the context of recent demographic pressures posed by globalization, immigration and depopulation. In this connection, this thesis offers a novel theoretical link between social policy and ontological security in which the narrative performativity of right-wing populism is central in understanding the legitimization of exclusionary policy turns across different welfare regimes. Through the cases of Denmark and Poland, as representative of dissimilar historical trajectories, ontological security regimes and welfare traditions, it is argued that right-wing populist actors in both countries have instrumentalized social policy as an instrument of 'reassurance' by promising 'anxious' subjects potentially powerful mechanisms of identification and differentiation at times of uncertainty. In explaining this theoretical link, this study foregrounds the role of 'affective temporality' as a powerful narrative element that can enhance the emotional and ontological appeal of populist social policy discourses. Accordingly, by proposing Lacanian psychoanalytic contributions to the relationship between populism and ontological security, it is argued that populist social policy narratives frequently draw on historically-rooted insecurities, emotions, myths, desires and fantasies in legitimization of policy changes. In particular, it has been argued that populist actors frequently link the past, present and future into a simplified, emotionally charged, desire-infused fantasmatic narratives about the national welfare, thereby promising 'anxious' subjects stronger degree of ontological security. This study therefore argues that such storytelling, which draw on a historical and fantasmatic temporality, is an important populist discursive strategy for understanding the legitimization of exclusionary/moralistic social populist policy transformations in Denmark and Poland across the wider political spectrum. This research is based on critical narrative analysis of social policy texts, written or spoken, produced by right-wing populist actors in Demark and Poland under the demographic pressures posed by globalization between 2008-2022.

ÖZETÇE

ONTOLOJİK GÜVENLİK VAADİ OLARAK SOSYAL POLİTİKA: DANİMARKA VE POLONYA'DA TARİHSEL MİTLERDEN POPÜLİST FANTEZİLERE

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Bu tezin temel amacı, küreselleşme, göç ve nüfus azalmasının yarattığı güncel demografik baskılar bağlamında, refah devletinin günümüz Avrupa'sında giderek ahlaki ve dışlayıcı bir varlığa dönüşmesini açıklamaktır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez sosyal politika ve ontolojik güvenlik arasında yeni bir teorik bağlantı önerirken; sağ popülizmin anlatı performansını, bu dışlayıcı dönüşümün meşrulaşmasını anlamakta merkezi konuma oturtmaktadır. Bu çalışma farklı tarihsel arka plan, ontolojik güvenlik ve refah rejimlerini temsil eden Danimarka ve Polonya örnekleri üzerinden; her iki ülkede de sağ popülist aktörlerin, 'endişeli' öznelere belirsizlik zamanlarında potansiyel olarak güçlü özdeşleşme ve farklılaşma mekanizmaları vaat ederek, sosyal politikayı bir 'güvence' aracı olarak araçsallaştırdıklarını savunmaktadır. Bu teorik ilişkiyi açıklarken, bu çalışma, popülist sosyal politika söylemlerinin duygusal ve ontolojik çekiciliğini geniş siyasi yelpazede artırabilecek, güçlü bir anlatı unsuru olan 'duygusal zamansallığı' (affective temporality) öne çıkartmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, popülizm-ontolojik güvenlik ilişkisine Lacancı psikanalitik bir bakış açısı önererek; sosyal politika değişikliklerinin meşrulaştırılmasında popülist aktörlerin sıklıkla tarihsel olarak kök salmış güvensizliklerden, duygulardan, mitlerden, arzulardan ve fantezilerden yararlandığını savunmaktadır. Özellikle, popülist politika aktörlerinin geçmiş, bugün ve gelecek arasında sıklıkla bağlantı kurarak ulusal refah hakkında basitleştirilmiş, duygu yüklü ve arzu uyandıran fantazmatik anlatılar sundukları ve böylece 'endişeli' öznelere daha güçlü bir ontolojik güvenlik anlatısı vaat ettikleri ileri sürülmüştür. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, tarihsel ve fantazmatik bir zamansallığa dayanan bu tür hikâye anlatımlarının, Danimarka ve Polonya'daki dışlayıcı/ahlakçı sosyal popülist politika dönüşümlerinin daha geniş bir siyasi yelpazede meşrulaşmasını anlamak için önemli bir popülist söylemsel strateji olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu tez araştırması, 2008-2022 yılları arasında küreselleşmenin yarattığı demografik baskılar ışığında Danimarka ve Polonya'daki sağ popülist aktörler tarafından üretilen yazılı veya sözlü sosyal politika metinlerinin eleştirel anlatı analizine dayanmaktadır.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEECs	Central and Eastern European Countries
CDS	Critical Discourse Studies
DF	Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party)
DHA	Discourse Historical Approach
EU	European Union
IR	International Relations
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or questioning
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NB	Nye Borgerlige (New Right)
NPF	Narrative Policy Framework
OECD	Organization and Economic and Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OS	Ontological Security
OSS	Ontological Security Scholarship
PIS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party)
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party)
PO	Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
V	Venstre (Liberal Party of Denmark)
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Social policy has undergone a noticeable shift in the global context of contemporary rise of right-wing populism in the recent decades- ranging from the established Western democratic welfare states in the US, the UK and Denmark to the 'new authoritarian' hybrid welfare settings such as Poland, Hungary, India or Turkey. In contrast to earlier wave of populism emerging in the 2000s which generally favors a minimal/neoliberal welfare state, the recent literature suggests that the populist radical-right wing parties have almost exceptionally shifted towards a pro-welfare redistributive policy agenda (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Otjes et al.; 2018 Röth et al., 2018; Pingerra, 2020; Chueri, 2022; Fischer, 2020). However, the emergent pro-welfare social platforms have not been of a universalist and rights-based character, instead, we have witnessed consolidation of an increasingly exclusionary and moralistic welfare agendas, radically expanding for the 'deserving' and retrenching for the 'undeserving' groups (Chueri, 2022). This new redistributive logic, thus, reproduces existing patterns of exclusion and moral hierarchies between the members of the welfare community along the lines of race, ethnicity, religion gender, age, disability, and among many others (Fischer, 2020). In this sense, the emergent right-wing populist welfare paradigm deserves a renewed scholarly attention as it poses significant challenges for the prospect of the rights-based and universal social citizenship. By extending the scope of welfare chauvinism, which in essence is primarily concerned with welfare differentiation between the native population and the immigrants (or ethnic/religious minorities), the emergent populist welfare logic inscribes morally-defined notions of welfare deservingness across complex intersectionalities of identities ranging from ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality to religion or political affiliation.

Most notably, there has been a growing normalization of exclusionary redistributive visions in a vast number of European welfare states with mainstream conservative-right

and left-wing parties increasingly accommodating this exclusionary and moralistic redistributive modus operandi to broaden their electoral base. Denmark is often considered as a front-runner in this regard since the early 2000s. With the Danish People's Party becoming ever more influential since the early 2000s, the universal welfare state has seen itself radically becoming an exclusionary, punitive and assimilationist sphere for non-Western immigrants, while expanding for the 'deserving', such as the native working class and elderly. Similar developments have also been observed in other universal Nordic welfare settings such as Sweden, with new right-wing government intensifying efforts at retrenching welfare for the 'undeserving' immigrants accompanied by increased use of surveillance and social control (Pelling, 2022), while expanding for the 'deserving' native pensioners (Chueri, 2023).

On the other hand, in conservative familalistic welfare regimes such as Hungary, Poland or Italy, right-wing populist governments have more recently popularized seemingly universal pro-natalist family policy frameworks underpinned by Catholicism, heteronormativity and pro-family culture. By radically redistributing welfare resources towards several 'deserving' groups such as the white, native, traditional, Catholic, heteronormative, large families, such policies have reshaped social citizenship along gendered, religious and patriarchal lines. Most notably, in cases like Poland, the generous family benefits have enjoyed broad popularity in public, even forcing their mainstream liberal opponents to accommodate such policy frameworks in their election programmes (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2021:13). On the other hand, in such regimes, 'undeserving' groups such the non-normative women, family configurations, sexual minorities, the unemployed or the Roma community have seen their social and civil rights significantly diminished (Stubbs and Lendvai-Baiton, 2020). More recently, we have also witnessed a policy convergence around a hardline workfare and austerity policy agenda in cases like Italy and Austria targeting the long-term unemployed, while simultaneously expanding universal welfare for the 'hard-working' (Chueri, 2022; Squires, 2022).

In the light of this trend, the main research questions of this study are the following: *What are the common characteristics of communicative strategies employed by populist right in different types of welfare states? Why and how do these communicative strategies enjoy wider emotive appeal and resonance in mainstream policy debates?*

It has been well established in the literature that social policy has become a salient issue area for the right-wing populist politics especially in the post-crisis European welfare states shaken by economic shocks, transnational immigration and long-term demographic challenges (Afonso, 2015; Careja et al., 2016; Schumacher & Van Kersbergen, 2016; Afonso & Rennwald, 2018). In particular, the Great Recession of 2008, the Eurozone crisis of 2010 and the European migration ‘‘crisis’’ of 2015 spurred a fundamental interest in the right-wing populist parties’ social agendas, while mainstream parties have also increased their appeals to social concerns in counteract the increasing popularity of the populist right (Krause and Giebler, 2020). However, although these studies provide valuable insight into the potential economic, cultural or demographic underpinnings of the resurgent populist social policy platforms, we still know very little about how exactly populist actors are able to translate these global or structural impulses into nationally-resonant social policy emergencies.

In explaining this, this study first builds on the under-emphasized dimension of narratives in the domain of social policy making, arguing that right-wing populist actors are also ‘‘persuasive storytellers’’ (Taş, 2022; 128) around the issues of social welfare by (re)articulating the meanings of social norms, national solidarity, community and the desired nature of distribution in the imagined welfare community. When exploring the links between populism and social policy, narratives do matter as populism is mainly a discursive style in which ‘storytelling performativity’ plays a central role (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). While few works to date (see Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018) have recognized the discursive agency of populism in the domain of social policy by often foregrounding its anti-elitist, Manichean features in appealing to ‘the people’, further research is needed to understand how populist narratives are able to stimulate people’s emotions and affects towards certain social policy positions, and garner widespread approval in public and mainstream politics. Although the existing literature has well explored the ideological content of right-wing populists’ welfare agendas as shaped by conservatism, nativism, racism, authoritarianism, populism or neoliberalism in diverse welfare settings (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018; Fischer, 2020; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020; Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton, 2020; Putzel, 2020), these studies say relatively little about how these broad ideas are reinterpreted, operationalized and made meaningful to diverse audiences in different county and policy contexts (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021). Thus, by going

beyond the abstractness of content-based approaches which only tell limited part of the populist welfare governance, this study offers an alternative conceptualization of populism as a specific narrative pattern to uncover the emotive and ontological workings of policy social policy storytelling. Consequently, to understand the growing resilience of contemporary populist platforms across diverse welfare regimes, this study aims to contribute to the exploration of populism as a specific narrative pattern which is heavily reliant on activation of emotions, affects and desires in justification of policy reforms.

In understanding how populist narratives reshape existing welfare contracts in Europe, this study offers a novel theoretical link between social policy and ontological security, arguing that social policy has increasingly become a political instrument of 'reassurance' in the hands of the right-wing populist actors. Although the existing accounts on social policy and populism well recognize the exclusionary, authoritarian or regressive uses of social policy in the post-2008 context (Fischer, 2020; Putzel, 2020; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020; Kiely, 2020), an ontological security approach has yet to be analyzed in relation to populist social policy designs. Namely, despite the great deal of interest in the field in developing a politicized conception of contemporary populist social policy, the scholarship lacks an understanding of social policy as a broader populist instrument for controlling-anxiety, mobilizing emotions and multiple ontological insecurities in modern societies.

In a similar vein, ontological security scholarship has also made substantial scientific contributions to the study of populism (Kinnvall, 2018; 2019; Browning 2016; 2019; Subotic; 2016; Steele & Homolar, 2019; Agius et al.2021; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022). Such studies have explored how populist actors instrumentalize certain narratives, emotions, routines or memory in governing several domestic, regional or global-level policy issues in response to increased feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. However, despite this scholarly interest, there is a lack of theoretical and empirical insight into how populist leaders or parties stimulate emotions and feelings of ontological (in) security via the communication/design of social and welfare policies. In order to fill this gap and to account for the global rise of exclusionary populist welfare platforms, this study brings together the literatures of social policy, populism and ontological security- by offering the first systematic theorization and analysis of social policy from the analytical lens of ontological security. Accordingly, it is argued that by giving or taking

rights, articulating social norms, order or behaviors, populist welfare narratives have increasingly become a terrain for (re)building collective identity, while promising 'anxious' subjects potentially powerful mechanisms of identification and differentiation in the face of perceived distributional and identity crises. An ontological security approach to social policy-populism nexus, thus, not only helps exploring the mobilizing dynamics of populist social policy governance, but also provides analytical tools to understand their wider resonance across diverse populace and political spectrum. In this connection, by foregrounding the insufficiently recognized role of emotions and affects in the domain of social policy making, an ontological security approach also allows us to uncover how and why subjects are particularly drawn towards certain policy narratives over others.

In explaining the proposed theoretical link between social policy and ontological security, this work offers a novel conceptualization of historical temporality by arguing that populist narratives are oftentimes grounded in an affective temporal template, which increase their emotive appeal in policy legitimatization process. Although the existing populism literature well recognizes nostalgia and collective memory as central to populist discourse (Manucci 2020; 2022, Riedel, 2022; Taggart, 2000; Akkerman et al., 2016; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Elçi, 2022; Wodak and Forchtner, 2014), they are rarely used as an analytical lens in social policy literature. Few studies to date have investigated the use of historical narratives and myths vis-à-vis the welfare state, in particular through the populist frame of 'welfare nostalgia' (Fenger, 2018; Scheurs; 2021). However, beyond the nostalgia-centered approaches which narrowly focus on the instrumentalization of the idealized past, there is a lack of theoretical understanding about how populist actors instrumentalize temporality in justification of welfare reforms. To fill this gap and offer a more holistic conceptualization of temporality in populist discourse and policy legitimation, this study draws on Lacanian psychoanalytical contributions to the study of populism (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008; Stavrakakis, 2007) and ontological security (Kinnvall, 2018; Eberle, 2019; Vieira, 2018; Browning, 2019). Lacanian psycho-analytical tools such as *fantasy*, *object of desire* and *enjoyment* enable us to explore the often-overlooked unconscious means through which populist narratives appeal to 'the people' and hegemonize common sense. In particular, the Lacanian fantasy, revolving around the coexistence of horrific and beatific imaginations, serves as a temporally-informed emotional repertoire, providing subjects with an imagined path about who they

were in the past, what to expect in the future as well as who to blame for the present. In this connection, this holistic conceptualization of temporality also transcends the nostalgia-centered historical approaches to populism and social policy, and instead stresses that populist actors do not only resort to an idealized past in justification of welfare reforms, but constantly conflate the visions of past, present and future into a highly-simplified, emotionally-loaded, desire-infused fantasmatic narrative. As such, by combining Lacanian fantasy with a historical lens, this study develops its own methodological framework based on the interaction between populist storytelling and the process of legitimation. Building on the analytical tools of Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) as well as advancing the previous literature on mythopoetic legitimation (legitimation through history) (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Bennett, 2022; Forchtner and Özvatan 2022), this study argues that 'fantasmatic mythopoesis' is a powerful strategy of populist policy legitimation in the domain of welfare, especially providing affective energy to policy discussions in times of heightened uncertainty.

In this sense, by often invoking temporally-resonant signifiers of identity in the face of recent distributional and normative challenges posed by globalization, populist actors able to construct newer crises and emergencies around social problems that resonate broader sections of the society, by going beyond their immediate electoral base. In response to the augmented sense of emergency, the proposed policy action is narrated as a promise of ontological fullness. Namely, by drawing on this temporal template grounded in both history and unconscious affective drives, it is argued that populist politics creates its own demand and supply for an 'alarmist' at the same time 'reassuring' social policy agenda, thereby, functions as a powerful socio-psychological instrument for (re)shaping collective identities, desired forms of peoplehood, community and belonging in the existing ontological security regimes.

In summary, the key arguments of this thesis are: Populist social policy narratives are commonly structured around a fantasmatic-historical narrative template containing memory, myths, desires and antagonistic emotions when articulating complex social policy issues. Accordingly, it is argued that alongside its anti-elitist, anti-establishment and Manichean articulatory features, (fantasmatic-historical) temporality plays a pivotal role in social policy legitimation, which is often under-emphasized in the relevant

literature. Secondly, it is argued, when structured temporally along historical myths and fantasies that enjoys deep symbolic resonance within a wide heterogeneous audience, social policy narratives tend to offer a stronger degree of ontological and emotional closure in times of heightened uncertainty and insecurity. By linking imagined national past with the crisis-driven present as well as oppositional futures, such narratives promise autobiographical continuity and fuller identity, while stimulating desire and powerful emotions such as loss, shame or pride, resulting in wider emotive appeal and resonance in the mainstream policy debates.

In this context, through the proposed theoretical framework between ontological security and social policy, I aim to explore the psycho-linguistic agency of right-wing populism which has pioneered exceptional welfare transformations in the cases of Denmark and Poland. Accordingly, while in Denmark, the main inquiry is to account for how one of the most inclusionary welfare states in the world has created a context for the flourishment of exclusionary welfare politics, in the case of Poland, the main puzzle would be how and why Poland as one of the historical laggards in social and family policy, has radically moved towards an explicitly familial welfare regime. As such, through these theory-developing case studies, this study offers a novel theoretical framework for understanding the ongoing welfare state transformations in Denmark and Poland from the perspective of ontological security. As such, it is argued that despite dissimilar historical trajectories, ontological security regimes and welfare traditions, electorally successful right-wing populist parties in both countries have recently had significant implications on the shape of the welfare state by fueling national projects that propagate discriminatory, exclusionary and moralistic notions of welfare deservingness. Albeit with differing ideological glues (i.e., nationalism/ethnicity in Denmark and family/gender in Poland), social policy has been used as a powerful socio-psychological tool for political actors in both countries to resurrect national identity as well as refashion social order.

In this connection, this thesis is organized as follows: *Chapter 2* will present the literature review and theoretical framework. This chapter is divided into three sections by analyzing the extant literature along three nexuses: (i) the social policy-populism nexus (ii) the populism-ontological security nexus, and finally (iii) the social policy-ontological security nexus. Accordingly, the first nexus between (i) social policy-populism offers builds on a politicized conception of social policy to understand the ongoing exclusionary

and moralistic transformation of European welfare states. As such, it is argued that rather than a technical/rational policy area as it is conventionally understood, social policy is increasingly becoming a purposive/political instrument for populist actors to advance their populist projects. In what follows, the first nexus also establishes that social policy literature may greatly benefit from the narrative research, which is under-emphasized in the existing social policy research. Arguing that narratives are also important political-strategic argumentative tools for populist actors in policy legitimation, it is argued that narrative research could provide fruitful analytical advantages over traditional ideational social policy literature, helping researchers to uncover emotional or ideational motivations that may not be expressed explicitly in the policy designs. Concurring with Lacanian psychoanalytical contributions to populism, this nexus also advances the view that populism should be conceptualized as an emotionally-loaded, fantasmatic, temporal narrative pattern. Thereby, this nexus suggests foregrounding the often-neglected dimensions of populist narrativity in the domain of social policy, which is the affective regulation of temporality, including instrumentalization of history, traumas, memory, myths as well as the unconscious desires, fantasies and emotions.

In a similar vein, in the second nexus between (ii) populism-ontological security, it is argued that populism research can greatly benefit from Lacanian-inspired ontological security approach, which offers a more systematized analytical exploration into psycho-linguistic appeal of populist discourse, including the unconscious registers underpinning populist messaging. Furthermore, by treating ontological security and anxiety as multi-final, flexible and dynamic concepts in line with the recent scholarly debates, it is argued that a Lacanian-inspired OS approach would offer a better understanding of the emotive workings of contemporary populism. Finally, the last nexus (iii) between social policy-ontological security presents the proposed research gap in understanding the recent transformation of the European welfare states and outlines the main theoretical/conceptual contribution of the thesis. As such, it is argued that social policy has increasingly become a promise of ontological security in the hands of the right-wing populism. In explaining this, this section offers a Lacanian ontological-security reading of social policy narratives, which has yet to be developed in the existing literature. By often drawing on a historical-fantasmatic narrative template, it is suggested that populist social policy has increasingly become an affective and fantasmatic space for perpetuating

exclusionary populist projects, thereby sustaining or reshaping existing ontological security regimes.

Following the literature review, *Chapter 3* will present the research design and methodology to be followed in this thesis. First, the theory-developing case study approach will be introduced as the most appropriate method for the purpose of this study, given the highly puzzling nature of the policy shifts as well as the inadequacy of existing accounts to fully capture the complexity of the investigated phenomenon. Secondly, *Chapter* 3 also offers a detailed justification for the selection of Denmark and Poland as theory-developing cases. Inspired by most-different case selection design which allows researcher to identify similar patterns in dissimilar contexts; it is argued that the cases of Denmark and Poland exhibit dissimilarity in historical trajectory, evolution of ontological security regimes as well as welfare legacies, while exhibiting similarity in the presence of an electorally successful populist right as well as experiencing exceptional welfare state transformations in the recent years. As such, it is argued that despite dissimilar historical ad welfare trajectories, Denmark (an established, universal welfare regime) and Poland (an emerging, post-communist welfare regime), electorally successful right-wing populist parties in both cases (Danish People's Party (DF) in Denmark and Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland) have significantly facilitated adoption of exclusionary and moralistic welfare agendas whereby certain groups of people are excluded from the imagined welfare community.

Thirdly, *Chapter 3* outlines the methodological framework. By integrating the under-explored role of narratives within the conceptual architecture of Discourse-Historical approach (DHA), this study develops its own methodological perspective to explore the psycho-linguistic agency of populism in social policy legitimation. As such, this study builds on the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) which offers a more systematized narrative inquiry with its separate conceptualization of narrative elements such as *plot, characters* and *policy moral* in policy legitimation. In this sense, inspired by the NPF framework for policy analysis as well as guidelines for conducting DHA with its focus on the historical dimension of discourse formation and the context-dependent nuances of argumentation and legitimation, I develop range of analytical criteria to be looked for in empirical texts to uncover how ontological security is sought through social policy narratives. Finally, this section also offers a country-specific data collection by

prioritizing country-specific political communication culture; thereby, incorporates several different genres such as public speech acts, party programmes, parliamentary debates, party blogs or online interviews and so forth.

In what follows, the *Chapter 4* will present the first empirical chapter of this study. Accordingly, the first case study investigates the puzzling welfare state transformation of Denmark over the recent decades, by asking how and why one of the most inclusive welfare states in the world has radically moved towards an exclusionary and discriminatory welfare agenda. Arguing that anti-immigrant Danish right-wing populism has been the primary locomotive behind this transformation, this study suggests exploring the narrative workings of Danish populism, which is under-emphasized in the existing literature. Drawing on Lacanian ontological security approach and historical lens, the main argument of this study is that Danish populist narrativity around social welfare is particularly informed by invocation of Danish myths of distinctiveness, historical narratives of the welfare society as well as fantasies of Danish progressivity and national homogeneity. This heavy reliance on historical-fantasmatic template in social policy discussions, is argued to be a crucial discursive strategy explaining the recent exclusionary transformation of the Danish welfare state, and its wider resonance in the mainstream policy debates.

This chapter is divided into two sections: The first section offers a historical reading of Danish ontological security by focusing on key traumatic junctures, myths and identity narratives that have been developing since the late 18th century. Having established this historical background, the upcoming section will empirically analyze how these historically-resonant signifiers are recontextualized in the context of changing social, political and economic landscape under the recent crises of globalization between 2008 and 2022, including the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the so-called migration 'crisis' of 2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic. These external shocks are conceptualized as critical junctures that severely affected European politics and the shape/conceptions of the welfare state and social citizenship in Europe (Wodak, 2018, Schumacher & van Kersbergen, 2016; Otjes et al. 2018; Breve, 2019).

In this connection, a three-staged periodization is offered to understand the transformation of the Danish welfare state under the recent crises of globalization. As such, (i) the first

period covers the years between 2008-2015 in which the non-Western immigrants have increasingly become narrated as the 'undeserving', non-contributing, passive *Others* under the propagated 'welfare state of emergency'. The empirical investigation reveals that under this specific post-crisis uncertainty and anxiety, DF's policy storytelling commonly invokes nationally-resonant temporal anchors such as the mythical welfare society, *folk* peoplehood accompanied with fantasies of national solidarity and reciprocity to redraw the boundaries of belonging and deservingness. (ii) The second period covers the years between 2015-2019 which primarily marked by the post-2015 refugee 'panic' and the subsequent adoption of discriminatory and authoritarian anti-immigrant welfare agenda. Shaped under this emotive context, the empirical investigation of social policy narratives exposes a remarkable shift towards symbolic and cultural *Otherness* of the immigrant subjectivities in contrast to earlier period. In doing this, the analysis also reveals that policy actors frequently draw on historically-resonant anchors such as the myths of the welfare society, *hyggelig* Denmark or the collective memory of the WWII to justify the culturally/symbolically assimilationist an exclusionary policy measures as the only way for the survival of the nation. Finally, (iii) the third period investigates the radical transformation of the Danish welfare state into a punitive and authoritarian entity during the years 2019-2022 under the influences of the Danish 'paradigm shift' in immigration in 2019 and the Covid-19 Pandemic. Under this context, the policy speeches reveal that policy actors, including the mainstream politicians, commonly legitimize the discriminatory policy instruments through instrumentalizing various historical anchors such as the narratives on welfare nationhood, *folk* citizenry, the myth of *Samfundssind* to further moralize the boundaries of national belonging and welfare citizenship.

Chapter 5 presents the second empirical study of this thesis, which offers an in-depth exploration of Poland's recent welfare state transformation under the right-wing populist Law and Justice Party. As similar to Danish case, Poland's welfare transformation is argued to be substantial shift in the global context of transformation of the welfare state. Accordingly, the main research puzzle of this study is to account for how and why Poland, as one of the historical 'laggards' in social and family policy (Szelewa, 2014:33), has radically moved towards a pro-social, familial welfare regime since 2015 under the populist PiS, and how to account for the broad popularity of the pro-family instruments such as the 500+ Plus? Similar to Danish case, this study also offers a discourse-analytical perspective to understand the agency of Polish right-wing populism in the domain of

social welfare. It is argued that despite the seemingly universal character of the policy turn, Polish right has particularly instrumentalize social policy to advance its illiberal political regime. Similar to Danish case, this empirical investigation adopts a historically-informed, Lacanian inspired ontological approach, arguing that the instrumentalization of historical (fantasmatic) temporality has played a pivotal role in legitimation of the popular family policy reforms.

In a similar vein, this empirical chapter offers a three-staged empirical analysis of Polish family policy development between the years 2008-2022 under the dislocatory effects of globalization. Accordingly, the first stage covers the years between 2008-2015 which marked the transitory period from an implicit to explicit familalism under the influence of global financial crisis as well as the Poland's evolving 'war on gender'. At this stage, PiS' policy narratives heavily build on a temporally-informed emotional template, particularly facilitating a moral antagonism between the Polish recent post-communist past and the imagined future based on pro-social and pro-family projections. (ii) The second period covering the years 2015-2019 marked a transformative familial shift in Polish social policy with PiS coming to government in 2015. Performing an interrelated crisis of immigration and gender, PiS' family policy is mainly proposed as a restoration of 'long-awaited' dignity of family and motherhood during this period. Informed by several historical and religious myths as well as the fantasmatic construction of the 'Old versus New Poland', PiS' post-2015 policy narratives are particularly structured around an affective temporality. (iii) Finally, the third period, from 2019 to 2022 is particularly marked by intense election cycles as well as the heightened demographic anxieties posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Shaped under this emotive context, the post-2019 policy discourse directly addresses that a pro-family welfare state would be the best defense against the 'moral threats' posed by gender, feminism and sexual minorities. Also, by reinvoking oppositional futures between the 'Old' and 'New' imaginations of Poland, the post-2019 familal policy regime is justified as the only way to 'return to normality' as well as a guarantee of a 'dignified future.'

Finally, conclusion (*Chapter 6)* will outline the main theoretical premises and empirical findings from the Danish and Polish cases. In what follows, I will summarize the expected contributions of this study to the distinct, yet interrelated literatures of social policy,

populism and ontological security, followed by limitations of the research and avenues for future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter intends to bridge the literatures of social policy, populism and ontological security to offer a new theoretical perspective to understand the recent exclusionary policy shifts in European welfare states and their growing resonance in the mainstream policy agendas. Connecting these three literatures provides insights into understanding the communicative agency of right-wing populism in the context of global resurgence of exclusionary and moralistic welfare agendas. As elaborated in the introduction in more detail, this chapter is divided into three sections along the (i) social policy-populism nexus (ii) populism-ontological security nexus, and finally the (iii) social policy-ontological security nexus as the proposed theoretical gap.

2.1 Social Policy-Populism Nexus

2.1.1 Expanding the Boundaries of Social Policy: Towards a Politicized Approach

The origins of social policy and the welfare state are found in insecurities of employment and income inherent in the capitalist modern states. Accordingly, social policy is conventionally defined as the institutionalized practices and mechanisms adopted by governments to enhance the well-being of citizens and provide protection for all who might experience economic and social hardship (Baldock et al, 2003). In this connection, narrowly understood, social policies are ‘‘institutionalized responses to social and economic problems, ranging from insecurity to inequality and poverty’’ (Beland, 2010: 9), covering mostly the ‘classical’ areas including ‘social protection benefits (social security), healthcare, education, housing provision, subsidies as well as personal social services (Baldock et al, 2003). In a similar vein, by building on Briggs’ (1961) classical definition of welfare states, Seelkopf and Starke (2019) define social policy as follows:

> The deliberate use of organized power (through politics and administration) in an effort to shape market processes and modify outcomes of market forces to (a) guarantee a minimum income, to

> (b) provide an insurance against life contingencies such as unemployment or illness for (c) all citizens without distinction of status (Seelkopf and Starke, 2019: 2).

Overall, these approaches constitute the conventional comparative welfare state research over the last 30 years, which has focused on a relatively narrow set of policies and actors, offering analyses primarily based on public social insurance and state-provided social services in the OECD countries of the Global North following the post-second world war years (Seelkopf and Starke, 2019). Besides, according to this conventional understanding, the purpose of social policy is generally acknowledged progressively, based on the idea of equality of individuals, aiming to improve the well-being and social inclusion of all people irrespective of status through formal or informal means of welfare provision (Kotkas & Veitch, 2017). In addition to its progressive and inclusive understanding, the conventional conceptualization of social policy has also narrowly focused on traditional forms of social protection and redistribution. However, this narrow focus on the traditional public welfare state programs has already been challenged by alternative approaches aiming to contribute to the contemporary discussions around the need to redefine the nature, scope and reach of social policy in modern societies (Beland, 2019). Thus, it can be argued that the conventional literature offers a simplistic view of social policy, treating it as a broadly technical and rational policy area oriented towards maximizing efficiency in policy implementation (Midgley and Livermore, 2009: 12).

In an attempt to offer a more holistic account of social policy, a more recent research agenda called as the ‘‘unconventional social policy’’ or ‘‘social policy by other means’’ has expanded the traditional welfare state accounts by focusing on the multiple arrays states regulate welfare in complex modern societies (Dorlach, 2019; Beland, 2019; Seelkopf and Starke, 2019). Various studies in this line of research incorporated areas such as immigration, taxation, business, agriculture or energy into the domain of social policy, and investigated how states could also regulate and produce welfare other than traditional social policy tools such as national healthcare, education services or unemployment benefits (Seelkopf and Starke, 2019). Regulation of migration has been one of areas where the recent literature has more recently expanded the traditional welfare accounts (Afonso, 2018; Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018). Focusing on the functional interaction between social policy and immigration, existing studies problematize how social policies are instrumentalized by policy actors to regulate and control immigration through direct or indirect means (Ataç, 2019; Ataç and Rosenberger, 2018). For instance,

it has been argued that through abolishing, limiting or conditioning welfare benefits and services, social policy tools may also be used as a mechanism of migration control by policy actors to govern 'unwanted' populations such as irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers in modern societies (Ataç, 2019).

Similarly, by going beyond its conventional progressive understanding, Midgley and Livermore (2009: 12), highlight the 'hidden' nature of social policy, which may intentionally or unintentionally influence the well-being of some groups in the society. Namely, it has been recognized that social policy agendas may also include 'hidden' or unstated goals to decrease the welfare of a particular community such as through direct or indirect exclusion of non-citizens from the welfare benefits. Another example concerning the hidden objectives of social policy includes the implementation of family policy. As such, it has been argued especially in socially conservative welfare states, policy tools such as direct family cash benefits may target hidden policy objectives other than income support such as decreasing women employment and promoting reproductive role of women (Midgley and Livermore, 2009). Accordingly, various previous studies have recognized this 'dual' nature of social policy and institutions, arguing that other than redistributive goals, social policies may play a central role in categorization and regulation of populations directly or indirectly across wide range of intersectionalities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender or religion etc. (Midgley and Livermore, 2009; Lewis 2000; Keskinen et al. 2009). However, although these strands of literature have expanded traditional welfare state accounts by addressing the functional interaction between social policy and other fields, or by recognizing multiple ways governments may use social policy to achieve a variety of unstated social and political objectives, the political dimension of social policy have not been sufficiently emphasized. Similarly, although the previous literatures recognize that social policy can be substitute to other policy goals through more indirect and hidden ways such as controlling migration, its proactive and purposive uses are generally overlooked in the existing social policy literature (Fischer, 2020).

Particularly, the global rise of right-wing populism has provided a renewed impetus to problematize the instrumental uses of social policy, and how such uses can possibly serve to success of populist governments and movements. In this sense, by going beyond the existing approaches which narrowly recognizes its political context, this study offers a

reconsideration of social policy as a purposive political instrument in the hands of the contemporary right-wing populist actors to (re)build collective identities and refashion social order across multiple intersectionalities of race, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or gender, among many others. In this context, criticizing the traditional social policy accounts which are largely cast in progressive and technical terms without a political insight, a more recent research agenda (Fischer, 2020; Buğra; 2020; Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton, 2020) introduces a more politicized conception of social policy. Fischer (2020), for instance, recognizes the regressive or authoritarian uses of social policy, which he names as the ‘‘dark side of social policy’’ and states:

> The point is that social policy is inherently political as it fundamentally deals with the articulation and actualization of social norms and entitlements, and with social ordering, legibility and discipline, and it has different effects when deployed by groups with different agendas. In this sense, it is used by both the Left and the Right for these functions, although of course it is used differently, with different objectives, and guided by different ideological visions about moral social order (Fischer; 2020: 8).

This strand of literature is particularly useful for the purpose of this study as it mainly problematizes the instrumentalization of social policy by the authoritarian, nationalist and populist governments across diverse welfare regimes, arguing that social policy has particularly become a new space for populist governance. Accordingly, by going beyond its conventional, progressive and technical conceptualizations which fails to recognize its purposive uses, this strand of literature recognizes its proactive and instrumental uses. Yet, despite this recognition, this study also aims to advance this politicized conception by incorporating its broader emotional and ontological workings in reshaping collective identities, which has yet to be developed in the social policy literature. Having established this, the next section will introduce the role of narratives in social policy research as central political/strategic tools to frame, contest and legitimize policy problems and chosen policy solutions.

2.1.2 Narratives and Social Policy

In contrast to accounts focusing on the role of material interests which narrowly deal with the electoral interests or the role of political institutions that excessively centered on the notion of path dependence, an increasing number of scholars including the institutionalist perspectives have recognized the role of ideational factors as central to origins of policy process (Blyth, 2002; Campbell 2004; Beland 2009; 2010; 2020; Taylor and Gooby,

2005). With respect to welfare state literature, interest-based and institutional approaches provide only a narrow understanding of welfare state development due to its lack of emphasis on the role of ideological motivations behind the policy choices (Beland, 2019; 2020). While ideational tools such as cultural frames, ideas, discursive frames (see Blyth, 2002; Campbell 2004; Beland 2009; Taylor and Gooby, 2005; Béland & Mahon, 2016) are regularly adopted to the study of social policy and the welfare state, narrative research has received less attention (but see e.g. Blyth, 2013; Needham, 2011; Bevir and Needham, 2017).

This study intends to fill this gap by contributing to the growing literature studying the role of narratives in welfare state research (see Greve, 2020, Blum, 2019; Beland, 2019; Blum and Kuhlman, 2019; Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018) arguing that narratives are of particular importance for understanding the motivational and ideational factors behind the social policy designs. As famously developed by Stone (2012) through her seminal book *Policy Paradox*, narratives are highly-simplified version of reality mostly involving a specific sequence of events, temporality, characters and a causal connection (Stone, 2012; Blum and Kuhlmann, 2019). In particular, Stone underscores that narratives often follow a certain structure including a certain aspect of change, characters such as 'heroes', 'villains' or 'victims' in conjunction with a moral aspect about how the world should be (Stone, 2012, 158). Therefore, narratives are increasingly acknowledged as central argumentative tools for policy makers to appeal to their audience and legitimize policy choices (Jones and McBeth, 2010). In this sense, narratives are of particular importance for social policy making especially in accounting for how social problems are constructed and linked with specific problems, groups of people, policy choices as well as under which conditions. Accordingly, the focus on policy narratives enable social policy scholars to focus on complex intersectionalities of policy design such as institutions, ideas, policy legacies and actors.

Narratives are also political-strategic tools, through which the policy actors seek to successfully frame the problem in a way to legitimize their policy solutions in an acceptable manner. Accordingly, the success of a social policy reform is often rooted in the discursive capacity of policy actors to frame the social policy necessity in a compelling and persuasive way (Blum and Kuhlmann, 2019). Another crucial aspect of social policy narrative is the ''social construction of target populations'' (Schneider &

Ingram, 1993 cited in Blum and Kuhlman, 2019: 345) around who should be entitled to social rights, who should not and who to blame for the existing problems. Given that social rights are at the center of social policy, it regularly involves the distinction of 'us' versus 'them' along multiple deservingness criteria in policy designs, which results in positive or negative constructions of group identities in the society.

The emerging research agenda studying narratives in the realm of social policy has focused on diverse policy fields such as pension, family, labor market as well as child and elderly care policies (Beland, 2019; Hagelund and Grødem, 2019; Blum, 2019) in both established and emerging welfare states. For instance, under the specific post-2008 austerity context, Van Gerven (2019) has investigated deservingness constructions of the elderly in the health care policy in China (Van Gerven; 2019), while Bandelow and Hornung (2019) have studied narrative constructions of the labor market 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in French and German labor market reforms. The evidence from developing scholarship on narratives and social policy provides powerful insights for advancing a politicized conception of social policy, especially its purposive and instrumental uses by the contemporary populist actors. As such, the emerging scholarship on social policy and narratives establishes that social policy is a highly contested political area where the policy actors often compete for the most ''compelling story'' (Kuhlman and Blum, 2021) to sell their policy solutions to their target audience. In this connection, these accounts all approach social policy as more than a rational and technical issue area (Blum and Kuhlmann, 2019: 352), but more of a politically salient policy area over constructing the most appealing problem and solution to the target audiences.

In particular, as compellingly put by Stone (2012), narratives are more important strategically in the face of ambiguity and heightened uncertainty such. In this sense, narrative stories are powerful argumentative tools in times of crisis settings, simplifying the complex policy context into 'black/white' policy solutions imbued with highly simplified and often antagonistic constructions of deservingness. Narratives, in this sense, help individuals to translate the complexity of the social world into something manageable by offering a selectively appropriated events, characters and temporality. Seen in this light, narratives have a key cognitive and affective function in times of critical situations, enabling individuals to cultivate a sense of coherence and continuity, by not only articulating the meanings of the past and present events, but also linking them into

an idealized future (Nordensvard and Ketola 2022; Cianciara, 2022). In addition, taking social policy as strategically and politically important, this line of literature also captures the growing centrality of 'constructed targeted populations' in the contemporary welfare reforms. Narrative analysis in social policy making, thus, is particularly productive to recognize the centrality of identity constructions in the contemporary populist welfare designs across the notions of belonging and deservingness.

Given their highly specific and simplified structure, the growing body of social policy research has also highlighted the analytical advantages of narratives over other forms of ideational tools such as ideas and policy paradigms (Blum and Kuhlman, 2019; Kuhlman and Blum 2021; Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018). Accordingly, by transcending the traditional focus of ideational social policy literature which is mostly centered around broad and abstract policy ideas and paradigms such as 'social investment' or 'neoliberal/austerity' paradigms, narratives offer a more contextual and systematized analytical inquiry into the social policy research (Blum and Kuhlman, 2019: 342). These ideational concepts are, rather, often criticized for being highly abstract and ambiguous which can be interpreted and implemented differently across different settings (Blum and Kuhlman, 2019: 342). On the other hand, given their highly specific and simplified form of articulating policy problems and solutions, narratives are easier to measure the reform-underlying motivations and strategic discursive preferences of narrators which inform specific policy choices over the alternatives. In this connection, narrative research in the realm of social policy enables researcher to uncover emotional or ideational motivations that may not be expressed explicitly in the policy designs.

However, despite the growing body of research on narratives and social policy, the narrative aspect of populist social policy making is still under-emphasized. In this sense, we still know very few about the nuances of populist narrativity in social policy reform, and how in particular, some social policy narratives are emotionally and politically more appealing than alternatives. Accordingly, in the light of the recent scholarly discussions around populism, the next section will elaborate on the conceptualization of populism as a specific form of affective and fantasmatic narrative pattern.

2.1.3 Populism as an Affective/Fantasmatic Narrative Pattern

Populism has been subject to various definitions and formulations in the academic literature based on wide array of empirical and theoretical observations, although it has long been put forward as a self- evident concept by scholars who attempted to develop a unitary theoretical substance from various empirical observations. Despite such attempts, the study of populism has remained highly time and context dependent being historically heterogenous in its content, instruments, patterns of mobilization, rhetorical repertoire and policy tools. This paved the way for diverse conceptualizations ranging from understanding of populism as political strategy (Weyland, 2001; 2017) ideology (Mudde, 2004; 2007), a style or repertoire (Wodak, 2015; Moffit, 2016), a frame (Aslanidis 2016) discourse (Laclau, 2005) or 'heartland' (Taggart, 2000). However, despite this conceptual complexity, growing number of scholars have recognized the fundamental dialectic between the 'elites' and 'people' as the common unifying essence of populism (Mudde, 2004; 2007, Canovan, 2002; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). As defined by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017):

> Populism is a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic cams 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volante generale (general will) of the people (Mudde and Cristobal, 2017: 559).

As different from a full-fledged ideology such as liberalism or socialism, the 'thin-centered ideology' concept built on the work of Freeden (1996) is used to denote that populism does not provide any interpretative framework for range of socio-political questions, but, is often combined with stable host-ideologies. This ideological vagueness is commonly argued to be a key explanatory factor in accounting for why it is found across distinct ideological cleavages, for instance, while the right-wing exclusionary versions of populism rooted in nativism proposes a narrow understanding of "the pure people" based on ethnic demarcations, the left-wing inclusionary variant of populism rooted in socialism often embraces a socio-economic conception of the 'the true people' as against the 'neoliberal elite'(Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). Then, regardless of the ideological position, populism is commonly defined as a specific vision of society divided into two homogenous groups free of pre-given ideological assumptions. According to Schumacher and Kersbergen (2016):

> The heart of populism concerns the conflict between, on the one hand, the mythical, homogenous and unified common people and, on the other hand, an enemy that consists of a divisive political, economic and cultural elite, to which very often a dangerous and threatening 'other' is added. The

> content of a populist party's programme thus depends on who is identified as the elite or the establishment, to what extent a dangerous 'other' is specified and which already existing values and ideas are embraced (Schumacher and Kersbergen, 2016: 302).

Drawing on this 'common minimal core' of populism, which does not have a 'universally adoptable strategy', the ideational literature commonly addresses its flexibility and adaptability to various cultural contexts However, despite its merits in signifying the centrality of 'elite/people antagonism', the ideational (ideological) literature is also commonly rooted in one-sided assumption overlooking the discursive nuances of populism beyond the 'people/elite' dichotomy in social construction of reality.

Perhaps, the most sophisticated treatment of populism in this direction is found in Ernesto Laclau's theoretical elaboration. For Laclau (2005), the symbolic distinction between the 'us' versus 'them' is more of an instance of relational 'empty signifiers' (Arditi, 2010), meaning that it can take various forms in different social contexts, gaining meaning through a process of 'identification' in which the specific social groups are constructed as 'the people' (Us) against 'the others' (Them) in diverse settings (Laclau, 2005; 2012). As such, Laclau's populist ontology is broadly interested in how collective identities are formed through discourse in the context of ''power struggles for socio-political hegemony'' (Ungureanu and Popartan, 2020: 40). Although some see this approach rather 'unstable' as compared to ideational perspective, the novelty in this approach has to do with treating populism as a universal logic of formation of antagonistic collective identities independently of the political ideology accompanying the populist articulation. From this perspective, it can be argued that Laclau's populist ontology promises a timely corrective to the ideological assumptions as he emphasizes the centrality of discursive mechanisms populism is built upon in constituting collective identities.

By going beyond the 'substance versus form' debate and mutually-exclusive conceptualizations of populism, a recent line of research offers a more integrative and flexible elaborations of populism based on facilitating dialogue between populism's universal/rhetorical articulatory logic (Laclau, 2005) as well as its 'minimal core' defined by its 'thin-centeredness' (Mudde, 2004). In facilitating this integrative perspective, some works have offered correctives to Laclau's populist logic. For instance, Ungureanu and Popartan (2020) argue that Laclau's rhetorical treatment ''turns populism into an ahistorical and catch-all concept'' (Ungureanu and Popartan, 2020: 40), while

overlooking emotive dynamics, affects or temporality at play in populist articulatory logic (Ungureanu and Popartan, 2020; Palestrino, 2022; Salter, 2016).

A dominant criticism towards Laclau's populist ontology is the insufficient recognition of role of emotions and affects in populist articulatory logic in construction of *Us* and *Them* (Salter, 2016; Palestrino, 2022). As such, various works have offered a Lacanian psychoanalytical corrective to Laclau's work on populism, foregrounding the role of unconscious affective drives, desires and fantasies underpinning the efficacy of populist articulatory logic (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008; Stavrakakis, 2007). These studies commonly build on Lacanian concepts of fantasy, desire and *enjoyment (jouissance)* in understanding populist articulation of the 'people' and the 'other'. Grounded in the Lacanian notion of *subjectivity* who is defined by an eternal ontological *lack,* these studies have emphasized the role of *desires* and *fantasies* articulated by populist actors to cover the subjects' perceived ontological incompleteness. Fantasies, in this sense, are commonly regarded as a particular narrative frame that stimulates desire towards completing the inner ontological lack, which drive subjects towards certain 'empty signifiers' such as 'the people' or nation upon which this sense of completion is built. More importantly, fantasies direct subjects' sense of lack towards certain *Others,* who are often depicted as enemies stealing or threatening the imagined wholeness.

Furthermore, drawing on Lacanian conceptual tools, *desire* is defined by Stavrakakis as an ''element that keeps everything going…animated by the quest for a lacking/impossible fullness, around the promise of encountering *jouissance*'' (Stavrakakis, 2007 cited in Palestrino, 2022: 231). For Lacanian theorist Stavrakakis (2007), the enjoyment refers to a lost, 'mythical' unity or fullness which constantly drives subjects' desire for reaching an imaginary wholeness, a sense of ontological completeness. This ontological interplay between the *lack, desire, fantasy and enjoyment,* according to Lacanian approaches to populism, provides powerful affective corrective to Laclau's discursive theoretical approach, besides, they also extend populism literature by providing additional analytical tools to trace unconscious emotive dynamics underpinning the appeal of populist discourse. Most notably, these studies provide further theoretical and analytical insight to account for why some discourses are more appealing and emotionally seductive than others (Solomon, 2015; Palestrino, 2022). As such, Lacanian approach calls for greater attention to consider the politics of desire and fantasy inherent in contemporary populist

politics, which mostly consider populism as an *emotionally-loaded, fantasmatic narrative pattern* constantly playing on the subjects' 'inherent anxiety' and the 'desire for an imaginary fullness'.

2.1.4 Populism, Social Policy and Affective Temporality

The politics of desire and fantasy, then, also connects to another psychoanalytical corrective to Laclau's populist rhetorical logic, which is the incorporation of temporality as an additional affective signifier of populist construction of social reality and collective identities. Populism literature has also long studied the prominent role of collective memory, and in particular, nostalgia (Manucci 2022, Riedel, 2022; Taggart, 2000; Akkerman et al., 2016; Inglehart and Norris, 2016, Wodak and Forchtner, 2014; Elçi, 2022) in the political discourse of the right-wing populist parties. Likewise, these studies have commonly converged on the observation that populist discourse is often rooted in nostalgic descriptions of the past, a mythical past moral order invoking a lost sense of national greatness (Kotwas and Kubik, 2022; Aydın-Düzgit, Rumellili and Topal, 2022). Although the nostalgia-centered approaches tell only part of the populist story, they still inform significant aspect of the affective workings of populist narratives. As such, it is argued that the emotive power of temporality is stronger if it is supported by historical references to collective memory, nostalgia, myths, traumatic or glorious historical events, that are to some extent resonant with the subjects' collective historical consciousness. The instrumentalization of these nationally-resonant historical anchors are argued to underpin the success and appeal of populist storytelling performativity.

Similarly, some studies working in the social policy-populism domain have also recognized 'welfare nostalgia' as a central discursive framework employed by populist actors in relation to welfare. Accordingly, welfare nostalgia refers to a populist frame used to invoke a sense of ''lost golden age of welfare capitalism'' (Scheurs, 2021: 129) defined by generous welfare assistance ''for those who worked hard and needed it'' (Scheurs, 2021: 130). However, despite capturing some aspect of populist use of temporality in social policy discourses, this analytical lens would be of more representative of the established welfare states in the Northern and Western European context where a lost sense of 'golden age' would stimulate wider resonance, while failing to account for social policy narratives deployed in the emerging welfare state contexts.

Secondly, the existing nostalgia and memory-centered approaches tell only limited part of the populist instrumentalization of temporality. In this connection, rather than focusing on the use of past, more recent studies have emphasized the necessity of addressing a more general and holistic use of temporality in populist discourse, such as the affective construction of the 'the people' with reference to binary visions of the past and future (Palestrino, 2022) or the ''chronopolitics'' of populism linking the ''mythical pasts, crisis-driven presents and utopian futures'' (Taş, 2022: 128). Namely, other than merely focusing on the use of nostalgic or mythical past, such studies have offered a broader conceptualization of populist temporality involving the articulation and often linking of the past, present and the future within the populist narratives. As argued by Taş (2022), populist narratives mostly project the nation as a ''unique entity moving forward from the mythical world of the past to a crisis-driven present, which will lead to either a utopian or apocalyptic future'' (Taş, 2022: 140).

In this connection, this study aims to advance this recent strand of research on populism which recognizes its broader temporal component. As such, concurring with the literature recognizing the central role of narratives in populist communication (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2022; Freistein and Gadinger, 2020; Taş, 2022) as well as drawing insights from the Lacanian psychoanalytical contributions to the study of populism (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2004; Stavrakakis, 2007) this study seeks foregrounds the role of affective temporality as an under-emphasized dimension of populist narrativity. Accordingly, it is argued that populist narratives are heavily informed by affective construction of time, which is not only invoked through historical/nostalgic narratives or myths, but also through unconscious desires, emotions, affects and fantasies. In this way, I aim to offer a more holistic conceptualization of temporality and use of history in populist sense-making including often neglected unconscious desires, emotions and fictional/fantasmatic narratives. Namely, it is suggested through this study that other than merely resorting to an idealized distant past, right-wing populist storytelling around the welfare constantly conflates the visions of past, present and future order into an emotionally-loaded fantasmatic narrative about the imagined nation's survival. In doing so, this study advances the argument that history can also be reactivated through antagonistic emotions, fantasized ideals, desires and imageries, other than collective memory and nostalgia.

In conclusion, in the light of this proposed holistic approach towards the populist use of history and fantasy in policy legitimation, this study treats populism as form of an affective/fantasmatic narrative pattern or a ‘‘storytelling performance’’, as put forward by Nordensvard and Ketola (2021:861). As such, by transcending the traditional populism debate between the ‘ideology versus discourse’, this study treat populism as form of an affective, antagonistic narrative pattern following a peculiar sequencing of events often involving; (i) moral antagonism between the homogenous groups (good vs corrupt/bad or heroes vs villains), (ii) glorification of the popular will (iii) simplification of social reality into black/white choices as well as (iv) affective regulation of temporality involving both historical memory, trauma, myths as well as unconscious desires, fantasies, emotions and imageries. In this way, through a Lacanian centered narrative perspective, this study aims to uncover the often-overlooked psycho-linguistic means populist actors appeal to ‘the people’, alter established norms, shape collective identities and generate support in the wider public.

2.2 Ontological Security-Populism Nexus

2.2.1 Ontological (In) Security and Populist Reassurance

Ontological security, which is originally conceptualized by psychologist R.D Laing and further developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to an inner feeling of security and completeness produced by a sense of confidence or trust in the continuity and predictability of one’s place in the world (Giddens 1990). Drawing on Laing’s (1960) psychiatric account developed in his seminal work *The Divided Self*, the ontologically secure person is defined as someone who has a stable and unquestioned sense of identity, autonomy as well as who enjoys an inner ‘‘consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth’’ in her identity and reality (Laing, 1960:41). In contrast, ontologically insecure person is the one who lacks this stable sense of identity and autonomy, putting her sense and agency into a perpetual existential anxiety and dissonance (Laing, 1960:49).

Departing from Laing’s individual-psychiatric analysis, Anthony Giddens (1991) offers a sociological interpretation of ontological security. By primarily focusing on the relationship between late modernity and human condition, Giddens (1991) scales the ontological security theory from individual to societal level and emphasizes the centrality of intersubjectivity in one’s stable sense of self-identity (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017;

Kinnvall, 2018). According to Giddens (1991), ontological security is rooted in a ‘‘basic trust’’, which is developed in early childhood through established routines and habits, which in return, enable individuals to continue their everyday life (Giddens, 1991: 35). In this sense, originally defined, ontological security relies on a stable ‘sense of being’ informed by a constant psychological need to seek stability and predictability in one’s social and material environment (Ejdus, 2020) as well as seek confidence in one’s existential position in her social world (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2005; Kinnvall, 2017; 2018).

In this connection, apart from psychological challenges of the *Self*, Giddens (1984; 1991) sought the understand the individual in a vibrant social setting in which she has to cope with the chaos of the everyday life. As he argues, under the increased pace of dynamism, change and unpredictability brought with modernity, human life is constantly overwhelmed by existential anxiety. Anxiety is different from fear as it lacks a definite object that can be avoided or challenged (Giddens, 1991: 43-44), rather is conceptualized as a generalized emotion or inner individual feeling caused by uncertainty of the future. Individuals, thus, need to seek routinized behaviors and practices to cope with the ontology-unsettling conditions of modernity driven by constant impulses of uncertainty and change (Giddens, 1984;1991). It is argued, thus, in the face of chaotic world of modernity individuals need to reestablish sense of certainty, confidence and trust in everyday life. Confronted with such destabilizing critical situations, narratives and routines appear as the most important coping mechanisms to reaffirm sense of continuity and reassert one’s place in the social world in relation to other (Giddens, 1984;1991).

Giddens’ conceptual assumptions between the routines and anxiety have also more recently inspired the IR scholars to underscore the role of ontological security, rather than physical security in understanding state behavior (Kinnvall, 2004; 2007; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). Accordingly, by recognizing the role of routine and identity-centered motivations, these studies put forward that states, like individuals, are also driven by a desire towards upholding ontological security in stipulating actions and choice in international relations (Steele, 2008; Mitzen, 2006). Accordingly, IR scholars have analyzed several psychological mechanisms states engage with to maintain ontological security in times of critical/crisis situations that disrupt the ordinary routines and trust systems (Ejdus, 2018). It has been, thus argued, in such critical situations, states may

pursue security through routinized behaviors (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2019), retelling narratives (Steele, 2005; 2008; Subotic, 2016; Hansen, 2016; Eberle and Handl, 2018), emotions (van Rythoven, 2016), seeking status (Zarakol, 2011) seeking friendships (Berenskoeter, 2007),past memories/traumas (Kinnvall 2004; 2016; Subotic, 2016) or de/securitization of *Others* (Browning and Joenniemi 2013), among many. In this way, IR's engagement with ontological security literature have expanded our understanding of state behavior and security, including the analysis of foreign policy choices where states seemingly engage with ''self-harming'' behaviors (Klose, 2019: 854) at the expense of physical security (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Zarakol, 2010; Rumelili, 2015a; Browning, 2018).

Similarly, ontological security scholarship has also made substantial scientific contributions to the study of populism, especially its right-wing variant (Kinnvall, 2018; Browning 2016; 2019; Subotic; 2016; Steele & Homolar, 2019; Rumelili and Uzunoglu, 2022). Especially, the heightened sense of insecurity and uncertainty brought by neoliberal globalization have called broader attention to explore the ontological and emotional workings of right-wing populist politics at the level of individual, groups and societies (Kinnvall, 2018; Steele & Homolar, 2019: 215). OSS' theoretical focus on anxiety, insecurity and crises have proven to be particularly useful for understanding the rise of current wave of populism in relation to the effects of globalization such as increased economic insecurity, threats of terrorism, crime, mass immigration or demographic transformations (Kinnvall, 2018: 3). Accordingly, scholars have identified several ontological-security seeking means populist agents engage to transform anxiety into reassurance such as by upholding routinized narratives (Kinnvall, 2004; Mälksoo, 2015; 2016; Homolar and Scholz, 2016; Moffit, 2014; 2016), reproducing past memory (Subotic, 2016) or by invoking nationalism, religion or gender as stable sources of identity (Kinnvall, 2018). Similarly, this early line of literature has also commonly identified 'securitization of subjectivity' as a central mechanism for tackling ontological insecurity. In this sense, populists' Manichean understanding of *Us* versus *Them* has provoked a particular productive engagement with ontological security literature to untangle the ways populist actors translate anxiety into identifiable objects of threat in the face of multiple distributional and normative challenges posed by globalization.

However, the more recent scholarship on ontological security has approached the relationship between anxiety and reassurance from an alternative angle. Accordingly, rather than always strictly adhering stability and self-affirming routines, some studies have also argued that actors, including states or individuals may seek ontological security through a contradictory or seemingly ontology-unsettling ways to avoid feelings of anxiety (Browning and Jorenniemi, 2016; Cash, 2020; Rumelili, 2015a; Rumelili and Çelik, 2017). In contrast to an understanding of ontological security as stability of identity, such approaches adopt a more flexible and reflexive perspective to *Self* (Browning and Jorenniemi, 2016: 7) who would have range of available options when faced with existential anxiety, including mild discursive shifts or radical behavioral changes. This line of research commonly criticizes conflation of ontological security with identity as leading to 'status-quo' bias or normalization of securitization of identity (Browning and Jorenniemi, 2016; Mälksoo, 2015, Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017; 2020).

This criticism brings added value to understand the dynamic and flexible workings of ontological security-seeking strategies both at the level of state interactions as well as domestic policy making. Drawing on this line of research, this dissertation also treats anxiety as a 'multi-final' concept (Rumelili, 2020; Krickel-Choi, 2022:7) in understanding multiple ways right-wing populist actors seek ontological security at times of heightened anxiety. By going beyond taken-for granted assumptions around actors' handling of anxiety, this approach also invites broader consideration of emotional dynamics at play in guiding ontological security behavior, when exposed to anxiety. For instance, several studies have argued that subjects may also be driven by diverse emotional considerations such as maintaining self-esteem, status, pride, agency, recognition or upholding sense of exceptionalism and thereby, adopt seemingly contradictory identity-changes when faced with anxiety (Browning and Jorenniemi, 2016; Browning, 2021; Chernobrov, 2016). For instance, some studies, treat shame as a strong emotion that can be facilitated by anxiety and can shape the ontological security behavior in diverse ways (Steele, 2005; Zarakol, 2011; Youde, 2014; Browning, 2021; Browning and Joenniemi 2015). Basically, these studies share the assumption that as long as states and individuals ''maintain a positive view of the self'' (Krickel-Choi, 2022:9), behavioral and identity changes would not contradict with the perceived *Self,* hence, facilitate anxiety.

Despite not being at the center of the theoretical debates of this study, this aspect is also well exemplified in the discussions around Denmark's exclusionary welfare transformation. Concurring with Browning's (2021) investigation of Nordic ''good-state'' brand, I have also encountered multiple discursive ways political actors legitimize exclusionary policies in a way to reaffirm multiple positive emotions such as distinctiveness and superiority, even if the policies directly challenges the Danish self-proclaimed humanitarian identity. By drawing inspiration from these works, this study also treats ontological security as a dynamic process in the empirical investigation of the right-wing populist narratives in Denmark and Poland. By providing a promising corrective to the anxiety-biased literature, this line of literature, as argued, better captures the multiplicity of emotions that may guide actors' ontological security behavior at times of anxiety. I believe that this dynamic and flexible interpretation of ontological security also advances the theoretical link between crisis, populism and ontological security, shedding light on the multiple ways populist actors repackage emotions of anxiety, guilt, shame or pride in a way to boost ontologically security of the majority subjects at times of heightened uncertainty. Hence, this approach particularly contributes to the populism-OS nexus, where populism is increasingly recognized as an excessively emotionally-loaded, antagonistic narrative pattern in governing the anxiety-induced conditions of neoliberal globalization (Kinnvall, 2018).

Finally, in a way to understand the appeal of populist social policy narrativity from the perspective of ontological security, this study also engages with the recent scholarship on ontological insecurity, emotions and affects (Innes, 2017; Solomon, 2015; 2017; Kinnvall, 2018; Brassett, Browning, and O'Dwyer, 2021). Accordingly, in line with the flexible, affective and performative understanding of anxiety and ontological security, this study investigates how populist narratives, including certain myths, traumas fantasies and desires are communicated at a collective level in the society in the context of wider cultural, socio-political and affective setting. Accordingly, concurring with the works of Solomon (2015; 2017) as well as Kinnvall (2018), this study advances the 'subject-centered' ontological security approach by incorporating the subject into its broader social, cultural and affective environment (Solomon, 2017) in which particular forms of ontological (in)securities are produced. In this sense, by foregrounding the under-emphasized role of broader feelings, moods and affective atmospheres, the aim is to understand how populist policy stories are narrated at a collective level in the context of

various unsettling crisis settings such as economic dislocations, migratory pressures or the recent global health emergency. By taking these as powerful background conditions to facilitate attachment with certain collective emotions, affects and ontological (in)securities, this study offers a psycho-linguistic inquiry into the populist social policy narration and how in particular they play into subjects' fears, anxieties through conscious or unconscious affective drives. Finally, as argued, this strand of literature brings added value to the OSS-populism nexus by advancing the fixed and stable understanding of identity (Innes, 2017: 4) as well as anxiety by offering a performative and contextual understanding of production of identity through emotionally-loaded discourses and narratives.

2.2.2 Ontological Security and Lacanian Fantasy: Towards an Affective and Politicized Approach

In continuation of this discussion, a more recent OS scholarship challenges Giddens' original conception of ontological security as security of being which treats ontological security seeking endeavor as a quest for complete self in the form of achieving a full, unquestioned, whole self (Krickel-Choi, 2022:10). However, recent accounts have questioned the possibility of full attainment of ontological security, rather proposed an alternative 'security of becoming' referring to a never-ending quest for ontological security in the face of anxiety (Kinnvall, 2018; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2018; Eberle, 2019; Arfi, 2020). Mostly inspired by the works of psychanalyst Jacques Lacan, central to this line of scholarship is the acceptance of ontological security as a dynamic, never-ending process always in need of 'becoming' (Kinnvall, 2018:8). In a similar vein, other scholars also share this criticism by pointing the unavoidability of anxiety in human life, accepting it as a normal condition of everyday life, rather than an exceptional condition (Kinnvall, 2018; Arfi 2020, Steele, 2019), and not necessarily negative, as argued by Rumelili (2015) and Browning (2018). Some studies, in this line of literature also regularly points out the ontology-unsettling effects of contemporary globalization as defined by increased sense of insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty in most societies in the world (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2018; Steele and Homolar 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022).

The move away from 'security-of-being' also adds to the never-ending workings of populist storytelling by providing additional insights into understanding multiple emotional and discursive dynamics at play in quest for ontological security, rather than

treating it as a fixed meaning-making pattern revolving around certain antagonistic identities. Among the very productive theoretical contributions in this direction has been centered around the role of fantasy narratives in seeking-ontological security (Eberle 2019; Kinnvall 2018; Vieira 2018; Browning; 2019). Inspired by Jacques Lacan, fantasy is defined as a particular type of ‘‘desire-infused narrative through subjects construct social realities’’ (Eberle, 2019) As commonly argued, fantasies are stories that enable us to constitute ourselves as social beings by identifying with certain signifiers such as name, nationality, occupation, gender or religion (Glynos and Howarth, 2008; Kinnvall 2018; Eberle 2019; Browning; 2019), thereby, enable us to ‘go on’ in the anxiety-ridden everyday life (Stavrakakis 2007).

Central to this need to identify with fantasies is found in the Lacanian notion of *subjectivity* which is defined by inherently unstable and incomplete self by virtue of entering the society as it refers to an anxious state in which subjects will encounter the fact that they can never attain a full sense of Self, in the form an ‘‘authentic fullness’’ (Epstein, 2011: 337) in the existing social order. In this conceptualization, the search for ontological security is no more than an illusion as the stable sense of identity is always out of reach, and especially under dislocatory events shaking the established routines, individual subjectivity is more likely to suffer from anxiety in the constant struggle of ‘becoming’ (Eberle, 2019). However, to overcome this anxiety, or the *lack* in Lacanian terms, subjects must engage with fantasies that promise a resolution and self-fulfillment (Brassett, Browning, and O’Dwyer 2021; Eberle, 2019). Fantasies, in this sense, transform this constant ontological lack into certain empirical *objects*, either material or ideational, offering newer emblems of identification that subjects can seek ontological security and authenticity in the anxiety-inducing everyday life (Eberle, 2019; Browning, 2019).

The Lacanian approach to ontological security, in this sense, treats anxiety as an unavoidable condition of human life, while pointing to the impossibility of ever achieving ontological security (Kinnvall, 2018; Vieria, 2018). Apart from offering a very timely response to the growing body of critiques against the conventional ontological security approaches with their overreliance on ontological security attainment as an end goal as well as lack of alternative ways of dealing with anxiety (Rossdale 2015; Browning 2016; Hagstörm, 2021) the Lacanian inspired ontological security perspective also contributes

to the study of IR and populism, in particular. First, engagement with fantasy narrative invites a more systematized exploration into the psycho-linguistic appeal of political actors by providing analytical tools to account for why some narratives are more appealing than others at a collective level. In this context, existing studies commonly point out the *desire* factor as an important ingredient of the appeal of the fantasmatic narratives (Arfi, 2010; Solomon, 2015; Eberle, 2019). Fantasies, in this way, activate desire and affect towards attainment of certain 'objects' such as freedom, justice, sovereignty or in the form of material acquisitions such as welfare which are proposed as remedies to subjects' ontological lack, thereby, promise an imaginary fullness. This desire, for Eberle (2019: 245) is the basic ''engine'' for the Lacanian incomplete subject who has no other choice but constantly seek for becoming 'whole' in the anxiety-ridden everyday life.

Accordingly, fantasy is defined as type of narrative which ''captures the subjective desire for wholeness and transforms it into a scenario that provides subjects with (the promise of) ontological security'' (Eberle, 2019: 250). In other words, fantasy narratives can be distinguished from other narratives, such as the biographical narratives of self-identity by a particular narrative structure stimulating lack and desire simultaneously, while projecting an imaginary ontological closure. As defined by Glynos (2008) fantasies are also commonly structured around highly simplistic and antagonistic visions of social reality, ''involving some reference to an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy)'' (Glynos 2008: 283). As such, fantasmatic narratives tend to offer a highly simplistic and clear-cut vision of social reality, as put by Eberle (2019): ''either we recapture the 'object' and we are safe (the beatific scenario of securing a complete identity), or we fail and we are doomed (the horrific scenario of losing it)" (Eberle, 2019: 248-49). This dramatically simplified, desire-infused, narrative pattern, as argued by several scholars in the field, is what makes fantasies particularly emotionally appealing and mobilizing (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Eberle, 2019; Browning, 2018; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022). Simplifying the complex reality into black-and-white solutions, fantasies tend to offer stronger degree of ontological closure in times of heightened anxiety and uncertainty (Eberle, 2019).

Another important theoretical and analytical contribution of the Lacanian fantasy approach to the study of ontological security-populism nexus is the notion of transgression. In addition to its desire-imbued aspect, fantasmatic narratives are also structured around 'transgressive elements' defined as ''ostensibly peripheral discourses'' (Eberle, 2019: 254) in contrast to rational/official argumentation and narration which often ends up pointing 'obstacles', such as immigrants, elites or international institutions as 'stealing' our desire. As Eberle notes, the transgressive rhetoric not only identifies the 'threats' to our idealized wholeness, but often depicts them as 'obstacles' enjoying themselves at our expense or ruining our way of life often reinforced through the narrative trope of ''excessive enjoyment'' or ''theft of enjoyment'' (Zizek 1993; Stavrakakis 2007: 197). Translated from Lacan's jouissance, enjoyment refers to a 'stolen' sense of wholeness, which in fact, has never been possessed by the *Self* (Stavrakakis 1999; Glynos, 2008). This fundamental lack is again masked by fantasies providing subjects with emotional guidelines about ''why our full enjoyment is missing'' and who is to blame (du Plesiss, 2015: 22). As put by Glynos (2008), this unobtainable fullness, then, is often transgressed onto *Others*, who are blamed for stealing our desire, fantasy and way of life.

> The identity of the evil ''Other'' who prevents the nation from recouping the enjoyment it has lost shifts as a function of historical context. It may be a foreign occupier, those who ''always plot to rule the world'', some dark powers and their local sympathizers ''who want to enslave our proud nation'', immigrants ''who steal our jobs'', etc. In this view, the obstacle to full enjoyment shifts depending on the specificity of the fantasmatic narrative at stake, but the formal logic remains the same (Glynos, 2008: 262)

That is, in addition to role of desire, transgression also appear as another significant ingredient of fantasy narratives that advances their affective power. These notions have more recently been connected to the study of populist narratives (Kinnvall, 2018; Browning, 2018; 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022). Analytically, the transgression factor also contributes to the exploration of how desire is aroused through discourse and how ontological security is sought via fantasies. As Eberle (2019) argues, the Lacanian approach with its emphasis on *desire, transgression and enjoyment*, provides us methodological tools to better trace the 'unconscious' means of ontological security-seeking in political discourse such as ''operationalizing desire via the 'object' of a fantasy'' (Eberle, 2019). In this way, concurring with Eberle (2019), I also contend that Lacanian tools would help us differentiate the populist policy narratives from rational

/technical narration, with a particular focus on the role of fantasmatic appeals in legitimization of policies, and shaping existing norms and ontological security regimes in given settings.

Apart from conceptual and analytical contributions, the incorporation of fantasy approach into the ontological security literature also invites broader appreciation of the role of emotions in narrative construction of collective identities and ontological security. Drawing on the Lacanian notions of *desire, fantasy*, t*ransgression* and *enjoyment*, the Lacanian-inspired ontological security approach helps us uncovering the role of collective emotions such as shame, pride, hatred, humiliation or self-respect in reproduction of meanings of the Self, Other, security, belonging, community and survival. The incorporation of Lacanian insights, thereby, provides fruitful analytical tools to uncover the affective pull of populist social policy narratives. In other words, to understand why some populist welfare narratives are more resilient than other, which has yet to be fully analyzed in the existing social policy literature.

Furthermore, by taking a Lacanian ontological security approach towards the populism-social policy nexus, this study aims to contribute to the broader political consequences of the populist 'narrative quest for ontological security' through social policy, with particular emphasis on the power dynamics of power, exclusion and oppression (Eberle, 2019: 251). As such, the exploration of the desire-induced narrative closure premised upon the social policy storytelling, whereby certain identities, social rights and futures are excluded from the imagined community, points out broader political functions of populist fantasies of welfare in their promise of 'becoming'. In this way, this study aims to contribute to a more politicized conception of ontological security by analytically engaging with the ways populist social policy narration reproduces existing hierarchies and exclusionary imaginaries in their attempts to fill the ontological *lack* with certain objects.

2.2.3 Facing Crises: Populism, Fantasy Narratives and Ontological Security

Taking a Lacanian inspired approach to the ontological security-populism nexus also calls greater attention to delve into the relationship between populism, crisis, emotions and security. First of all, extending the work of Laclau (2005), more recently Moffit (2016) treats crisis as a central concept inherent in populism. As argued by Moffit (2016),

‘‘populist actors actively perform and perpetuate a sense of crisis’’ (Moffitt 2016: 195). By drawing on the performative/stylistic aspect of populism, Moffit’s theorization of crisis has made significant contributions to the understanding of contemporary populism (Moffitt 2016; Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Directing a major critique towards the existing populism literature which perceive crisis as ‘external’ to populism (Mudde, 2007; Arditi, 2007), Moffit (2016) proposes that ‘‘rather than just thinking about crisis as a trigger of populism, we should also think about how populism attempts to act as a trigger for crisis’’ (Moffit, 2016: 119). In this conceptualization, Moffit conceptualizes crisis as ‘internal’ to populist politics, thereby, redefine populism as a crisis-centered performative style which both enable populist mobilization, while simultaneously being recreated and ‘performed’ by the populist actors. Performativity is a novel approach developed by Moffit (2016), emphasizing that crises come into being not only because they have solid material bases and resonance in the society but also, they are actively perpetuated and performed by specific actors to specific group of ‘people’ in society. The performative lens to populism also provides additional theoretical insights into understanding the emotive appeal of populist storytelling. By going beyond the objective and material understanding of crisis, Moffit’s conceptualization also invites broader engagement with supply-side approaches to populism to uncover the discursive ways in which external crisis or dislocations are communicated by the political actors in an emotionally appealing and mobilizing manner.

Secondly, in a similar vein, broad body of ontological security literature treats crisis as fundamental to understand the structural, psychological and emotional anxieties underpinning the support for populistic appeal (Kinnvall, 2018; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022; Steele and Homolar, 2019; Cash and Kinnvall, 2017). This line of research commonly points to anxiety-generating effects of globalization as representative of a particular ‘era of ontological insecurity’ expressed by feelings of economic insecurity, political alienation, cultural/moral distress, senses of relative deprivation, loss or disempowerment (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2018). These heightened emotions, moods and feelings of ontological insecurity brought by globalization-induced structural disjunctions, according to this line of research, are inescapable and normal part of everyday life, which leads to a constant desire for ontological closure (Homolar and Scholz, 2019).

Of particular importance in this line of ontological security scholarship has been the recognition of crisis situations, as moments of increased sense of uncertainty and

instability, as central to emotive and affective workings of populist appeal. As such, it has been argued that crisis moments provide additional emotive impetus for the populist narrative performativity in their claim to represent the 'people' as against the perceived *Others* (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2018; Homolar and Scholz, 2019). Namely, through this interconnected politics of insecurity and reassurance, populist crisis narratives reinforce the very essence of ontological insecurity that it promises to suppress (Homolar and Scholz, 2019).

Structured in this way, a more recent wave of literature has especially highlighted the role of fantasy narratives in governing the collective anxiety at times of heightened uncertainty (Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022; Browning, 2019 Kinnvall, 2018, 2019; Adısönmez and Onursal, 2022). Accordingly, due to their highly simplified, 'black/white' visions of social reality structured around binary idealizations (Eberle, 2019) it is argued that fantasmatic articulations tend to increase the affective pull of populist crisis narratives at times of heightened ambiguity. By translating often complex and ambiguous causes of global/national dislocatory moments into simplified stories of 'good' and the 'evil', fantasmatically structured narratives tend to operate as powerful affective anxiety-controlling means in times of crisis (Glynos, 2008). Their mobilizing appeal, as argued, is more powerful if they are built around an fantasmatic/historical temporal template invoking myths, traumas and insecurities in legitimation of the perceived crisis (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022). As such, it is argued that populist actors commonly reactivate history through nostalgia (Browning, 2019; Taş, 2022) or historical trauma (Kinnvall, 2017) in legitimization of contemporary crisis. This not only provides a moral and legitimate base for the crisis narrative, but also helps stimulating emotions around loss, disempowerment and victimization around the present, while also reinforcing the moral base of the projected 'future' (Browning, 2019: 9-10, Taş, 2022: 130).

By drawing on these theoretical discussions, particularly the Lacan's socio-psychoanalytical approach, I conceptualize 'crisis' as a productive emotional force or some sort of an emotional opportunity structure behind the appeal of the populist discourse. Thereby, despite not being the major theoretical focus of this study, I treat these 'external' crises of globalization as powerful background conditions that may increase the ''psychological receptiveness'' (Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022: 529) of populist

discourse and agendas in the selected empirical cases. As argued in the previous section on populism, the primary focus will be given to exploration of context-specific discourse on ontological security deployed by populist actors in the context of crisis-ridden Europe.

2.3 The Proposed Theoretical Framework

Based on the above theoretical discussions on social policy, populism and ontological security, this section presents the proposed theoretical framework of this study. Accordingly, in order to understand the legitimization of exclusionary/moralistic social policy turns in the selected cases of Denmark and Poland in the context of recent crises in Europe, this study argues that social policy has increasingly become a populist promise of 'reassurance' in the hands of the right-wing populist actors (See Table 1). By giving or taking rights, articulating social norms and desired forms of citizenship, it is argued that the populist welfare contracts have increasingly become a promise of ontological security, offering 'anxious' subjects potentially powerful means of identification and differentiation at times of heightened anxiety. In arguing this, I offer a novel theoretical link between social policy and ontological security, in which the populist narrative performativity has a pivotal role in driving the legitimization of exclusionary policy turns in the selected welfare settings.

In explaining how the proposed theoretical link operates in the context of recent globalization-induced 'crises' in European societies, I draw on the performative aspect of populism (Moffit, 2016; Homolar and Scholz, 2019). Accordingly, rather than a coherent ideology or empty discursive logic, this study conceptualizes populism as a specific narrative performativity informed by an interconnected politics of crisis and reassurance. By augmenting and capitalizing on the existing feelings of fear, anxiety and ontological insecurities at times of crises, I argue that populist politics stimulates its own demand and supply for cognitive and emotional closure by promising a path towards recapturing 'normality' and 'certainty of identity' (Moffit, 2016; Homolar and Scholz, 2019; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022). In this sense, this study offers a supply-side, context-dependent exploration of populism with a particular focus on how populist actors narrate external dislocations as nationally-resonant emergencies, blame them onto specific groups of *Others*, and eventually legitimize policy actions as the only path towards normality in diverse welfare settings.

In explaining this performative agency in policy legitimation, I argue that populist actors particularly invoke an affective temporality from and towards which the collective subjects could construct a stable sense of themselves at times of critical situations. In this light, by taking a Lacanian-inspired approach to the ontological security-social policy nexus, this study argues that through a temporally-structured affective populist template, populist social policy narratives tend to offer a stronger degree of ontological and emotional closure at times of crises. In this connection, it is argued at times of heightened uncertainty, populist actors frequently invoke a historical/fantasmatic temporality to broaden their emotive appeal around the policy reforms. As such, this study offers a holistic conceptualization of history and temporality in populist discourse, arguing that populists not only instrumentalize an idealized past, but also links past, present and future into an emotionally-loaded, black/white, desire-infused narrative around the national welfare. Accordingly, it is argued that populist actors are particularly enabled by historically-rooted insecurities, myths, traumas, imageries and fantasies in social policy legitimization. By revitalizing these real or imagined signifiers of identity in the face of recent global dislocations, populist actors able to construct newer crisis and emergencies around social problems that resonate broader sections of the society, by going beyond their immediate electoral base.

In this sense, by going beyond the literatures of welfare-nostalgia or collective memory, which only tell limited part of the populist discursive logic, this study offers a more holistic understanding of historical temporality by incorporating their desire, fantasy or emotion inflicted articulations. In this sense, the proposed historical/fantasmatic temporal lens provides us with analytical tools to trace how history can also be reactivated through unconscious affective registers such as fantasized ideals, imageries, symbols, objects of desires and antagonistic emotions. In this sense, it is argued that despite being not the only articulatory strategy available to populist actors, temporality plays a pivotal role in policy debates, from and towards which individuals and subjects could make sense of themselves and their surroundings in relation to past, present and the future. Thus, the temporally-informed narratives not only offers a morally-legitimate base for the proposed policy action, but also speaks to multitudes of emotions such as loss, shame, pride or humiliation in justification of the policy changes. In this way, the proposed historical-fantasmatic lens could help us helps us understanding the emotive and ontological underpinnings of populist social policy narration, and their resilience among a growing

audience in European societies. In this light, these temporally-informed narrative structures not only help reinforcing collective identities and complementing autobiographical narratives in times of uncertainty, but also constantly keeps subjects 'alarmed' about the potential threats and dangers-to come in the future, if the present obstacle is not overcome. Structured in this way, I argue that right-wing populist social policy narratives tend to be emotionally stimulating and mobilizing, better capturing collective anxiety as well as subjects' psychological need for ontological coherence and fullness. In this way, they also differ from other narratively structured stories or rational/technical policy narration by their dramatically simplified, desire-infused, emotionally-loaded, fantasmatic-historical temporal template.

By taking a Lacanian-inspired approach to the ontological security-social policy nexus, I aim to uncover how ontological security is sought through social policy narratives, and in particular, what makes their appeal more persuasive, emotionally and politically seductive in contrast to alternative/traditional forms of policy narration. In this light, I argue that Lacanian approach invites a more systematized exploration into uncovering the psycho-linguistic appeal of populist narratives in rebuilding collective identities. As such, with particular emphasis on conceptual tools such as objects of desire, transgression and enjoyment, I argue that Lacanian-inspired ontological security approach would better address the often-neglected emotional messaging of social policy narratives in reproducing the boundaries of welfare community. As such, I argue that such Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective would contribute to the existing ideational social policy literature as well as the populist-social policy nexus by foregrounding the often-overlooked dimensions of unconscious affective drives, desires, emotions and fantasies underpinning populist policy messaging.

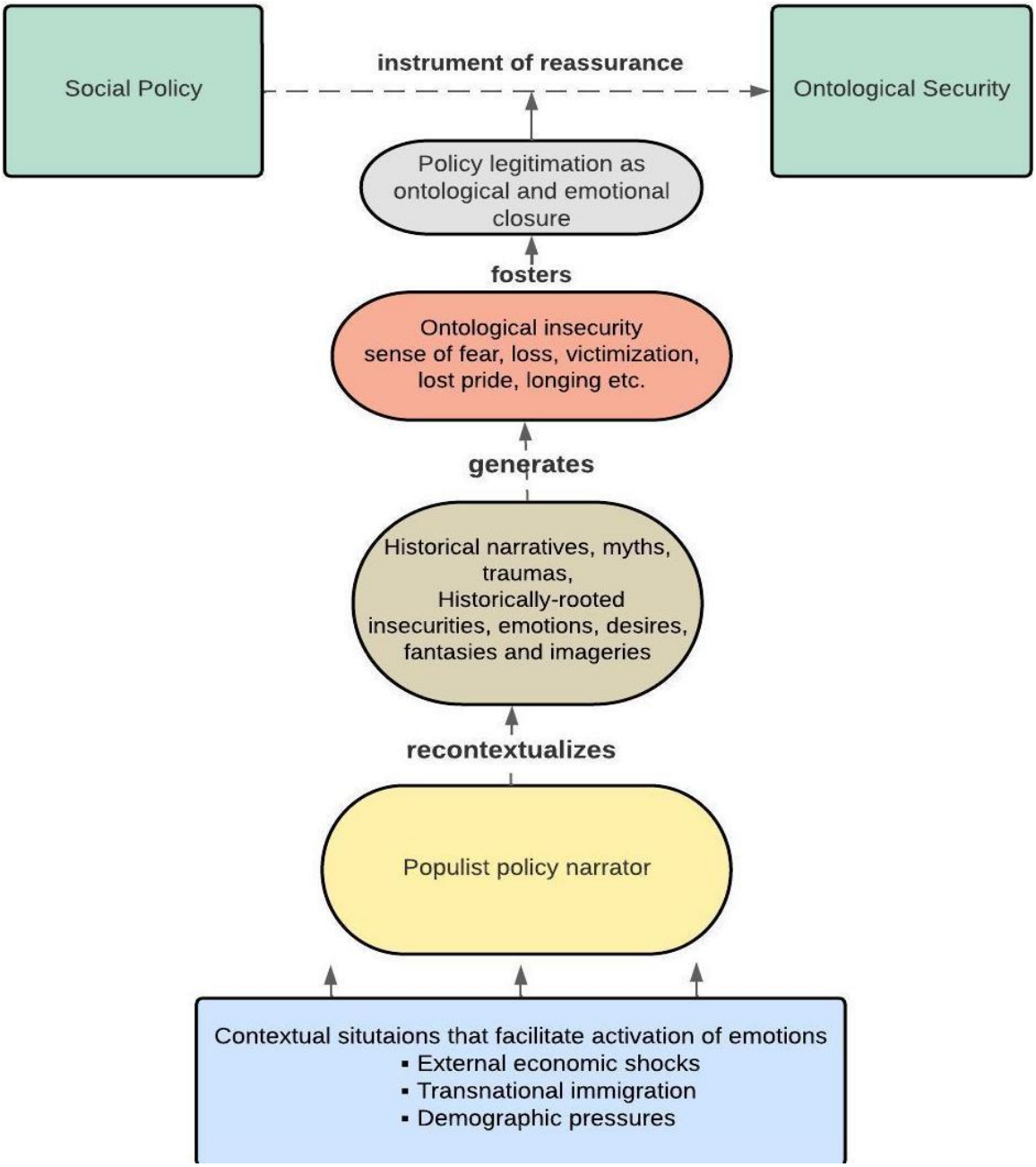

Table 1: Conceptual Framework

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In establishing the aforementioned theoretical link between social policy and ontological security, this chapter presents the research design and analytical framework to conduct the empirical studies as well as the rationale behind the methodological choices in a way to facilitate dialogue between the literatures of social policy, populism and ontological security. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section engages with the theory-developing case study approach and discusses why it has been chosen as the most suited research design for the theoretical aims of this study. Second, the chapter elaborates on the selection rationale of Denmark and Poland as theory-developing case studies with a focus on their expected utility in the proposed theoretical link. In what follows, the chapter introduces the narratives as central analytical tools in the empirical studies and discusses why the narrative-centered approach including the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is the most suitable for the proposed theoretical link between social policy and ontological security. Fourth, the chapter introduces an integrated methodological framework to be followed in each empirical study and offers a critical narrative-analytical framework rooted in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing country-specific data collection methods.

3.1 Theory-Developing Case Study Approach

Case study is a method of empirical research which aims to provide a detailed knowledge on contemporary phenomena of a particular single unit or small number of units within its/their own context (Yin, 1994; Stake, 2008; Gerring, 2017). While the selected units may be studied in a variety of ways, for instance qualitatively, quantitatively or through mixed methods depending on the research aims, the defining characteristic of the case study is providing intensive and in-depth context-sensitive information on particular cases as compared to other research methods (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Additionally, case studies, either single or collective, can accommodate various research interests depending on the

research aims, ranging from in-depth description, theory-testing to theory-developing (Eisenhardt, 2002). Additionally, case studies typically engage with ‘‘developmental factors’’ (Flyvbjerg, 2011) of a given unit (i.e., a person, group of people, an ethnic community, nation-state, welfare state or a process like democratization or Europeanization), dealing in particular with ‘why’ the identified phenomena occurred at that specific time and space, ‘how’ it occurred and with which implications (Yin,2003; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Hence, one of the important advantages of case study research is enabling the researcher the opportunity to provide a holistic examination of the object of the study; focusing not only the multiple aspects of the issue and their interrelatedness with each other, but also examine them in their natural context. In the light of these, case study approach is highlighted to be an appropriate methodology when the investigated social phenomenon is highly contested/or complex which require an in-depth understanding, or the prior investigations fail to account for the complexity of the issue (Eisenhardt, 2002: 32) which require new ways of approaching the research problem, namely theory generating (Yin, 2018).

In the light of the aforementioned merits of the case study approach, this study adopts a *theory-developing case study approach* (Eisdenhardt, 2002; Yin 2018) as the most appropriate strategy in examining the puzzling policy shifts experienced in the welfare regimes of Denmark and Poland. To begin with, case study research, through its detailed examination of ‘how’ and ‘why’ things happen as well as its particular focus on examining ‘unusual’ or ‘puzzling’ patterns (Yin, 2018), is arguably relevant for engaging with the process of welfare state development (Vis, 2018). For instance, case studies typically adopt questions such as ‘how’ and ‘why’ a particular welfare policy reform is successfully implemented or failed in a given case and ‘how’ can we understand the factors affecting policy change/adoption including policy actors, their ideas and motivations (Vis, 2018). In addition, as argued by Yin (2018), although single case studies primarily focus on one unit, they may actually carry powerful comparative insights when the research question is longitudinal in nature. At such cases, the use of single case studies is particularly justified as the researcher can account for the patterns of change over the course of time in a given country, which could be otherwise difficult to capture.

In a similar vein, existing welfare state scholarship frequently builds on within-case comparison in single-case studies by carefully tracing the development of particular

reform processes in a given country involving comparison of multiple policy reforms or examining the evolution/ (or absence) of a specific policy area over time. Finally, as argued by Eisdenhardt (2002), case studies are particularly revelatory and suitable for theory-developing for the newly emerging research phenomena or phenomena that the prior theories seem inadequate to explain. Accordingly, through in-depth examination of two-theory developing case studies on Denmark and Poland which are selected as critical cases (Yin, 2018) for the theoretical proposition of this study, this dissertation seeks to facilitate a novel theoretical approach towards understanding the welfare state development in Denmark and Poland through the lenses of ontological security. In the light of the aforementioned advantages of case study approach, next section will elaborate on the rationale behind the selection of cases as well as their expected utility in justifying the proposed theoretical framework.

3.2 Case Selection

Inspired by a most-different case selection design (Gerring, 2007), which allows the research to identify similar patterns in dissimilar contexts, theory-developing case studies on Denmark and Poland aims to untangle the complex pathways through which the right-wing populist parties pioneer distinctive social policy transformations across different welfare states. In doing this, this study offers a theory-developing case study approach to shed light on the nuances of communicative agency of right-wing populism across different welfare regimes with a particular focus on the role of historically and fantasmatically articulated temporality in legitimization of exclusionary policy shifts. In line with this theoretical proposition, the selection of Denmark and Poland follows three criteria: *(i) variation in historical trajectory and evolution of ontological security regimes (ii) variation in welfare traditions (iii) the presence of an electorally successful right-wing populist party* as well as *(iii) exhibiting exceptional welfare state transformations in the recent decades.*

First of all, Denmark and Poland are dissimilar cases with respect to their historical trajectory and evolution of ontological security regimes. To begin with, Denmark has a long history of state sovereignty that can be traced back to the early Middle Ages since the 16th century marked by an ‘‘unbroken state and linguistic continuity dating back more than 1000 years’’ (Østergård, 2006: 54). As argued by Danish historian Uffe Østergård, Danish history is marked by two paradoxical pasts; the multicultural and multilingual

Danish empire located in a wide territory in Northern Europe as well as a small and ethnically homogenous national state after 1864, making Denmark as we know today (Østergård, 2006; 2012). First of all, Danish early history traces back to the Viking age, which roughly corresponds to the late 8th century and characterized by a notable period of expansion and exploration. In the late 14th century, Denmark also became part of a united monarch with Sweden and Norway. With the eventual decline of the union in the 16th century, Denmark emerged as a separate imperial power being home to many subjugated populations in its vast territory. Converging Christianity in the 10th century, Denmark also played a significant role in the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century with Danish empire embracing Lutheran version of Protestant Christianity as the state religion. Danish imperial heritage is commonly characterized by considerable territorial influence, military expansions and an unbroken state sovereignty with long-standing role in Northern European affairs. This early historical period, also including its Viking heritage, left lasting impact on Danish ontological security, which nourished a particular imaginary of a morally superior, heroic, authentic and distinctive Danish self-identity.

The second episode of the Danish history since the 17th century, however, was marked by prolonged territorial and military losses. Especially, the Danish defeat in 1864 against the Prussia/German powers represented a critical juncture in Danish history and perceptions of physical and ontological security. Conceptualized as the nation's deepest humiliation, this military defeat led to a radical ''inward-turn'', (Hansen, 2002: 57), making Denmark one of the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogenous societies in the world (Borevi, 2017: 369). The emergence of an extremely strong German threat at the very Danish border had created an almost national consensus among the political elites that Denmark should avoid external military confrontations and rather focus on internal security and consolidation. Inspired by romantic nationalism of the 19th century together with Lutheran values, Denmark underwent a comprehensive internal restructuring in the post-1864 context based on empowerment of the farmer-peasant people (*folk*) both economically and culturally in a largely agricultural country (Bergmann, 2017:44). In the meantime, since the early 19th century, Danish state had steadily evolved into a constitutional monarchy with the adoption of modern constitution, introduction of civil liberties and parliamentary system in 1849, which marked the early transition towards democracy in Denmark. Compared to most other 19th century nation-

states, the degree of national mobilization was also unprecedented in Denmark. The peasant-farmers' movement was soon adopted by the rising Social Democracy and gradually transformed into an all-encompassing worker's movement in the early 20th century (Østergaard, 2006: 12). As such, Danishness was reinvented along libertarian-popular values such as freedom, democracy, equality, solidarity and consensus, which significantly shaped the Danish perceptions of security and survival in the post-1864 context. As such, rather than embracing military motives, an imaginary of a progressive, solidary and homogenous *folk* became a central ontological construct to reclaim the lost sense of security and superiority in the much smaller, homogenous Danish nation state.

The exceptional combination of external German threat in the post-1864 context and the successful peasant mobilization that prevailed as a Social Democracy at the turn of the 20th century (Østergaard, 2006) also facilitated the adoption of a low-profile foreign policy as the only available policy option for the nation's survival. Thus, since the mid-19th century, Denmark opted for a policy of neutrality and non-interference in the international military conflicts, including the WWI and WWII. Despite not engaging the war directly, the WWI had severe economic consequences for Denmark as elsewhere in Europe. The successive reforms adopted by the Social Democratic governments of the time also laid the foundations for the social democratic welfare state in the early 20th century. With the adoption of the principle of universalism in the 1930s, Denmark also became a pioneer of comprehensive social policy reforms in the Nordic region as well as in Europe (Christiansen and Petersen, 2001). During the interwar years, an all-encompassing, universal welfare system become a widely shared political ideal across the party lines, which was believed to be the best way to guarantee the survival of the nation by facilitating internal cohesion and socially/culturally harmonious Danish *folk*.

Danish aspiration for neutrality and non-involvement in European affairs was also manifested itself during the WWII when Denmark was invaded by the Nazi Germany in 1940 (Larsen, 2002:59) as the country put up a very limited resistance during the first years of the 5 years long occupation (1940-1945). However, the growing popular resistance since 1943 put an end to Nazi rule in 1945. Also, the Danish rescue of Jewish population in 1943 from Nazi persecution was also a pivotal event in the making of contemporary Danish national identity by empowering the Danish self-image as a morally superior, humanitarian and non-confrontational self-identity both domestically and

internationally (Østergård, 2011). The war also dramatically altered the Danish security and foreign policy with Denmark increasingly embracing a more active position in international affairs (Pedersen, 2012; Hansen, 2002: 59). Aligning with the Western alliance in the cold war division of communist and non-communist countries, Denmark played an active role in the construction of the post-war international institutional architecture by becoming founding members of the UN in 1945 and NATO in 1949 (Jespersen, 2004: 27). The country also became a more active global player form the 1970s onwards by partaking in peacekeeping operations and increasing development aid to foreign nations, which particularly contributed to its self-image as a peaceful and humanitarian ideal. In the wake of the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 hitting Danish economy particularly severely, Denmark also joined the EU in 1973 along with Britain.

Domestically, the post-war welfare state also expanded significantly between 1950 and 1970s with the introduction of national pension system, expansion of unemployment benefits and various insurance and social assistance programmes, among many others. The post-WWII period marked the golden age of social democracy and the welfare state in Denmark, also making the latter as a common ontological construct in the making of Danishness as an egalitarian and progressive ideal during the 20th century-going well beyond the lines of the center-left. However, the heightened economic pressures since the 1970s, increased immigration and the growing skepticism around EU integration marked a gradual turn from liberalism to ethno-cultural understandings of national identity. The desire to preserve sovereignty and the well-developed welfare state have led Denmark to opt-out from certain aspects of EU integration. With the electoral rise of populist right in the 1990s, Danish humanitarian self-image has been challenged by the increased military activism abroad and restrictive welfare and immigration politics domestically especially hardening since the migration 'crisis' of 2015. Despite the more recent negative international publicity over the surge of anti-immigrant politics, Denmark still holds a reputation of modern, prosperous and democratic country with high standards of living, commitment to human rights, universal social welfare and environmental protection.

In contrast to Denmark, Poland's history is commonly characterized by territorial discontinuities, foreign domination and limited state sovereignty for large part of its existence. Similar to Denmark, Polish history can also be divided into two distinct periods; the one characterized by territorial expansion, state sovereignty and regional

influence during the 16th and 17th centuries followed by a turbulent period of partitions and lost sovereignty since 1789 (Zubrzycki, 2006). To begin with, similar to Denmark, Poland's early medieval past dating back to the 10th century is also marked by significant territorial expansion and regional influence in Central Europe. Besides, similar to Denmark, Poland also adopted Christianity in the 10th century. In contrast to Denmark which later converged to Lutheranism in the late 16th century, Poland had been a staunch follower of Roman Catholic tradition of Christianity since the early 10th century. Since then, unlike Denmark, religion and the (Catholic) Church had become defining features of Polishness. In the late medieval period, Poland entered into a union with Lithuania known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795), which was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious federal gentry republic located in vast areas of Central Eastern Europe covering present-day Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and parts of Latvia and Estonia. Until the late 18th century, the commonwealth expanded significantly becoming the largest state in Europe. Besides, unlike the European absolutist monarchies of the time, the commonwealth was exceptional given its decentralized, democratically superior political structure as well as relatively high degree of religious tolerance in a multi-religious entity at a time of religious conflicts in Europe. Poland's medieval republican legacy is, thus, commonly characterized by its unique political system, territorial influence, agriculture-based economic prosperity, republican traditions as well as the prominence of Roman Catholicism (Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2002).This early history contributed to emergence of a particular imaginary of Polishness envisioning a morally-superior, politically and culturally distinct Polish *Self* in relation to Western civilization (Zubrzycki, 2006, Krasnodębska, 2021).

The second episode of Polish history is, however, marked by long periods of partitions, foreign domination and continuous shifts of borders. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was dissolved in 1795 which led to series of partitions among the neighboring powers of Russia, Prussia and Austria. Similar to Danish trauma of 1864, the dissolution of the multi-ethnic commonwealth led to emergence of a narrower conception of national identity during the 19th and 20th centuries based on ethno-cultural-linguistic homogeneity (Zubrzycki, 2006). However, in comparison to Denmark, which retained its political autonomy and state sovereignty after the dissolution of the empire, Poland faced a more radical decline by completely disappearing from the European map over hundred years. Accordingly, unlike Danish romantic nationalism which mainly revolved around

celebrating distinctive Danish culture, language and historical heritage under a functioning nation-state, Poland's nationalist movement during the 19th and 20th centuries was mostly shaped by territorial concerns and quest for independence in the face of foreign domination. Thus, Polish ontological insecurity was deeply shaped through its prolonged experience of statelessness, contributing to a constant sense of suffering, victimization, humiliation and inferiority in relation to West, that still informs the contemporary identity narratives. In addition, since the partitions period, Roman Catholic Church had played a pivotal role in the national struggle for independence, becoming the only legitimate institution for nurturing patriotism and seeking continuity of the Polish nationhood in the absence of state authority.

During the age of partitions (1795-1918), Poland was also separated from significant aspects of modernization and nation-building process occurring in other parts of Europe (Krasnodębska, 2021). Unlike Denmark which adopted significant political and constitutional reforms during the 19th and 20th centuries, Polish nation-building efforts were marked by series of uprisings and revolts to restore statehood and independence. Although Poland regained independence in 1918, the country had a very short-lived democratic governance between 1918-1939 followed by a devastating occupation by Nazi Germany in 1939. Although both Denmark and Poland were occupied by Nazi Germany during the WWII, Poland suffered an extensive destruction and devastation due to much bigger scale and longer duration of the occupation in Poland, including the Holocaust. Following the end of the war, Poland was situated under the Soviet sphere of influence by the allied powers, which led to a 40 years long communist domination that lasted until 1989. Similar to partitions period, Poland was once again separated from the West and had lagged many important developments of the post-war reconstruction of Europe, including the economic progress and prosperity enjoyed by other nations as well as partaking in the formation of international institutional order (Krasnodębska, 2021).

The emergence of the anti-communist Solidarity trade union in 1980 represented a central moment in Poland's history, which facilitated a peaceful transition to democracy in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe in 1989. Transition to democracy in 1989 marked a turning point in Polish history. Following 1989, Poland embarked upon a rapid and extensive path towards democratization and market-oriented economy to catch-up with the West. The county also became a member of NATO in 1999 and joined the EU in

2004, adopting an active foreign policy prioritizing transatlantic relations as well as European integration. However, the post-transition period also triggered Poland's historically-rooted ontological insecurities around its long-standing backward and liminal status as a consequence of its historical exclusion from the Western world, including its communist legacy-as the country trying to reinvent itself both domestically and internationally (Mälksoo 2010; Krasnodębska, 2021). Since 2015, with the electoral rise of the right-wing populist PiS, Poland has faced significant international scrutiny in relation to erosion of democracy, rule of law, attacks on civic and political freedoms, paving the way for flourishment of an authoritarian and illiberal politics in the country. As in Denmark, the migration 'crisis' of 2015 triggered Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant sentiments in Poland. Finally, for several years Poland has been undergoing a serious demographic decline due to low birth rates and emigration, which also situated the demographic politics at the center of the government policy.

In summary, taking a look at the history of Denmark and Poland, it can be argued that the two nations exhibit remarkable differences in terms of historical continuity of their statehood, struggle for independence, political and economic modernization, patterns of democratization, international influence as well as exposure to international conflicts. However, before discussing these, it should be worth mentioning that both nations were multi-national, multi-ethnic entities that enjoyed vast international and territorial influence at different times in their medieval history. Similarly, the dissolution of these entities in the 18th and 19th centuries has had profound impact on the making of national identities and conceptions of ontological security as both nations have gradually embraced an ethnically and culturally homogenous conception of national identity. However, despite the traumatic shrinking of its territorial size in the late 19th century, Denmark had sustained its political autonomy and statehood, which marked a long and uninterrupted history of sovereign statehood since the middle ages. Since the mid-19th century, the country has enjoyed remarkable territorial integrity, well-established democracy and economic development. Denmark was especially fortunate in terms of avoiding major international conflicts and invasions during most of its history in contrast to its European counterparts, which also facilitated a relatively peaceful and smooth path of democratization domestically-also making the country one of the pioneer states on the path towards modernization, in particular the development of the welfare state in Europe. For Østergård (2006: 2), Denmark was also among the very privileged group of small

states in the post-WWII period that was able to enjoy national independence and influence in the making of the post-war international order. Meanwhile, the dissolution of the commonwealth in the late 18th century had launched a long and turbulent period of statelessness and foreign domination in Polish history. Despite the short-lived democracy and independence during the interwar years, after the WWII Poland had fallen under 40 years of communist rule and once again was separated from the West. Unlike Denmark which remained neutral during the world wars, Poland was a major battleground during the WWII, devastated by the war and the Holocaust. As such, since the partitions, Polish nation had missed important aspects of European modernization and democratic developments occurring in different parts of the Europe, at the same time, was unable to pursue an independent foreign policy since the 18th century.

In sum, these historical differences, as I will elaborate more in detail in the empirical chapters, culminated in different perceptions of security, identity and national survival. Danish contemporary ontological security has been fundamentally shaped under the post-1864 national habitus in which the continuity of Danishness was conditioned upon the preservation of the small, homogenous and progressive nation with a powerful *folk* (people). Despite the traumatic reduction of its territory in 1864, Danish nation had enjoyed an unbroken state sovereignty and linguistic continuity tracing back to over 1000 years (Østergård, 2006), which helped maintaining a sense of stable and continuous Danish *Self* even at times of national turmoil. Besides, the successful and relatively peaceful experiences of nation-building and modernization in the post-1864 context had also contributed to a sense of superior and distinctive Danish national identity. Especially, Danish ontological security is primarily tied to preservation of the welfare society and its progressive values such as freedom, democracy, solidarity and egalitarianism, which contributed to a unique sense of identity and pride in the imagined Danishness.

Poland's ontological security, on the other hand, is deeply shaped by its historical suffering, including series of foreign partitions, invasions, limited state sovereignty, and the experience of totalitarian regimes. These historical experiences left a particular imprint of shame, victimization, humiliation, sense of inferiority and backwardness in the making of Polishness, while Polish ontological security has been closely tied to recognition from the West and the preservation of the hardly-won sovereignty, autonomy and independence. Shaped under these traumatic experiences, Polish ontological security

is deeply connected to the collective memory of nation's struggle for independence, which contributed to a particular imaginary of a self-sacrificing, heroic and patriotic Polish nationhood. Besides, as a collective entity constantly facing fear of physical and cultural extinction, Catholic religion, traditional culture, morality and family had historically become important sources for seeking ontological security, continuity, sense of distinction and differentiation.

Secondly, the cases are selected on the basis of representing different welfare regimes in Europe that are organized around distinctive social rights principles, patterns of social stratification and state-market-family relations. Despite being an ideal type, Esping-Andersen's (1990) classical welfare state typology still sheds light on important differences between the contemporary welfare regimes of Denmark and Poland. To begin with, Denmark belongs to the classical Social-Democratic/universal welfare state model within the classification of Esping-Andersen's typology marked with high degree of decommodification, labor market participation, defamilization as well as generous welfare transfers and extensive public service provision (Blum, Kuhlmann, & Schubert, 2020; Greve, 2016; Greve and Kvist, 2021). Besides, according to traditional understanding of Denmark as a classical Nordic welfare state, Danish welfare state is historically known for its strong commitment to social citizenship, social solidarity and equality in many spheres of society, including economic and gender equality. Although Danish welfare state, alongside the other Nordic welfare states, has been under constant change and recalibration, challenging its core universalistic qualities, Danish welfare state is still in many ways distinct internationally especially given its historical tradition of strong, generous and universal welfare-oriented public support irrespective of the labor market position (Abrahamson, 2015). Additionally, the welfare system is also characterized by high degree of social trust and public support in government institutions and public services, supported by an established tradition of democracy. These qualities still distinguish Danish welfare state from conservative-Catholic welfare regimes of continental Europe as well as Anglo-American systems of minimal welfare state (Østergård, 2006).

In contrast to Denmark, Poland does not belong to Esping-Andersen's typology of established Western states (Kuitto, 2016) nor it is difficult to incorporate the country into a single model of post-communist CEE states as they are highly varied (Fenger, 2007;

Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Kuitto, 2016). The existing literature rather suggests that Poland, along with other CEE countries, exhibit a 'hybrid' system of welfare mixing certain traits of conservative-corporatist European welfare states as well as Southern European welfare model (Lendvai-Bainton and Stubbs, 2021) due to its residual approach to social rights, merit-based social insurance system, high level of income inequality, labor market segmentation, low level of spending on public services as well as high reliance on traditional family and the role of women as primary care givers in the welfare system (Saraceno 2016). Besides, the comparatively lower levels of trust in collective institutions in Poland has also led to an underdeveloped system of public welfare, while the welfare state is primarily understood as responsible from providing direct social transfers rather than wide-ranging and quality public services as in the case of Scandinavian welfare regimes. In this context, apart from displaying stark differences with respect to historical origin of the welfare state (i.e., Social democratic origin in Denmark in contrast to communist one in Poland), Denmark and Poland can also be regarded as dissimilar cases in a number of parameters in relation to welfare state such as the institutional design, state-market-family balance, redistributive impact, the extent of labor market stratification, gender equality as well as the legitimacy and public support enjoyed by the welfare state.

Thirdly, the cases are also selected on the basis of presence of an electorally successful right-wing populist party in given countries, which have exerted significant influence on government policies and public debate in the realm of social and welfare policies over the recent decades(s). First of all, stressing a highly nativist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and EU-sceptic right-wing agenda, Danish people's party (DF), which was founded in 1995, has become a highly influential political force in Danish politics since the early 2000s (Bergmann, 2017). With an outspoken anti-immigrant, welfare chauvinist agenda, the party has had significant policy influence as a recognized coalition partner of the center-right parties since the early 2000s (Widfeldt, 2018). The Danish DF's influence has been particularly remarkable in driving mainstream parties' immigration and social policy platforms, given that the party has never formally joined the governments and hold any ministries, but mostly served as a critical support position in the formation of successive conservative governments during 2001-2011 and 2015-2019. Although the party has been in opposition since 2019, largely due to the ''mainstream accommodative strategies'' (Wodak, 2021) in relation to immigration as well as the emergence of more nativist,

radical right alternatives in Danish politics, DF remains to be crucial political actor in Denmark in transmitting exclusivist social preferences with fundamental implications for the shape and possibilities for the universal social citizenship.

In a similar vein, right-wing populism has dramatically advanced in Central and Eastern European region, being home to some of the most electorally successful right-wing populist parties in the world including Poland. Founded in 2001 as a center-right, Eurosceptic, national-conservative right-wing party, the Law and Justice (PiS) has advanced a political programme by overwhelmingly capitalizing on socio-economic and moral/cultural frustrations in relation to post-1989 transition (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019). However, the party has gradually developed into an authoritarian, populist and illiberal position during 2010s with an outspoken culturalist and traditionalist agenda. In contrast to Danish right-wing populism which is overwhelmingly centered around preserving the welfare state with a strong anti-immigrant sentiment, PiS' populist platform is mostly based upon promoting conservative social values, traditional culture and the special role of the Catholic Church in public life (Gwiazda, 2021). However, since coming to power in 2015 the party has taken a drastic anti-austerity turn and adopted the largest social transfers in Polish history in addressing the negative demographic trends (Szelewa, 2017). Accordingly, in the name of 'demographic renewal' the party has engaged with radical redistribution of public resources towards privileged groups through pro-family and pro-natalist policy measures (Lendvai-Baiton and Szelewa, 2020).

In contrast to Nordic welfare chauvinism which mostly tends to exclude the non-native immigrants from the social contract, the low level of immigration (Krastev & Holmes, 2019) in the region has led Central and Eastern European populists to stigmatize domestic minorities and groups such as the post-communists, feminists, human rights activists or the LGBTQ+ community. In this context, since 2015 (also including its second term in 2019) PiS has increasingly become the most credible political actor in Polish politics voicing the social demands of the 'left-behind' along socially-conservative lines. In sum, in both Denmark and Poland populist movements have made significant electoral and policy impact in the recent decades. While Danish right-wing populism is historically built upon preserving and protecting the welfare state mainly from the outside influences and especially the non-Western immigrants, in Poland right-wing populism is more

closely linked with promotion of conservative-social values, traditional family, role of religion with a staunch Eurosceptic agenda.

Finally, the country cases are also selected on the basis of exhibiting ‘‘intellectual puzzles’’ given the exceptional shifts experienced in their welfare regimes over the recent decade(s) both in terms of policy composition as well as the meanings of welfare citizenship. To begin with, Danish welfare system, formerly known for a Scandinavian role model in the world for its generous universal welfare state, has been undergoing fundamental changes over the recent decades by radically moving towards a means for exclusion and punitive discipline both in terms of controlling immigration as well as in social policy. Denmark is also an illuminating case with respect to unprecedented normalization and mainstreaming of exclusionary welfare visions in the face of mass immigration, also making the country a unique case with respect to populist-mainstream interaction unlike elsewhere in Europe (Mudde, 2019; Meret, 2011). Accordingly, Danish case is revelatory in the sense that it allows for exploring the complex ways exclusionary politics can take hold in a strongly universal welfare state.

As similar to Danish case, Poland is also selected as a critical case with respect to the transformation of its welfare state over the recent decades. In the case of Poland, which is historically regarded as a ‘‘laggard’’ in social policy and family policy in particular (Szelewa, 2014:33), the main inquiry is to account for the fundamental shift from *implicit familalism* combined with low welfare spending and limited family policy towards an *explicit familial* orientation through an expansive family-oriented welfare system since 2015. As similar to Danish transformation, the existing research on Poland’s familial policy turn also lacks a discourse-analytical perspective to address the affective power of PiS’ policy storytelling in shaping the new policy regime of ‘‘exclusive familalism’’ (Lendvai-Baiton and Szelewa, 2020). Similar to Denmark, Poland’s familial turn marked by the system of generous cash benefits has particularly aided to the success and popularity of the party since taking power in 2015, even forcing the liberal mainstream parties to follow the familalist line in their electoral pledges. Thus, in untangling ‘what’ allows for PiS-led familalistic social model to take root and thrive in Poland since 2015, Polish case offers a privileged research field to detect the context-sensitive communicative agency of PiS in the realm of welfare.

In summary, by adopting a 'most-different case selection' rationale, it is argued that despite dissimilar historical trajectories, security considerations as well as welfare traditions, electorally successful right-wing populist parties in both countries have recently had significant implications on the shape of the welfare state by fueling national projects that propagate a highly moralistic and exclusionary notions of welfare deservingness. It is argued, in this sense, albeit with diverse ideological glues and policy means (i.e., nationalism/race in Denmark and family/gender in Poland), social policy has been used as a powerful socio-psychological instrument for political actors in both countries to resurrect national identity. In this sense, the in-depth examinations of Denmark and Poland are expected to contribute to the populism-social policy nexus, by not only enabling to trace the 'micro-politics' (Wodak, 2019, 2020) of populist social policy in diverse socio-political and historical contexts which inform different exclusionary paths, but by also contributing to a ''holistic consideration of social policy'' (Fischer, 2020: 373) by recognizing its affective/emotional underpinnings as potentially powerful identification mechanisms in the broader politics of reassurance.

3.3 Narrative Analysis

As argued in the previous section, narratives are defined as primary tools by which individuals communicate and make sense of the world, at the same time, they are increasingly acknowledged as highly important argumentative tools for policy makers to formulate, contest or legitimize policies (Stone, 2012; Jones & McBeth, 2010). Narratives, then, stands for a particular linguistic pattern, being more than simple stories, helping individuals to translate the complexity of the social world into something manageable by offering a certain vision of reality. By selectively building on historical accounts, integrating events and characters into a certain causal relationship, narratives are significant argumentative and affective tools for policy makers, which do not only articulate the meanings of the past and present, but also articulates a normative idealization of the future in line with the goals of the narrative entrepreneurs (Nordensvard and Ketola 2021; Cianciara, 2022). Narratives, in this sense also serve as strategic instruments for policy actors in times of heightened uncertainty and instability, or in ''crisis'' settings shaking the existing meanings, enabling policy actors to ''attempt to impose fixed meanings on social experience'' (Maza 1996:1500, cited in Cianciara,

2022: 87). In this context, narratives play important role in political attempts to constitute and reconstitute ontological security in times of crisis (Steele and Homolar, 2019).

As mentioned previously in the literature chapter, narratives are arguably easier to measure the reform-underlying motivations and emotional underpinnings of policy narrator that may not be expressed explicitly, providing powerful linguistic insight into understanding multiple ways ontological security can be sought. In this sense, the narrative-centered approach may also shed light on why some social policy debates spark wider political and public resonance in certain settings as compared to others, and how to account for their specific cognitive and emotive functions enabling policy actors to 'sell' their welfare positions to their respective public as the only true path towards an ontologically secure future. Narratives, in this sense, appear as productive analytical tools for understanding the ways ontological security is sought through social policy discourses, in particular in accounting for how social problems are 'constructed', linked with specific political actions, who should be given access to rights, and who is to blame for the existing problems.

Narrative-centered approach is also relevant for exploring the links between social policy and populism given that populism is mainly a narrative politics in which narratives and ''storytelling performativity'' are central to populist communication (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021). Populist narratives are commonly identified as being people-centric, notably pitting 'pure' people against an 'evil' elite (Mudde 2004), rooted in a ''split world of friend and enemy'' (Cash, 2022: 131), which often involve an emotionally charged plotline with a promise of change (Nordensvard and Ketola 2021). Existing literature has heavily argued that contemporary populism, especially its radical right-wing variant has proactively used social policy as a strategic tool to fashion social order along nativist, racialized, ethnicized, patriarchal or other lines of exclusion (Fischer, 2020). In doing so, various studies have stressed that contemporary right-wing populism employs a particular discursive rhetoric in redefining the prospects for the welfare state by simplifying complex social problems and often blaming them on specific group of 'Others' (such as immigrants or the elites) as against the 'true people' whose social rights should be prioritized (Ketola and Nordensvard, 2018).

3.4 Integrating Narratives into Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

3.4.1 Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)

As argued previously, narratives are of particular epistemological and ontological significance by not only enabling to account for the sequence of events in representative ways but by also offering causal and emotional integrity shaping how one is positioned and position *Others* (Forchtner, 2020: 304). Departing from this central premise of centrality of narratives in one's social life, this study attempts to integrate the underexplored role of narratives in the conceptual architecture of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to better comprehend the historically-embedded discursive means employed by the right-wing populist actors in persuading public the necessity and acceptability of a specific course of action as well as their normalization.

First of all, in analyzing policy narratives I build on the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) which offers a detailed and systematized account in understanding the core structure of the narratives with a particular focus on the capacity of narratives in shaping public policy at multiple levels of analyses (Jones and McBeth, 2010; Shanahan et al. 2018). To begin with NPF defines narratives as ''stories with a temporal sequence of events unfolding in a plot that is populated by dramatic moments, symbols, and archetypal characters, culminating in a moral to the story'' (Jones and McBeth 2010: 329). Accordingly, the NPF holds that narratives share certain common characteristics that can be identified and generalized empirically across different policy contexts such as the *setting,* (discursive representation of the context, i.e. the institutional and legal setting, cultural and economic conditions), *characters* (which may include victims, villains, heroes, allies or opponents), *plot* (cause-effect mechanism linking characters and setting into an arc of action); and a *moral* (normatively charged policy solution or call for change) (Shanahan et al. 2018).

While not all of these ingredients need to be present in identifying a policy narrative, the NPF holds that at least one mentioning of a *character* and a *policy moral* is required (McBeth et al., 2014: 229). As identified by the NPF, while there may be other characters in a narrative story, narratives typically include a villain who is responsible from a given loss, a victim who suffers from the loss or the problem, and a hero who is portrayed as the only actor capable of solving the problem (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2017). Additionally, in a policy narrative, a story should involve a moral positioning which provides a normatively charged ending to the perceived problem. These narrative elements, according to NPF, provides causal coherence in that it prescribes how one event

leads to another, which finally culminates into an emotionally charged appeal affiliating with actor's own biographical narratives and sense of identity (Stone, 2012; Blum & Kuhlmann, 2019). Apart from these categories, this study will give special attention to the exploration of the *temporality* inherent in the NPF framework with its connection to plot, setting and characters to capture how the narrative reproductions of the 'past' act as a significant affective means for stimulating emotions and ontological security in policy legitimation. In this context, by going beyond the traditional focus of the NPF, the present study offers a novel approach by leveraging the NPF framework to the analytical lens of Lacanian fantasy and ontological security in order to facilitate a more enhanced framework for understanding the affective pull of populist policy narratives. By drawing insights from the NPF framework the below section offers a critical narrative analysis rooted in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).

3.4.2 Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and Framework for Mythopoetic Legitimation

Discourse-historical approach (DHA) is one of the main strands of the broadly defined field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Wodak & Meyer,2016a; Wodak, 2015), which is primarily concerned with the larger discursive context in which the linguistic practices are embedded beyond the text level, as well as other forms of meaning-making devices such as visuals or speeches in the reproduction of social reality including social construction of identities and power relations (Wodak, 2015; Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili, 2019). Informed by this critical stance towards the empirical analysis beyond the taken-for-granted meanings (Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili, 2019), DHA is specifically interested in the construction of identities with a focus on the historical dimension of the discourse formation (Wodak, 2015).

The focus on discursive strategies from the perspective of DHA is particularly relevant in unraveling the specific linguistic and rhetorical means political actors engage with when trying to legitimize a particular course of action such as demonizing *Others* or naturalizing forms of discrimination. DHA, in this sense, provides theoretical tools to account for the mobilizing potential of a particular policy scheme or reform with particular focus on its context-dependent modes of argumentation and legitimation; particularly how a certain policy is articulated, by which actors, in which historical or socio-political context, and for which legitimatory aims (Bennett, 2022). It is against this

background that the narratives, as central linguistic forms that make our social world meaningful (Forchtner, 2016), relate to the central analytical premises of the DHA by recognizing their affective, persuasive and strategic potential in the intertwined process of identity building and legitimation.

Besides, by systematically integrating the micro/or meso narratives (personal or group level) with the broader macro-linguistic context (i.e., historical and institutional), DHA provides insights into a better understanding of narrative-analytical approaches. In particular, the joint focus endorsed by the critical-analytical perspectives yields a more robust framework in exploring policy narratives by going beyond the dividing lines across levels of analyses, but rather focusing on the inherent interaction between the language, power and social structures (Souto-Manning, 2014). Accordingly, given the strong emphasis on numerous contextual factors in the production of discourse as well as the recognition of its historical nature (Wodak, 2016), it is argued that DHA is particularly well suited for understanding the context-sensitive nuances of populist storytelling in the selected cases.

Drawing insights from the analytical tools of DHA as well as the NPF framework, this study develops its own methodological perspective to explore the instrumentalization of the temporally-rooted meanings in justification of policy positions. Accordingly, a methodological framework is offered based on the interaction between the populist storytelling and the process of legitimation. Building on the previous studies on legitimization (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), I give special emphasis on the *mythopoetic legitimation* (legitimization via history) as one of the legitimization strategies in discourse identified by van Leeuween (2008) which has received less attention as compared to other strategies (Bennett, 2022) such as authorization (legitimization via authority, customs, laws), moralization (legitimization via values) and rationalization (legitimization via expected utility).

Mythopoetic legitimization is originally conceptualized by the works of Van Leeuween as a strategy of discursive legitimization via storytelling (Leeuween, 2008) in the form of cautionary stories, moral tales that inform mythical/fictional mode of social action (Bennett, 2022), while the earlier work by Leeuween and Wodak (1999) conceptualizes mythopoesis as a ‘‘story with a purpose’’ (Bennett, 2022: 371). However, as argued by

Forchtner and Özvatan (2022), the existing conceptualizations of narrativization as a legitimation strategy represents a ‘‘case of mistaken category conflation’’ given that narratives- as central sense making devices- in fact underpins all forms of legitimization strategies, thus, they are already ‘everywhere’ (Bennett, 2022). Building on this critique, Bennett (2022) conceptualizes mythopoesis as ‘‘*legitimation through history’’* or more specifically, ‘‘*selective narratives of history* ‘‘including myths, national traumas or moral tales that are treated as ‘‘truths’’ or ‘‘canonical stories’’ (Bennett, 2022: 371), which facilitates ‘‘desire for closure, coherence and fullness’’ (Bennett, 2022: 373; Forchtner 2016) in justification of political action.

> In particular, legitimation is a form of recontextualization, through which new meanings are produced by the integration of meanings that institutions and processes already possess (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 110; van Leeuwen 2008). More than this though, the recontextualization of first-order objectivations is the discursive strategy underpinning legitimation, and especially mythopoesis, which is the telling of one story in order to tell another. Every time a sign is used as a signifier, we bear witness to a subjective, strategic repurposing of a pre-existing concept marked by its taken-for-grantedness. Their construction, telling and retelling is never arbitrary but rather intersubjectively negotiated (Bennett, 2022: 373)

Departing from this definition, it is argued that populist actors actively engage with mythopoesis as a legitimation strategy. By extending Bennett’s conceptualization of mythopoesis from legitimization ‘based on historical narratives’ towards a more holistic perspective including the fantasy, desire and emotion-inflicted aspect of historical temporality. In this way, the Lacanian inspired ontological security approach helps uncovering the often-unconscious affective registers inherent to mythopoesis. In the light of this, I propose a reading of mythopoesis as a populist strategy of persuasion based on historical and fantasmatic retelling of events, memory, myths as well as invocation of temporality through unconscious drives such as emotions, fantasized ideals and objects of desire.

Inspired by the works of Critical Discourse Studies, in particular DHA scholars (Wodak 2001; 2015; Krzyżanowski 2010; 2018) as well as using insights from the NPF scholarship, this study offers a two-fold analytical step to be followed in each empirical chapter: (i) the analysis of historical-context which maps outs the macro-discourses and (ii) the analysis of populist ‘recontextualization’ of these temporally-resonant signifiers of identity. The first stage concerns mapping out evolution of grand narratives (i.e.,

national myths, traumas) from the perspective of ontological security framework. At this macro stage of analysis, the main focus will be to unravel the historical roots and evolution of the meanings of *Self* and *Other* in both countries in the light of the 'critical junctures' that led to creation of a specific ontological security framework that inform the structural roots of Danish and Polish welfare state transformations. The second analytical step engages with the *in-depth analysis* of populist storytelling, aims at ascertaining how these historical roots, myths, ontological insecurities, emotions and fantasies (Bennett, 2022) are 'recontextualized' at the micro and meso-level linguistic order by the right-wing populist actors in the new globalized era. By building on the performative aspect of populism between the politics of crisis and reassurance, the second stage itself is offered as a two-step process; including first, the analysis of narrative construction of populist ontological security crises in the context of recent crises of globalization; second step concerns the analysis of populist social policy storytelling as a promise of ontological security.

Inspired by the NPF framework and DHA's guidelines for analyzing discursive strategies (Wodak, 2001; Reisigl's, 2017) as well as leveraging them to the analytical lens of Lacanian ontological security approach, I develop range of analytical criteria to be looked for in the selected texts (See Table 2). At this stage, I look for direct or lexical elements in the selected texts to account for how ontological security is sought via social policy narratives. Accordingly, I analyze the selected texts against the narrative elements inspired by the NPF framework, such as the characters, policy moral, setting as well as the plot (conceptualized in this study as historical/fantasmatic temporality). This includes analyzing the main characters, (either heroes, villains or victims etc.) along with the representation of the present policy setting (crisis-ridden, anxious etc.), the policy moral involving a promise of change (i.e. promise of dignity, return to normality etc.) as well as the plot involving the temporal representations of the policy narrative (through historical or fantasmatic registers).

Characters	Policy Setting	Historical/Fantasmatic Temporality	Policy Moral
• Fantasmatic, antagonistic articulation of Characters(Self/Other, Deserving/Undeserving • Reference to object of anxiety (i.e., immigrants, elites, EU) • Trope of excessive/stolen enjoyment • Affective/moral qualities associated with characters (i.e., heroes, villains, victims, deviants, cheaters, abusers etc.)	• Reference to policy setting (i.e., existing policy debates, policy actors). • Reference to economic, cultural, political, institutional setting • Affective qualities associated with the present context (crisis-ridden, anxious, victimized etc.)	• References to past moral order (historical events, myth, tales, historical figures, imageries, desires) • Coexistence of Beatific and horrific futures • Construction of the 'past' (i.e., nostalgic, glorious, traumatic) • Affective qualities associated with the 'past' (fear, loss, pride, hope, humiliation, shame, anger and so forth)	• Mythopoetic and fantasmatic articulation of policy moral (anxiety-free or disastrous) • Reference to object of desire (i.e., sovereignty, freedom, morality, tradition) • Affective qualities associated with the policy moral (ontological security, recognition, pride, dignity, superiority, self-esteem)

Table 2: Analytical Criteria for Critical Narrative Analysis

Informed by the above analytical table, the proposed framework follows an *in-depth critical narrative analysis* in trying to understand the legitimization of puzzling social policy turns as well as the 'mainstreaming' (Wodak, 2019; 2020) of exclusionary forms of welfare citizenship in the cases of Denmark and Poland. As argued by interpretivist and critical analytical accounts, a qualitative *in-depth focus* is particularly fruitful in studying normalization of forms of exclusion, discrimination or racism given the inadequacy of traditional measurement methods in accounting for often codded and implicit linguistic means political agents (re)produce identities and alter norms (Wodak, 2015). To sum, using theoretical insights from the CDS as well as the qualitative NPF scholarship, this section has presented the proposed methodological incorporation of the narrative analysis into the backbone of the discourse-historical approach. Next section will elaborate on the case-specific data collection methods to conduct the empirical investigation.

3.5 Data Collection

Drawing on the aforementioned analytical framework, the empirical analysis of social policy transformations in the cases of Denmark and Poland is primarily based on the qualitative in-depth analysis of political discourse produced by the right-wing populist or populist-inspired political agents in the context of the ''EU's long decade of crisis''

between 2008-2022. To begin with, concerning text selection, the case studies draw on political discourses recontextualized in range of genres and spaces such as political speeches, special addresses, newspaper articles, blogs, policy documents, press releases, party programmes, election manifestos or social media posts. While the empirical approach on different genres aligns with the CDS's principles of intertextuality and interdiscursivity enabling to detect the inherent relationship between the texts and genres, it is particularly essential when analyzing the populist movements and their rhetoric realized across range of social domains in shaping public opinion (Wodak, 2015). In this connection, by drawing insights from the CDS research, these texts-written or spoken-are selected based upon 'purposive sampling' (Wodak, 2015) which would provide the most relevant data in line with the theoretical aims of this study by ensuring that the analyzed texts provide insights on the central themes and research questions identified in this study.

Accordingly, based on the proposed analytical framework, the texts are chosen in a way to reflect the narrative performativity of populism between the politics of crisis and reassurance in the making of social policy. In this respect, the focus is first given to the texts produced by populist politicians that specifically invoke crises of ontological insecurity in the context of the major global crises during 2008-2022. At this stage of sampling, specific focus is given to speech acts produced by the populist actors in relation to major crises of globalization such as the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, Eurozone crisis of 2010, the so-called refugee ''crisis'' of 2015 as well as the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These crises are commonly conceptualized as severe external shocks that severely affected the EU and provide emotional opportunities for populist politicians to impose new meanings on social experience and identity constructions in European societies (Wodak, 2018). Similarly, the broad body of ontological security literature highlights the anxiety-generating effects of globalization expressed by feelings of increased insecurity, deprivation and loss, which may increase the psychological appeal of populist politics and policy solutions (Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022: 529). Relatedly, the time-frame is also chosen with reference to the relevant literature in studying welfare state transformations in Europe, captured as some of the critical junctures that severely affected the size, composition, policy context as well as perceptions of welfare citizenship in various European welfare states (Schumacher & van Kersbergen, 2016; Otjes et al. 2018; Breve, 2019).

Thus, at this initial step, the texts are chosen to shed light on the crisis-nurturing strategies employed by the right-wing populist actors in translating the heightened global anxiety into context-specific national emergencies in their respective context. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of the study, special focus is given to speech acts which political actors invoke fantasies, past memories, foundational myths either implicitly or explicitly in justification of the crisis stories. The selected texts for the analysis of crisis stories mainly comprise political discourses expressed through public speeches, press releases, election speeches or social media posts. At the second stage of analysis, on the other hand, the focus is given to political discourse around the major social policy reforms and debates adopted in response to perceived national crises in Denmark and Poland.

In the case of Denmark, the empirical analysis is conducted in relation to major global shocks during 2008-2022 to account for country's remarkable exclusionary turn in relation to welfare state and access to social citizenship. In particular, the empirical interest lies in how the populist construction of Denmark's alleged 'demographic crisis' around immigration have been used to legitimize various exclusionary social policy responses in Denmark. In doing this, the primary focus is given to political discourse conveyed by key political figures from the right-wing populist Danish People's Party (DF) alongside the populist-inspired discourse produced by the Danish mainstream politics, including the Social Democrats, and center-right Liberals. Accordingly, the empirical analysis primarily focuses on speech acts produced by Danish politicians and officials, including party leaders, prime ministers, members of parliament and immigration ministers.

In order to reach the public speeches by the politicians, the empirical material is primarily gathered from the website (https://dansketaler.dk/arkiv/) which is a huge up-to-date collection of current and historical public speeches made by the Danish politicians. As it is stated in the opening of website, the collection sheds light on the ''shared speech history'' of Denmark providing direct access to Danish speech act produced approx. 1850 to the present day. Within this huge archive, most importantly, I have made use of annual party speeches, constitutional speeches, new year's speeches as well as other public speeches deployed on special occasions and gatherings by the prominent policy figures. Especially, the annual party speeches as well as the new years' addresses as important

part of the Danish political communication culture, provide rich political discourse on politicians' policy positions. Secondly, I have also obtained data from Danish online news sources such as Politiken, Berlingske, B.T Ekstra Bladet, Jyllands-Posten and Information. These news sources are selected as some of the top national new papers in Denmark that would provide primary data on the public discourse of politicians from different ideological positions. In addition to public speeches and online news sources, Danish parliamentary website (https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/) is also a valuable medium to access the political debates on key policy social policy reforms. Finally, social media has also provided additional insights in the case of Denmark, which is also a powerful political medium exposing the ways populist actors disseminates their exclusionary agenda into the everyday politics (Wodak, 2021). Thus, additional data is also gathered from leaders' social media posts or comments such as Twitter and Facebook, especially from political actors such as DF's Martin Henriksen who vocally use social media to express political views.

Finally, in tracing the policy turns in Denmark during the identified period, the empirical focus is given to the policy areas that have been exposed to most significant transformation over the recent decades in in terms of facilitating differentiated conceptualizations of social citizenship such as labor market policies, social housing, social assistance, cultural integration policies as well as symbolic politics governing the social and civil rights. In Denmark, rather than focusing on a single policy area, I aim to provide an overview of the exclusionary policy development in the domain of social policy. In this sense, I aim to trace the evolution of the right-wing (and also populist-inspired mainstream) political discourse in the context of key social policy debates and reforms concerning immigrants' access to social citizenship to understand how the universal Danish welfare state has gradually moved towards a sphere for exclusion and social control.

The empirical analysis in the case of Poland similarly covers the post-2008 context until 2022, which sheds light on the recent evolution of the Polish welfare state into a distinctive regime of expansionary familalism. In the case of Poland, the analysis is primarily centered on gathering political discourse from the Law and Justice Party (PiS) which holds the government office since 2015, and since then has been the main policy agent in the area of family policy in Poland. In tracing the evolution of Polish familial

turn, I primarily gathered data from the PiS' publicly availably party programmes from 2005 to 2022. In the case of Poland, these policy documents were particularly useful as they provided highly long and detailed presentations of policies, including social and family policies. Secondly, as in the Danish case, I have made great use of Polish Parliamentary website (https://www.sejm.gov.pl/), which similarly provides access into parliamentary debates around key policy changes in the domain of family, gender and demographic policy, also including the debates on the EU integration since the early 2000s. In the case of Poland, PiS' official party website (https://pis.org.pl/) also provides rich political discourse in the form of policy documents, press releases and interviews with top government officials. Finally, additional data is also gathered from social media posts such as through Facebook, especially from political actors such as Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki who actively use Facebook to express policy positions.

In terms of policy area, this empirical chapter is mainly centered around the evolution of family and gender policy in Poland. In doing this, the main emphasis is to trace the legitimizing political discourse produced around the family policy instruments, such as cash benefits, social assistance, maternity leave or family housing etc. However, I have also focused on the legitimizing discourse around the adoption of other pro-family social policy instruments such as the retirement or early education policies. In the case of Poland, the recent familial policy turn is also intimately linked with gender and demographic policy as I also focused on gathering political discourse on the major policy changes in the area of reproductive rights, governance of marriage as well as social and civil rights of sexual minorities.

To sum, in both country cases, the policy areas are selected on the basis of exhibiting the most notable transformation in recent years which inform their divergent exclusionary paths. While in the case of Denmark, the main policy areas cover the policy changes concerning immigrants' access to welfare and social citizenship in the post-2008 context, in Poland I have focused primarily on the evolution of family policy discourse from the mid 2000s to the present. Similarly, in each case this study adopts a case-specific data collection method in terms of representing the country-specific political communication culture, thus, focus on different mediums of political communication. Accordingly, given their different political culture as well as target audiences to whom the policy narratives are communicated, in each case the aim is to prioritize the data that would serve the most

relevant examples of policy narration that are most likely to resonate with their respective public.

Chapter 4

DEFENDING THE DANISH WAY OF LIFE: THE ROLE OF MYTHS AND FANTASY IN POPULIST NARRATIVES OF WELFARE

4.1 Introduction

> This is why the Danish People's Party is here…to ensure the welfare society that generations before us have built up. In order to preserve a society where we basically move around in safety and can have trust in each other…We must ensure that the society we have been handed down from previous generations, and which we value so much, can be preserved and defended… The Danish People's Party must be known as a party that zealously throws itself into the fight for core welfare – conditions for the elderly, health, security. But also, as a party that never doubts how values are created. Who earns the money? The money, which we can then talk about how best to distribute in our welfare society. And when we talk about distribution, as you know, you can only use the same krone once. And we have to choose: welfare, security and trust? Or waste money on failed and hopeless integration, language courses and expensive housing...The goal is to preserve the country as we like it, not to remake it all or replace the population (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Speech, 15.09.2015)

This statement was made by Danish People's Party politician Kristian Thulesen Dahl in an annual party meeting in September 2015, following the *long summer* of refugee movement from Turkey to Europe in 2015. By reclaiming itself as the defender of Danes' core welfare, speech constructs the welfare state as a 'zero-sum' social ideal that should only be enjoyed by the 'deserving' Danes, while reinforcing immigrants as undeserving *Others,* who not only unjustly benefits themselves at the expense of the natives, but also threatens the very existence of safe, familiar, and superior Danish way of life. Most remarkably, by invoking an imagery of a mythical welfare society, welfare state is secured only to those 'deserving' Danes who have built and contributed to it over generations, while directly excluding the 'undeserving' immigrants from the imagined welfare community. Through this highly simplified, emotionally-loaded Manichean storytelling, welfare state is reconstructed as a binary choice between the idyllic/privileged and anxiety-ridden/disastrous Danish futures. Then, in governing the ensuing refugee 'crisis', this policy storytelling not only foregrounds the very forms of insecurities, emotions and

myths rooted in Danish historical ontological security, but also reactivates desires for a 'nativist recapture' of the welfare state from the 'undeserving' immigrant.

What deserves an insightful emphasis is how and why the Danish welfare state, which once was categorized as one of the Europe's most universal and generous systems of welfare, has gradually transformed into a sphere for exclusionary, punitive and assimilationist social politics. Strikingly enough, Denmark, which was once identified as such has followed notably distinct path in relation to its Nordic social democratic counterparts both regarding controlling immigration as well as in social policy (Hagelund, 2020). Especially, after 2015, Danish welfare state has embraced a particular authoritarian and assimilationist turn towards non-Western immigrants with the adoption of ever-expanding means for symbolic forms of *Othering*, exclusion and subordination. Most notably, Danish case is also an exception with respect to mainstreaming of exclusionary welfare visions across the political landscape, making the country a specific 'social laboratory' within the populism-social policy nexus (Mudde, 2019; Meret, 2011; Schumacher and Kersbergen, 2016).

In the light of these, the exceptional case of Denmark constitutes the main puzzle of this study aiming to unpack the complex pathways through which one of the most *inclusionary* welfare states in the Scandinavian region as well as globally laid the groundwork for the emergence of a distinctively *exclusionary* politics. In untangling this puzzling shift, this study offers a new theoretical link between social policy and ontological security in which the psycho-linguistic agency of right-wing populist politics is central in redrawing the boundaries of national belonging and social citizenship. In this sense, by adopting a Lacanian ontological security approach to the study of populism and social policy, it is argued that populist social policy narratives produced by Danish right-wing populism are particularly built on a historically and fantasmatically informed narrative templates, repackaging social problems and policy solutions in a highly simplistic, emotionally-loaded, black/white manner. These temporally-informed narratives of nationhood and peoplehood, as it is argued, play a pivotal role in understanding the growing mainstreaming of exclusionary welfare visions across the Danish political spectrum.

In this sense, in the first section, I first present a brief background on the Danish welfare state transformation over the recent decades as well as the review of the existing literature. After establishing the necessity of a historically-informed, contextual analysis, I trace the historical origins of key markers of Danish national identity through the lens of ontological security and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In what follows, the next section will provide a brief empirical background on the evolution and thriving of the Danish People's Party (DF) in the context key junctures feeding the DF's emotive capital over the recent decade. In the second part of the chapter, by building on the 'performative' aspect of populism with a focus on crisis and reassurance, I offer a three-staged periodization of the evolution of Danish welfare state. As such, this section will specifically focus on populist social policy narration in response to three major 'crisis' moments between 2008 and 2022; which are the global financial crisis of 2008; the so-called refugee crisis of 2015/16 and the Covid-19 global pandemic. It is argued through frequent reliance on temporally-resonant narrative tropes, DF's social policy narration promises emotional and ontological closure for the 'deserving' at times of heightened anxiety by providing Danish subjects with identification and differentiation opportunities, while further excluding the 'undeserving' from the imagined social contract.

4.2 The Danish Puzzle: Background and Existing Approaches

Denmark is commonly known as a 'welfare state paradise' with its universal public healthcare, education, high degrees of social protection, extensive social security, income equality and female employment in the labor market (Greve, 2016; Finnsdottir and Hallgrimsdottir, 2019). In addition, for many years Denmark is famously ranked as being some of the happiest countries in the world due to its high quality of life, good work-life balance, high levels of economic security as well as low levels of social stratification (Bjerre et al., 2021). The major guiding principle underpinning the Danish welfare state is that all citizens are equally granted with fundamental rights and benefits cradle to grave based solely on their 'citizenship' regardless of their personal or financial background (Finnsdottir and Hallgrimsdottir, 2019). As such, Denmark along with other Nordic social models during the 20th century, came to be recognized as a distinctive type of welfare state driven by strong commitment to inclusive and egalitarian citizenship as well as key progressive values around social solidarity, equality and universalism (Finnsdottir and Hallgrimsdottir, 2019).

This inclusive vision of social citizenship was deeply rooted in the ‘golden age’ of the welfare state after the Second World War, in which Danish social model along with other Scandinavian welfare states laid the basis for ‘‘socially-liberal conception of social citizenship’’ (Seeman, 2020). Conceptualized as the most enhanced form of egalitarian distribution (Esping-Andersen, 1990) the universal Nordic social model is also associated with ‘‘higher tolerance towards immigration’’ (Bell et al., 2022) which inhibit the social stratification to a large extent. In this connection, in the context of post-war principles of welfare inclusion and human rights (Soysal & Soyland, 1994), the welfare state was also seen in large part as central to integration of immigrant and refugee communities into Danish society. Accordingly, the country was also famously cited as being the first signature of UN Refugee Convention as early as 1951. In addition, one of the most liberal and progressive immigration laws in Europe in 1983, granting refugees legal rights around ‘‘family reunification, language training, financial and residential support and a work permit’’ (Bjerre et al, 2021:135). In this way, for a long time, this inclusionary and universal conception of social citizenship has also served as a key ‘‘instrumentalized ideal’’ (Browning, 2021: 34) for Denmark to cultivate a tolerant, egalitarian, progressive and authentic self-image both domestically and internationally (Pace, 2018: 786).

However, since the 1990’s, the Danish welfare utopia has gradually been challenged. In fact, towards the end of the 20th century under the impulses of economic stagnation and rise of transnational immigration, the social citizenship had become increasingly ‘contractualized’ (Seeman, 2020) on the basis of political discourses and workfare-based policy measures promoting an idealized Danish welfare citizenry based on ‘activeness’ and contribution to society in terms of labor and tax. The erosion of social citizenship also reflected the broader retreat from Keynesian notions of universalism and solidarity from the late 1970s onwards in the context of neoliberal globalization (Balorda, 2019, Sainsbury 2012). However, the most remarkable transformation at the turn of the century was marked by the rise of right-wing populism in Denmark and growing politicization of immigration, leading to ethno-nationalist and culturalist claims to citizenship and belonging in the Danish welfare state. This gradually resulted in overall retrenchment of immigrant access to social benefits and tightening of monitoring procedures for the welfare recipients (Schumacher & Van Kersbergen 2016).

As immigration has been dominating the Danish public discourse since the late 1980's, the universalist character of the welfare state has undergone significant changes, particularly in relation to growing demarcation among the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups in the imagined welfare society. The rise of anti-immigrant/nativist right-wing populism since the 1990s is commonly argued to be an influential political force behind the gradual erosion of social citizenship in Denmark, redefining the ideal citizenry based on compatibility with culture, ethnicity, language and core Danish values, other than financial contribution (Mouritsen, 2015). Particularly, with the pivotal policy influence of populist right-wing Danish People's Party (DF) since 2001, both right and left-wing governments have adopted ever-more restricting stance in relation to social citizenship, as exemplified by steady reduction of social rights and financial benefits for the immigrants, refugees as well as the 'undeserving' poor (Bjerre et al., 2021).

Having established this, this study asks why and how a country, once identified as one of the most inclusive and egalitarian systems of welfare, has transformed into a sphere for exclusionary and authoritarian welfare state politics. Although Denmark was long considered as an exceptional case in relation to its exclusionary welfare turn in the face of contemporary immigration, its more recent punitive and assimilationist turn deserves further theoretical and empirical investigation. Accordingly, scholars frequently position Denmark as a frontrunner with respect to its ever-restrictive immigration-hostile environment in comparison to its Nordic social democratic counterparts such as Norway and Sweden (Brochmann et. al., 2012; Hagelund, 2020). Furthermore, another notable aspect of the Danish turn is the growing resilience and resonance of exclusionary welfare visions across the political landscape and public. In that respect, Denmark is often regarded as a particular social laboratory in the populism literature with respect to the widespread mainstreaming of anti-immigrant populist sentiments across the political spectrum, including the Social Democrats (Mudde, 2019; Meret, 2011; Schumacher and Kersbergen, 2016).

In the light of these, Danish case is particularly illuminating to study the broader appeal of exclusionary politics in a universal welfare state context. In particular, the post-2015 policy context, in which the Danish welfare state has radically moved towards an authoritarian and punitive policy setting, provides a fertile research avenue to study the ways populist actors communicate their messages in justification of exclusionary welfare

politics. In this light, this case study asks how we can understand the Danish turn in the context of wider transformation of the mainstream social agendas towards authoritarian and punitive practices of social exclusion. Thus, the Danish case offers a productive avenue for analyzing the resilience and normalization of exclusionary welfare visions both as a policy agenda as well as a normative ideal in a universal welfare state context.

The existing studies on the impact of radical right-wing parties (RRWP) on the shape of the welfare state in the Scandinavian context produced rich literature, particularly in relation to thriving of welfare chauvinism in the right-wing populist social agendas. The existing demand-side approaches have focused on the individual preferences for the welfare chauvinistic appeals in the Scandinavian context in the context of recent crises of globalization. As such they mostly focused on different versions of discontent such as the perceived economic insecurity (Hjorth, 2016) or socio-cultural/identity-related grievances (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Hjorth, 2016). Although individual preferences, as major drivers of political action, are also pivotal for the prospects of social citizenship and the shape of the welfare state, they only tell limited part of the story in exploring the influence and mechanisms of populist politics in transferring these impulses into social policymaking. Although both the economic and socio-cultural impulses around globalization have an explanatory value in understanding the thriving of exclusionary policy context, a more nuanced approach is offered through the supply-side analysis of populism (Moffit, 2016; Aslanidis, 2016; Hawkins et al, 2018). Namely, even these pressures exist, how can we understand the Danish populist agency in translating these impulses into nationally resonant crises? Likewise, how can we understand the broader mainstreaming of exclusionary welfare visions across the Danish mainstream.

In this sense, supply-side approaches provide better insights into policy analysis by focusing on the diverse ways and strategies parties use welfare chauvinism in the social policy designs. Accordingly, existing contributions in the Danish context mostly draw on the effects of populist partisan politics, "political opportunity and bargaining structures on the social policy outcomes (Careja et, al. 2016; Schumacher and Kersbergen, 2016; Chueri, 2022; Römer et. al, 2021) with some also focusing on the populist-mainstream interaction in the social policy sphere (Chueri, 2022; Schumacher and Kersbergen, 2016). Although, few contributions in this line of research gave special attention to the wording of party statements and speeches in legitimation of restrictive social policy reforms

(Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Careja et al.,2016; Finnsdottir, M., & Hallgrimsdottir, H. K., 2019), the literature mostly lacks discourse- analytical perspectives more specifically narrative-centered analyses in exploring the ways Danish populist actors disseminate their exclusionary visions to broader sections of the public, including the mainstream politics. Accordingly, to fill this gap, through the proposed theoretical link between Lacanian ontological security and social policy, I offer a historically-informed, critical narrative analysis to explore the communicative agency of populism in driving the Danish exclusionary welfare path.

4.3 Danish Ontological Security in The Making: From Historical Myths to Populist Fantasies of Danishness

The contemporary Danish political discourse on welfare citizenship and immigration can be best understood through the exploration of the peculiarities of the nationally embedded meanings of Self and Other within the country's historical heritage. In this connection, in the light of the critical junctures in Denmark's history that disrupted the established understandings of Self and Other, this section maps out the evolution of key narratives of self-identity that inform the 'fantasized ideal' (Browning, 2021) of Danishness today. Accordingly, it is argued that the traumatic upheavals that the country underwent since the 18th century characterized by a long history of territorial losses and political subjugations (Østergård, 2012: 42) had profound implications on the imagined Danish community in construction. In particular, Denmark's defeat by Prussia and Austria in the war of 1864, which is commonly referred to as the ''Danish trauma'' in the existing literature (Borevi, 2017: 369), has gradually laid the foundation for a strictly homogenous national identity that abides today structured around fantasies of national homogeneity, authenticity and distinctiveness (Hellström, 2016).

In this respect, departing from the centrality of 'Danish trauma' within the construction of the imagined community of Denmark, the next section will map out the evolution of key national narratives and myths which constitute the building blocks of the contemporary Danish ontological security regime. Against this background, it is argued that the historically constructed national narratives of distinctiveness not only provided a sense of status and ontological security to the Danish *Self* in construction but has since then been commonly instrumentalized in domestic and international politics as an

affective mobilizing means, particularly in relation to its encounter with diversity and Otherness. Accordingly, the following sub-sections explore the founding national myths and grand narratives that constitute the meanings of Danishness today, while being regularly invoked around the discussions of immigration and multiculturalism in justification of the exclusionary social policy reforms since the 2015.

The Myth of 'Lille Danmark': Small and Proud Nation

In order to understand the exclusionary turn of the Danish hegemonic discourse towards immigration today, one has to first untangle the broader historical and nation-specific narrative context in which the specific aspects of Danishness are constituted as ''distinctively exclusive'' (Hellström, 2016: 206). Following Østergaard (2006), it is argued that the Danish national identity and political culture are the result of two paradoxical pasts. The first is commonly referred to the early historical period until the mid-19th century when Denmark was a multi-ethnic and supra-national empire located in a vast territorial area ''bordering Russia in the east and reaching into the American continental plate in the West'' (Bergmann, 2017: 33). In the 18th century, the Danish state included the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, the Jutland peninsula, present day Norway, Iceland as well as Faroe Islands and Greenland. Characterized by a long and uninterrupted trajectory of state sovereignty dating back to the early Middle ages, including the Vikings, Danish kingdom was one of the oldest and most externally influential kingdoms in the world (Østergaard, 2006: 55).

In accordance with the vast territorial influence during the imperial times, the ethnic Danes were also enjoying a deep sense of superiority and autonomy over the subjugated populations (Bergmann, 2017: 33), which nourished a particular sense of national pride and self-esteem in relation to its Self-identity. Besides, despite the influence of cosmopolitan ideas, the intensified fear over German dominance since the late 18th century also contributed to a sense of homogenous national identity revolving around the virtues of the peasant folk (people), (Agius, 2013: 244; Bergmann, 2017:40), while Danishness was excessively being reproduced as against the German *Other* (Engelhardt, 2007; 213). In this context, alongside the emerging valorization of the peasant folk as the cornerstone of Danish Self-identity, its imperial heritage marked by an episode of state sovereignty and vast territorial influence had left an imaginary of Danish distinctiveness

and authenticity underpinned by a particular sense of national pride and status. The intensified threat of German Other since the last decades of the 18th century further served to consolidation of the 'we-feeling' as well as the aspired Danish distinctiveness and authenticity, a myth that re-emerges more strongly since the second half of the 19th century (Kaspersen, 2020: 190).

The second episode of the Danish history, in contrast, was marked by significant critical junctures which radically disrupted the idealized self-image of the Denmark as well as Danishness as part of extensive empire. This period was characterized by repeated and prolonged military defeats since the early 19th century such as the loss of Norway in 1815 and Schleswig-Holstein in 1864. The eventual loss of Danish-speaking North Schleswig in 1864 to Prussia/Germany was a great shock to Danes, when Denmark lost one-third of its territories and shrank into one of the smallest states in Europe from a large and influential empire (Bergmann, 2017:33; Geugjes, 2021:12). Conceptualized as the moment of country's ''deepest humiliation'' (Yndigegn, 2018: 412) the Danish defeat in 1864 fundamentally challenged the existing perceptions of Danishness and its alleged status and national pride, while forging for new identifications in restoration of the anxious Self.

Despite the continuous loss of power since the 17th century onwards, the extent of the defeat in 1864 was extremely traumatic to Danes and how they imagined themselves and the Others. As Kaspersen (2020: 189) maintains, until the defeat of 1864 ''Denmark was still one of the most militarized societies in Europe and its self-perception, it was more than strong enough to defeat Prussia''. This Self-identity was fundamentally shaken in the aftermath of the defeat, triggering a deep sense of ontological insecurity over the perceived loss of psychological superiority, agency, status and self-esteem, which had long informed the Danish autobiographical narratives. Besides, the rise of Germany into a major power nearby had become an additional source of anxiety to the existing narratives of the Danish Self, which also led to a profound reorientation of Danish national identity as well as the existing national fantasies to be structured around a particular sense of 'we-feeling' (Kaspersen, 2020:189) and distinctiveness.

To begin with, both the military defeats as well as the continuous fear of shrinking due to emergent German threat at the very Danish border after 1864 had created an almost

national consensus (Kaspersen, 2020; 192) among the political elite that Denmark should avoid military confrontation and rather ‘‘turn its gaze inward’’ (Booth, 2014: 24). This ‘inward turn’ (Hansen, 2002) was most famously manifested by political slogans such as ‘‘what was lost outside is won within (Hvav udad tabes, skal indad vindes)’’ (Bergmann, 2017: 42), which was believed to be best type of defense in withstanding any external enemy. Namely, the extent of the loss and the continuous German threat had gradually generated a national consensus that Denmark could only survive and prosper through a strong ‘we-identity’ (Kaspersen, 2020:198). Thus, rather than invoking national fantasies around Denmark’s heroic military past to reaffirm ontological security, it was mainly through the aspired internal homogeneity that promised a restoration of ‘‘wholeness’’ (Eberle, 2019) in Danish identity.

In this connection, driven by an existential urge to preserve ‘‘what little they had left’’ (Booth, 2014: 43), preserving homogeneous Danish identity internally became a key ontological security-reaffirming strategy in governing the collective trauma and the ensuing crisis mood in the post-1864 national context. In this connection, the emergent popular romantic nationalism of the time played a vital role in reconstituting the ontological security regime of the newly emerging Danish state through a ‘‘national fantasy of homogeneity’’ (Cash and Kinnvall, 2017: 268). In the wake of the national crisis, revitalizing these identity-signifiers became powerful anxiety-controlling mechanisms given their ability to foster sense of unity, belonging and rootedness through which the disrupted Danes could revalidate a safe, continuous and positive Self. At the same time, the projected sense of homogeneity also provided new identification opportunities for the disrupted Danish Self to reclaim its declined authenticity, status and sense of national pride.

Accordingly, as argued by Østergård (2012), the construction of Danish national identity in the post-1864 national context particularly reflected such fantasized portrayal of Danishness through a seemingly paradoxical construction of Self-identity. Central to this new national self-image was the remaking of Denmark as a ‘‘small but proud nation’’ (Geugjes, 2021: 11) through the imaginary of *Lille Danmark* (Little Denmark). Other than the desires for a strong and homogenous national identity, the cultivated self-image also projected a self-sufficient and progressive nation with a powerful *folk* (people) which was under constant threat from external Others (Geugjes, 2021: 11). For Østergård (2012),

this aspired identity was closely linked with Denmark's two paradoxical pasts. Namely, the existence of a long and uninterrupted sovereign statehood on the one hand, and its more recent history marked by traumatic territorial losses on the other, eventually translated into a contradictory self-identity that combines ''self-confidence with apparent humility" (Østergård, 2012: 37).

Rooted in a ''fantasmatic'' logic (Eberle, 2019), the *Lille Danmark* imaginary was also driven by an inherent paradox projecting both ontological security and insecurity simultaneously. Namely, in the face of greatly reduced status and the emergent geo-political vulnerability, the fantasized ideal of *Lille Danmark* not only exposed ontological insecurity but also promised an idealized sense of superiority, distinctiveness and authenticity over a small nation that can sustain itself and be its 'own' (Østergård 2012: 37). The identification with smallness, in this sense, was to deal with the wounded national pride, self-esteem and status, while promising a desired sense of security of identity through an imagined internal homogeneity. The aspired status of smallness, thus, attempts at reaffirming ontological security through a renewed emphasis on an imagined distinctiveness over a homogeneous nation that is unified, progressive, consensual, politically stable and unconfrontational. At the same time, through attachment to smallness identity, the *Lille Danmark* also sustains the deeply seated ontological insecurity rooted in the national trauma of 1864 led by anxiety over further shrinking and external *Others*. In this respect, the newly cultivated Danish self-image in the post-1864 context was proven to be an affectively powerful rhetorical means, providing a legitimate narrative through which the 'anxious' Danes could connect the collective experience of loss with their existing stable autobiography as well as allegedly authentic and distinctive *Self.*

The national fantasies that developed in the post-1864 context have also gradually translated into the international realm, including an aspiration for neutrality, non-involvement in international affairs since the early 19th century (Kaspersen, 2020: 192). Central to this identity was the belief that the principle of neutrality was a morally superior position in world affairs (Gram-Skjoldager, 2019), which also contributed to the construction of a positive self-image as well as Danish ''desires for distinction and virtuous difference'' (Browning, 2021). The newly embraced value-based parochialism did not only target its reduced territorial circumstances in European affairs in the post-

1864 context, but also become a means for reclaiming ontological security by constructing a sense of national moral self-appreciation and distinctiveness of ‘‘what little cultural and economic capital Denmark had left after the loss of its empire’’ (Booth, 2014:124).

This self-proclaimed status of distinctiveness and humanitarian Self-identity around the *Lille Danmark* was also strengthened in the aftermath of the Second World War. Especially, the Nazi-German occupation of Denmark between 1940–1945 has left crucial marks on contemporary Danish ontological security. Although it is generally acknowledged that the official Danish policy towards the occupation was that of accommodation or collaboration (Sørensen, 2005; Booth, 2014; Østergård, 2011), Danish wartime experience has gradually become a matter of collective national pride. Especially, since the early 2000s, the resistance narrative gained prominence among Danish politicians, who cultivated an image of Danish nation united against the German occupiers during the entire war (Sørensen, 2005). Since then, the notions of independence, sovereignty and freedom has also become key notions of Danish political culture and national identity, which has been commonly instrumentalized by Danish politicians to legitimize anti-EU stance, transnational immigration or activist foreign policy choices (Østergård, 2011). Finally, Danish wartime experience also empowered the Danish myth of humanitarian self-identity in the post-1864 context. In particular, the Danish rescue of Jews in 1943 from Nazi persecution, as argued by Østergård (2011: 47) has laid the foundations for a humanitarian and non-confrontational self-identity domestically and internationally since the 20th century.

Grundtvigian Legacy and the Myth of the Authentic Danish ‘Folk’ (People)

Another significant national myth emerged from the post-1864 context revolved around the prominence of the farmer-peasant folk (people) – that is, the 'common people’ within the imagined Danish community. N.F.S. Grundtvig, (1783-1872), a Danish intellectual, Lutheran priest and education thinker was perhaps the most influential figure in spearheading the projected ‘‘national reawakening’’ in the newly emerging smaller nation-state (Mouritsen and Olsen, 2013). The Grundtvig’s nationalism, which romantically celebrated the ideal of Danish smallness and homogeneity, also incorporated an idealized notion of ‘common people’ who were bounded with a collective national

spirit based on civic and moral responsibility as against the external Others (Korsgaard, 2015: 196). More specifically, under the greatly diminished circumstances, other than military means, the nationally 'empowered' rural population was imagined as the only subjectivity that could guarantee the survival and thriving of Denmark in the new, smaller state.

Accordingly, in addition to promising a sense of cohesion and belonging thus appealing to subjects' desire for stable and fuller identity, the desired ideal around the powerful folk also served as a key mobilizing narrative to resurrect the disempowered Danish *Self* by capitalizing on the subjects' need for agency, recognition, self-esteem and individual integrity in the wake of Denmark's traumatic decline. The aspired self-identity through the folk gradually developed into a core ontological construct in the imagined community, surpassing the nation or the state (Hansen, 2002). In this sense, the Grundtvig's popular nationalism, which later transformed into an ideology called as the "Grundtvigianism" (Hansen, 2002; Østergård, 2006) had profound influence in reconstituting the Danish ontological security regime in the ''New Denmark'' (Levisen, 2012: 18).

Rooted in an imagined spiritual unity, the Grundtvigan notion of folk invoked a sense of ''ideal citizen subjectivity'' as the basis of the national awakening movement in the post-1864 context. Central to this ideal was to create a 'Danish peoplehood' based on responsible and moral citizenry imbued with love of the 'fatherland' (Damsholt, 2015). Namely, Grundtvig believed that the rural population could only become the 'people' if they were able to form a heart-felt civic responsibility towards the common good rather than pursuing self-interests (Korsgaard, 2015: 201). Besides, embedded in an egalitarian myth of the 'common people', the folk was imagined in anti-elitist terms and strictly demarcated from the privileged group of elites or the so-called 'upper class' in the society (Agius, 2013: 244). Accordingly, through the fantasized ideal of folk, Grundtvig envisioned an all-embracing society in which the empowered and enlightened population, namely the peasant-farmer majority, responsible citizens. Also, the imagined Danish peoplehood was narrated as the only way to ensure a good, harmonious, virtuous and happy life as it strives to fill the perceived sense of loss, uncertainty and deprivation in the aftermath of the defeat. This utopian ideal of 'peoplehood', in this sense, provided a new basis for legitimizing the Danish national identity in the post-1864 context, while promising a continuous and positive sense of Self.

The primary means to invoke the 'we-identity' among the rural folk, according to Grundtvig, was popular education which would transform the generations of uneducated peasant-farmer masses into the "enlightened Danes" (Borish 1991 cited in Levisen, 2012: 18). The egalitarian narrative of the folk enlightenment, which eventually culminated into the establishment of folk high schools since the mid 19th century, strived to foster a sense of community and belonging across the peasant masses based on teachings of Danish history, mythology, culture and language. Behind the Grundtvigian educational philosophy, was to build a ''New Denmark'' (Levisen, 2012: 18) by revitalizing shared memories, common myths and narratives through which the Danes could enhance their sense of national pride, self-esteem, distinctiveness in the making of new community left over from the wars. In this sense, rather than formal or classical schooling based on ''rational thinking and factual knowledge'' (Levisen, 2012: 18-19) the Grundtvigian folk-enlightenment movement primarily aimed at raising national awareness among the rural masses based on narrative-based cultural and historical education.

Among the significant frames of cultural reference in the formation of the Danish folk during the 19th century was found in the shared Nordic heritage, which provided the desired sense of authenticity and legitimacy to the Danish Self in construction (Bønding, 2019). In particular, for Grundtvig, an important means to a national awakening was rooted in the Nordic (or the Old Norse) mythology, referring to a pre-Christian Scandinavian beliefs, tales and legends including Nordic hero-gods and goddesses. Furthermore, under the ontology-unsettling context of the European enlightenment, which disrupted the established narratives and legitimacy of the Church as well as the monarchy, Grundtvig believed that the Nordic mythology could provide the necessary sense of rootedness and continuity for Danish community in formation (Bønding et al., 2021). In particular, the crisis mood that followed the Schleswig Wars (1848/1864) had created a setting in which Danish intellectuals seek to reassert collective identities by reactivating the heroic Nordic past. By connecting the distant, but glorious past with the present and an idealized future, the nostalgic Nordic narratives helped maintaining ontological security by providing anxious Danes with a sense of biographical continuity, stability, while promising to ease the shame and humiliation of the present.

For instance, the revival of the Viking mythology, as part of Denmark's 'inward turn' in the aftermath of the 1864, appealed to the desired sense of rootedness and certainty by offering a legitimate narrative of who the Danes were in the past and what to expect in the future. The idealized Viking narratives, projecting the Danish Self as powerful, brave, intellectually advanced and world-ruler subjectivities (Bønding, 2019), acted as key emotive rhetorical mechanisms to reaffirm national pride, sense of self-esteem, status and distinctiveness. In this sense, the mythological 'folk spirit' rooted in the Nordic heritage, provided a historicized biographical narrative in a way to reconstitute collective identities, while providing a foundation for legitimizing new Self-identity narratives over the Danish authenticity and progressivity in the newly emerging nation-state. To sum, by lending legitimacy, authenticity as well as fostering emotional attachment through the Nordic heritage, the imagined folk helped reordering of the disrupted Danish *Self* during the turbulent 19th century, while complementing the ongoing national efforts at self-awareness around the folk-enlightenment.

Finally, the all-encompassing, informal and anti-elitist character of the Grundtvigian popular enlightenment also well resonated with the peasant movement that had been developing since the late 18th century (Levisen; 2012: 20), which eventually culminated into an ideological hegemony of the middle rural masses over the new, smaller Danish nation state. The peasant-folk ideal has even acquired a greater symbolic position with the rise of the Social Democratic movement at the turn of the 20th century. (Agius, 2013: 245). In this sense, while the imaginary of the peasant increasingly become intertwined with the people (Hansen, 2002:60), the peasant virtues have also become part of a fantasized ideal of the Danish self-perception under the newly emerging folkish democracy. The consequent ethnic and cultural homogeneity further consolidated the peasant ideological hegemony over the Danish political culture, crystallizing the values and norms such as freedom of speech, voluntarism, political anti-elitism, democracy, egalitarianism, social solidarity, tolerance, social trust and consensus (Agius, 2013: 245) as the core of Danish Self-identity. These set of values which still inform the fantasized self-image of Danish folk today both domestically and externally, function as key identity-signifiers through which the Danes could regenerate sense of ontological security, reaffirm national pride as well as articulate an authentic *Self*-narrative in contrast to the perceived *Others.* In particular, the myth of the authentic and progressive Danish *folk* continues to be an affectively instrumentalized metaphor at times of heightened

anxiety in Denmark, for instance, to be utilized in the politics of immigration, as it served to legitimize the Lille Danmark imaginary in the aftermath nation's ''deepest humiliation'' in 1864 (Yndigegn, 2018: 412).

The Myth of the Danish Welfare Society

Danish social democratic welfare state is one of the other central unifying elements within the fantasized ideal of Danishness, which was also rooted in the traumatic episode of Danish history marked by tremendous territorial and political instabilities. These critical situations, as argued by Korsgaard (2015), had gradually laid the foundations for the very elements of the Danish welfare society addressing not only the need for securing the physical well-being of its citizens, but also fostering a sense of rootedness, stability and ontological security in the midst of radical change and loss. In other words, the national trauma of 1864 had exceptionally generated a nation-wide ideational consensus among the political elite that Denmark could only thrive through a culturally/socially cohesive national community and society based on a strong ''we-feeling'' (Kaspersen, 2020: 193). Accordingly, rather than military means and ambitions, a folk-anchored internal consolidation was regarded as the only viable option for the nation's survival in the face of the emergent German threat in the aftermath of 1864.

In this specific context, as argued by Kaspersen (2020), in order to foster the necessary 'we-feeling' among the Danish folk in the newly emerging nation-state, there was a pressing need to reduce the class differences and inequalities which could potentially lead to social divisions and tensions in the society. Accordingly, the widely shared national consensus around the 'national awakening' after 1864 reinforced the necessity of establishment of strong systems of education, healthcare, social assistance, social housing as well as systems of social security underpinned by high degree of egalitarianism and political consensus (reference). In this sense, the development of welfare institutions and provisions came to be understood as a significant mechanism of defense and national survival at the time of national turmoil (Kaspersen, 2020: 194), by not only increasing the material conditions of the masses, but also reinforcing collective identities as well as restoring the nation's disrupted self-esteem, sense of individual integrity and pride. Therefore, beyond improving the livelihood of citizens, the welfare-based internal self-defense developing gradually from the late 19th century on, served as a foundational

function in resurrecting Danishness by providing the ontologically insecure Danes with a shared sense of belonging and togetherness while helping to escape the deep-seated feelings of shame and humiliation.

The ‘defensive’ function of the welfare state was further developed during the 19th and 20th centuries as the country underwent several dislocatory events including the agricultural crisis of 1870’s-1880’s, First World War, the Great Depression of 1930’s and the Second World War, including the German occupation of Denmark during 1940-43 (Kaspersen, 2020:191). While in each national emergency the welfare state came to represent the guarantee of the social cohesion by containing rising inequalities and social tensions, it was not until the Second World War that it became central to Danish Self-identity narratives. Namely, as put by Korsgaard (2015: 329): ‘‘Welfare and Danishness became one and the same: to be Danish was to identify oneself with the Danish welfare system’’. Despite the extensive influence of the Social democratic ideas on the development of the Danish welfare state as it was manifested by political slogans such as ‘‘Denmark for the people’’ during the 1930s, the expansion of welfare state was based on an almost national consensus including the liberal elites and conservatives (Hall and Korsgaard, 2015: 22). Since then and now, as maintained by Korsgaard (2006) ‘‘the welfare state, more than anything else, is what has grounded the nation in the heart of the Danish people (Korsgaard, 2006: 158), while forging values such as democracy, consensus, social solidarity, equality and trust as the cornerstone of the Danish welfare society as well as distinctive features of Danish self-image. In particular, during the post-1864 period, the development of welfare was closely associated with the mythical constructions of Denmark as a small and homogenous country with a powerful folk.

In this sense, it can be argued that the development of a democratically and universally founded Danish welfare state was deeply rooted in the ‘Danish trauma’ and the consequent ‘‘post-1864 national habitus’’ based on an exceptionally shared national and political consensus (Kaspersen, 2020: 198). Shaped under this particular setting, the discourse around the social democratic welfare state was increasingly included in the fantasized narratives of Danishness, stimulating self-images around its homogeneity, smallness and the progressive folk. In each moment of dislocation, the increased and encompassing welfare was seen as a central anxiety-controlling mechanism through which the ontologically insecure Danish folk could reproduce the underlying ‘we-feeling’

and reclaim the allegedly positive and authentic 'we-identity'.In particular, since the early 19th century the idea of welfare state was perceived to be a key affective coping-mechanism in revitalizing the Danish folk whose enlightenment was deeply connected with the nation's survival, with this myth becoming central in maintaining the ontological security regime of the 'new Denmark' and its alleged distinctiveness.

In addition to reinforcing 'we-feeling', the idea of welfare and its institutional practices have also functioned as key affective instruments in providing additional meanings to Danish Self-identity as well as opportunities for differentiation and distinction. To begin with, as stressed by Grundtvig himself in the early as 1820's: ''We have found true riches indeed in our land when few have too much and fewer too little" (Grundtvig, 1820 cited in Korsgaard, 2015: 329), the social philosophy of Danish popular enlightenment embraced the virtues of cohesion, solidarity, moderation, equality as well as mutual responsibility of one another, which later came to represent the core signifiers of Danish enjoyment.

Embedded in this specific imaginary of the welfare community, the myth of reciprocity emerged as a central rhetorical means to prescribe a moral and civic obligation to contribute to the welfare system in return for access to welfare benefits. As suggested by Jöhncke (2011), the myth of reciprocity has been critical for the maintenance of the Danish welfare community, by not only ensuring the financial sustainability of the welfare state as a bureaucratic apparatus but providing an overarching moral and ontological framework in which one's contribution to the community ensures the ''working of the whole of society'' (Jöhncke, 2011: 43). Namely, the continuation of the Danish welfare society is firmly dependent upon a shared understanding of mutual responsibility and reciprocal trust towards a common good, so the survival of the nation.

Moreover, the development of the welfare state also entailed significant affective hold by capitalizing on the lost senses of individual integrity, dignity and national pride in the post-1864 context. In response to humiliating defeat in 1864, which undermined the Danish self-perception as a large and influential empire (Kaspersen, 2020:189), the welfare-based internal consolidation had functioned as a key ontology-reaffirming strategy in the projected national awakening. Other than the desired spiritual unity through social cohesion, the improvement of material well-being of the citizens was also

believed to be key for reestablishing Danish national dignity and cope with the declined sense of status and self-esteem. The emergence of the modern Danish welfare state was, in this sense, narrated as a story of national pride and success that tied the community together under a common history and destiny as the county was struggling to survive its deepest humiliation.

Finally, the development of the social democratic Danish welfare state eventually culminated into a fantasized ideal of Danishness, providing Danes with a shared sense of community, belonging, history as well as sense of self-esteem and status. The cultivated ideal around the virtues such as egalitarianism (including gender egalitarianism), progressivity, social solidarity, cohesion, consensus and trust have also become the key pillars of Danish Self-identity. These identity signifiers, in turn, provided new opportunities for enhancing ontological security through seeking differentiation and distinction based on an idealized moral superiority over the Others (Browning, 2021). Deeply rooted in a post-traumatic national habitus, the all-encompassing and authentic narrative of the welfare state, then, not only complemented and reinforced the imagined Danish community, but also helped transforming the nation's deepest humiliation into a progressive story of the Danish welfare community.

However, over the last decades, the positive self-image around progressivity and inclusiveness around the welfare state has increasingly been instrumentalized by political elites as a means to legitimize restriction on social citizenship. For instance, the anxiety about the survival of the imagined superordinate Danish welfare society fosters an exclusivist understanding of social solidarity, as underpinned by the myth of reciprocity functioning as a central moralizing framework for differentiating the 'real-Danes' from the potential non-contributing/ or non-deserving 'Others' (Rytter, 2010).

The Myth of 'Hygge' and the Imagined Danish Sociality

The inward consolidation that followed the 'Danish trauma' did not only instill fear of *Others* and lead to a strictly exclusivist notion of national identity, but also forced the Danes to resurrect new national narratives around *Lille Danmark* celebrating nation's smallness, self-sufficiency and innate cultural traditions in order to reaffirm ontological security. Among the notable narrative consequences, the myth of *hygge* appears to be

another key component of the *Lille Denmark* imaginary which means, in a way, a specific Danish version of everyday sociality/lifestyle or ‘‘national feeling’’ (Howell & Sundberg, 2015) based on togetherness, sense of security, informality, harmony and intimacy. Although it is a hard-to-translate word and is often roughly translated into English as ‘‘coziness’’, the Danish *hygge* broadly refers to an idealized sociality, an inward domesticity based on ‘‘togetherness’’ in a socially cozy, safe and sheltered environment (Booth, 2014; Levisen, 2012).

The inwards-looking turn as propagated by Danish intellectuals since the late 19th century had also nourished the romantic idealization of ‘home’ as a safe, protected, inner, consensual space (Breunig and Kallestrup, 2020). The Danish *hygge* thereby evokes a sense of community based on cultural sameness, idealizing a domestic protected space rooted in a deep feeling of security and social trust as distinctive aspects of Danish way of life and sociality. Apart from depicting a unique sociality model for the Danish *folk* based on domestic coziness and togetherness, the Danish myth of hygge has also become central to self- identity narratives based on an imagined sense of cultural sameness and exclusivity. It has, in this sense, functioned as an affective vehicle for reaffirming one’s belonging in Danish community and identification with the Danish value orientations such as social solidarity, cohesion, trust, consensus and egalitarianism.

While the co-constructed values around the *hygge* promises the desires for identity-building around the distinctiveness of Danish community during the 19th and 20th centuries; namely the so-called idealization of the Lille Denmark, it also offers a sense of self-esteem, pride, status and ontological security. In this connection, by nurturing a distinction between ‘‘psychologically and morally charged ‘inner space’ and the ‘harsh’ outside world’’ the mythical construction of Danishness around the *hygge* can be conceptualized as a uniquely Danish way of survival as against the anxiety-inducing outside conditions, including the rise of Western modernity (Breunig and Kallestrup, 2020), globalization and multiculturalism.

As argued by anthropologist Linnet, the fantasized ideal of the *hygge,* which nurtured the self-proclaimed imaginary of Danish exclusivity, has even become a tool for ‘‘social control’’ in the sense that it prescribes a hierarchy of social attitudes and behaviors while excluding and stigmatizing Others who are perceived to be *uhyggelig* (unhomely) or

unable to perform *hygge*/or *hyggelig* environments. (Linnet, 2011). In this sense, while the myth of hygge has long been central to construction of imagined Danish community since the late 19th century, it continues to function as a powerful affective frame for securitizing subjectivity, most notably with respect to justifying restriction on immigrant access to welfare. Particularly, it has been commonly instrumentalized by the nationalist-populist discourses since the 20th century in the name of reaffirming national cohesion, progressive Danish values as well as the welfare community as against the perceived immigrant *Other*.

4.4 Rise of Danish Right-Wing Populism and Reproducing 'Lille Danmark' in the New Multicultural Era

Moving from the centrality of historically-embedded ontological insecurities, reformulated traumas and national myths in shaping the contemporary appeal of populist national projects, this section will contextualize the rise of Danish right-wing populism within the context of broader national and global developments around globalization and multiculturalism. Before moving into the in-depth empirical investigation of Danish welfare state transformation, this section will first lay out the evolution of the right-wing populist discourse in the context of the early structural and affective setting, and how in particular the Danish right-wing populist actors were able to reactivate the historical narrative of *Lille Danmark* in the new multicultural era.

As argued previously, ontological security literature provides useful entry points in understanding how moments of crisis characterized by ''unknowability and prolonged uncertainty'' (Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022: 531) can increase the psychological appeal of populist storytelling. Accordingly, it is argued that such dislocatory and ambiguous moments provide fertile emotional context for Manichean narratives which tends to offer a highly simplistic, essentialist and antagonistic vision of social reality. Accordingly, by often reimagining national myths, fantasies and past traumas populist narratives often tend to link the present 'crisis' with a mythical past moral order as well as an imagined future, in justification of political action. As such, by deliberately playing on the desires for ontological certainty, and the anxiety of loss of it often linked with certain 'Others' (i.e., the elites, immigrants), populist politics often thrive in the ontology-unsettling conditions.

In this respect, through a Lacanian-inspired ontological security framework, this section will elaborate on the emergence and thriving of the Danish People's Party (DF) in the recent Danish history in the context of broader domestic and macro-structural dynamics that are argued to foster the DF's emotional governance over the past two decades. By specifically focusing on the discursive means and strategies employed by the Danish People's Party (DF) in reproducing historically-rooted anchors of Danishness in the face of contemporary dislocations, I argue that the mythopoetic/fantasmatic storytelling has been (Wodak, 2015; Bennett, 2022) particularly central for consolidation of DF's emotional governance over the past decades.

The prevailing fantasized ideal around the *Lille Danmark,* invoking both anxiety of vulnerability and the desires for superiority in the post-1864 national habitus, in this sense, also served as a powerful affective anchor in populist mobilization around contemporary immigration to Denmark. Notably, the evolution of Danish debate on contemporary immigration has demonstrated how identity-building is particularly linked with reimagined fantasies transmitted through national myths, traumas, and desires for their full ‘‘enjoyment’’ in relation to an antagonistic 'Other'. As stressed by Zizek:

> We always impute to the "other" an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the "other" is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains to this way "the smell of 'their' food, 'their' noisy songs and dances, 'their' strange manners, 'their' attitude to work." (Zizek, 1993: 203).

Namely, by building on psychoanalytical conceptualizations of national identity, populist storytelling around immigration in Denmark is deeply motivated by the logic of ‘‘theft of enjoyment’’ through which the Muslim '*Other*' is often blamed for stealing the Danish homogeneity, coherence, authenticity, progressivity as well as morally superior/exceptional way of life- that are historically rooted. As such, the *Lille Danmark* imaginary as a distinctive, but constantly threatened *Self,* continues to be an affective mobilizing ideal in reproduction of Danishness in the face of challenges posed by globalization and multiculturalism. Structured in this way, the Lacanian inspired ontological security approach provides critical analytical tools in understanding the

mainstreaming and normalization of Danish populist exclusionary projects and their affective appeal in the wider society.

Early Debates on Multiculturalism and European Integration

Denmark has a long tradition of right-wing populism represented in the Parliament initiated by the Progress Party between 1973 and 2001 and its successor the Danish People's Party since 1995 (Bergmann, 2017). The literature on Danish populism commonly refers to both parties as representative of the right-wing populist family due to their primary appeal to ordinary citizen, anti-elitism, exclusion of out-groups and an emotionally driven political language. The Progress Party (PP), founded in 1973, was primarily neo-liberal, anti-tax, anti-bureaucracy and standing against immigration and expansion of the social democratic welfare state (Bergmann, 2017). As different from conventional neo-liberal right-wing appeal, the PP articulated a new language through constant references to people and the 'ordinary man' as against to domestic and international elites. Although the party was initially founded as an anti-tax platform, the party adopted an anti-immigrant stance during the mid-1980s with the increasing number of non-Western immigration into Denmark (Bergman, 2017; Rydgren, 2010).

Immigration was not a politically salient issue until the 1960s given that the large proportion of the immigration to Denmark was intra-Nordic or Western oriented (Agius; 2016; 6). During 1960s, Denmark had also received guest workers from Northern Africa, Middle East and Balkans, however, immigration was not a politically salient issue, similarly the acculturalization of immigrant workers and was also not part of the political agenda (Rytter and Pedersen, 2014; Bergmann, 2017: 50). However, with the rise of non-Western immigration during the 1970s and 1980s due to family reunifications and waves of refugee flows (Agius; 2013; 245) the political debates around immigration and integration have increasingly started to shift towards cultural claims to citizenship.

However, it was not until the 1990s that the political discourse on immigration has fundamentally turned intolerant with the surge of the Danish People's Party (DF) as a breakaway party of the PP (Rydgren, 2010: 2) in 1998 elections. The increasing refugee intake from Somalia and Kosovo during the late 1990s and the politicization of unemployment (Agius; 2013. 245), proved especially fertile for the surge of anti-

immigrant populist DF, which was aggressively anti-immigrant, mainly anti-Muslim and EU-sceptic in stark contrast with the anti-tax centered Progress party. While the PP mostly remained on the fringe of Danish politics, the DF gradually moved the party mainstream by mostly capitalizing on the immigration-induced anxiety since the late 1990s.

In the face of propagated ‘‘crisis’’ over immigration, the DF also gradually abandoned its anti-tax, neoliberal approach (Siim and Meret, 2016) and embraced an overwhelmingly pro-welfare stance on redistributive issues from the late 1990s onwards, soon portraying itself as the ‘‘sole defender’’ of the Danish welfare state (Bergmann, 2017). The pro-welfare mobilization also represented a novel shift for the shape of right-wing populism in Denmark, in contrast to its ultra-liberal, anti-establishment forerunner Progress Party. This newly cultivated self-image, combining a left-wing redistributive stance with nativist, anti-immigrant and EU-sceptic agenda also allowed the party to broaden its emotional governance under the demographic pressures posed by immigration and multiculturalism (Siim and Meret, 2016). As such, the party adopted a distinctively emotionally loaded language, firmly rooted in Manichean imaginations of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and emphasized the protection of (mostly Christian) Danish values, culture, authenticity and progressivity in the face of exposure to “alien” cultures (Wren, 2001). The encounter with the Muslim ‘Other’ in the 1990s thus served as a certain emotional context for the thriving of the newly founded DF to revitalize the post-1864 narratives of *Lille Danmark*, while framing the Muslim subjectivity as a fantasmatic *Other* stealing the distinctive Danish way of life.

The analysis of speeches given by Pia Kjærsgaard, the founder of DF, in Danish People's Party's annual meetings in 1998 and 1999 reveals that the party invokes a crisis narrative around Muslim immigration, which is mainly supported through temporal conflations juxtaposing the authentic and progressive Danish nation against a horrifically imagined Denmark ruined by non-Western, especially Muslim immigration. ‘‘Denmark is fundamentally not a country of immigrants. Denmark is an old nation, inhabited by *folk*. This is what leading politicians are unscrupulously smashing. They turn refugees into immigrants…but we demand that they remain refugees - so that we are able to maintain ourselves and our own nation’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 03.10. 1998). Here, the imaginary of a past secure/authentic moral order is instrumentalized to

broaden the sense of loss, humiliation and frustration around the ongoing non-Western immigration. Against this glorious past, Kjærsgaard articulates a horrific future scenario which would ‘‘send our [Danish] culture back to medieval conditions’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 03.10. 1998). Throughout the speech, this ‘medieval’ horrific future is depicted in direct contrast with Danish *folkish* values such as freedom, democracy, tolerance and gender progressiveness. In this sense, Kjærsgaard’s anti-immigrant narrative is heavily shaped by the fantasized ideal of *Lille Danmark,* underpinned by a ‘small, progressive, but constantly threatened’ Self-identity. ‘‘The visions we have of a humane foundation for our society are daily suppressed when we accept barbaric customs’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, DF, 03.10. 1998). By pitting the ‘Old/*folkish* Danish nation’ against an imaginary of ‘medieval Muslim culture’, Kjærsgaard storytelling further reaffirms Danish moral superiority over the Muslim *Other*. This emotionally-charged, Manichean temporal conflation frequently emerges in DF’s anti-immigrant storytelling. Accordingly, while ‘old’ often denotes authenticity and moral superiority in relation to Denmark and Danishness, the term is often framed as ‘medieval’ in the case of Islam and Muslim immigrants (Kublitz, 2010; 113). Finally, anti-elitism appears as a powerful affective frame to broaden the sense of ongoing victimization, helping DF to construct itself as the ‘true voice’ of the Danish people, while constructing the ‘ordinary’ Danes as victims of irresponsible elites allowing the dissolution of the authentic Danish way of life.

Another critical moment for deepening the DF’s populistic sentiment came with the **Euro referendum of 2000** in Denmark, in which the party aggressively campaigned against the adoption of euro over the Danish national currency- as being the only representative from the right-wing spectrum in Danish politics that refused to abandon the national Danish Krone (Bergmann, 2017). In this sense, apart from its increasing popularity around the immigration-hostile mobilization, the DF gained particular legitimacy through its anti-euro campaign, when the public indeed voted ‘No’ to euro in the referendum in 2000 (Bergmann, 2017). An important narrative aspect of DF’s anti-euro mobilization was the frequent recontextualization of the Danish myth of welfare society in the European integration debates.

As put by Pia Kjærsgaard in the annual meeting of her party in 2000, Danish welfare state is narrated as a historical national pride and success built by the hard work and

responsibility of the Danish *folk*. By appealing to feelings of loss and victimization, this specific historical imaginary of an ethnically-homogenous welfare society entails a particular affective hold in the debate against European integration and multiculturalism. Primarily structured around a crisis narrative, Kjærsgaard once constructs the 'ordinary Danes' as victims of several internal and external threats, who are blamed for distributing the Danish 'rightfully deserved' prosperity to the outside world. Especially, embedded in an anti-elitist frame, Kjærsgaard utilizes a generational temporal frame accusing her opponents, including the Liberals and Social Democrats, of unjustly distributing the Danish prosperity to the immigrants, while arguing that Danish welfare should first and foremost belong to Danish nationals and ''Danish generations before us who have worked for''. By invoking an imaginary of past generations, who are depicted as rightfully 'deserving' subjectivities in contrast to 'undeserving' Others, the anti-Euro stance is justified as the only way for a achieving an ontologically secure future. ''It is crucial that Danes in the future will be able to feel secure about the national pension, the early retirement pension and the post-retirement pension… this will only be possible by preserving the krone and thus the relatively closed Danish solidarity system'' (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 02.09. 2000).

Similar temporal invocation is also found around the narrative trope of loss of ''safe and familiar'' Danish way of life and everyday security rooted in *hyggelig* values of safety, harmony, cohesion and cultural sameness. ''Many Danes sense that the safe, familiar Danish society is slipping away through their fingers'' (Pia Kjærsgaard Annual Party Meeting Speech, 02.09. 2000). As such, apart from 'stolen enjoyment' of the Danes' welfare, Kjærsgaard's speech also caters a moral panic around the loss of *hyggelig* Denmark, if the krone is not maintained.

The populist victimization around European integration is also regularly connected to the Danish collective memory of German Occupation of 1940, which was also manifested through the launch of DF's anti-Euro propaganda in the anniversary of the Occupation, on the 9th of April. [1] In Danish populist fantasizing, the German occupation of 1940 stands for a powerful historical anchor to evoke feelings of 'stolen' freedom, sovereignty and

[1] [The crown at the top in the no campaign]. (2000, April 4). *Kristeligt-Dagblad.* Retrieved from https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/kronen-i-top-i-nej-kampagne

independence in the new multicultural, globalized era. Especially, in the case of 2000 Referendum, the adoption of euro is narrated as analogous to loss of freedom and independence. Søren Krarup (DF) recontextualizes the motto of the national trauma in the anti-euro mobilization by stating ‘‘Never again a 9 April! (…) in the last century people has let national freedom and independence to slip through their fingers…we are now faced with a decision which may mean the final end of a free and independent Denmark’’ (Søren Krarup, Constitutional Speech, 2000). Accordingly, this mythopoetic articulation not only promises a linear ontological security narrative through which ‘anxious’ Danes could reaffirm a sense of distinctiveness and national pride, but also keeps the subjects alarmed about dangers awaiting the Danish nation in the future, lest the national currency is given up.

Although DF’s EU referendum performance in 2000 significantly contributed to its political legitimacy-by fostering its self-image as the only credible voice speaking on behalf of the *folk*- it was not until the terrorist attacks in the US on **11 September 2001** that acted as one of the biggest affective catalysts for Danish right-wing populist mobilization. Accordingly, it has been commonly argued that the 9/11 and the subsequent ‘‘war on terror’’ served as a certain emotional validity for DF to enhance its anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric to wider segments of the public in Denmark (Bergmann, 2017; Rytter and Pedersen, 2014). After 9/11, immigration has become the most salient issue in Denmark, with mainstream parties also following the DF’s harsh rhetoric in order to safeguard voter support (Rytter and Pedersen, 2014). Notably, this critical juncture paved the way for the emergence of an almost widespread political consensus in Danish politics to restrict immigration and harden the cultural integration of immigrants. As the anti-immigrant rhetoric was becoming mainstream, the DF found suitable emotional context to deepen its exclusivist rhetoric, which resulted in an electoral breakthrough for the party in November 2001, becoming the third largest party in the parliament as well as the support party of the center-right government.

In the post-9/11 context, the ongoing securitization of immigration has acquired a particular legitimacy in Danish politics, by not only contributing to the emotional governance of the DF, but also fundamentally altering the norms of the political debate and what was considered as legitimate and acceptable to say publicly (Browning, 2018; Steele and Homolar, 2019). Arguing that ‘‘there is only one civilization, and it is ours’’,

Pia Kjærsgaard similarly draws on a civilizational antagonism between the West and Islam (Moller, 27.10.2001). In doing this, Pia Kjærsgaard increasingly relies on fear-mongering narratives around the notions of violence, criminality, backwardness, religious fanaticism, barbarism and under civilization (Moller, 27.10.2001). As such, through these alarmist ontological imaginaries, the DF sought to cultivate a collective sense of victimhood around the fundamental loss and disempowerment of the 'inherently good, virtuous and morally superior' Danish way of life, overtly channeling the ensuing collective anxiety into the Muslim subjectivity. Within this rubric of alarmist and fear-inducing framework, the DF's political discourse particularly relied on a highly essentialist, antagonist and black/white demarcation between the inherently 'good' Danes as against the 'evil' Muslim subjectivity.

The DF post-9/11 storytelling also heavily relied on invocation of a fantasized past moral order in which the Danish *Self* was imagined as ontologically safe, secure and superior in contrast to anxiety-ridden present and the dystopic futures. The post -9/11 storytelling was also highly racialized and gendered (Meret and Siim 2013) juxtaposing the morally superior, 'gender-progressive' West as against the 'barbaric, criminal' Muslim *Other* (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 87). Gendered imaginaries provided DF with further ontological means for differentiating the Danish *Self* from the 'oppressive/patriarchal' Muslim *Othe*r, while invoking fear around the loss of Danish gender egalitarianism, as one of the core signifiers of identity. These horrifically structured fantasies are also frequently visualized in the election campaign of the DF in 2001. By frequently invoking black-and-white visions of an 'anxiety-ridden' present and 'horrific future' as well as drawing on an ontologically-secure, past moral order, DF's election campaign was emotionally mobilizing. For instance, as encapsulated through slogans such as ''The Future of Denmark: Your Country, Your Choice'',[2] the election booklet visualizes images of 'dark-skinned' man carrying guns, while other visualized a smiling, little blonde Danish girl with the caption: ''When she retires, there will be a Muslim majority in Denmark''. Similarly, another visual depicts 'horrific' visions of Denmark through images of veiled woman and asking, ''Your Denmark? A multiethnic society with gang

[2] See the cover of DF's election booklet of 2001 https://www.bogtorvet.net/danmarks-fremtid-dit-land-dit-valg_dahl-kristian-thulesen-espersen-soeren-skjoedt-anders_1994963

rapes, repression of women and gang crimes. Do you want that?''[3] the party sought to stimulate emotions such as fear, hatred, anger, humiliation and victimization around the perceived loss of everyday security as well as the superordinate Danish values. Through these highly simplified, antagonistic images, the DF framed the elections as an existential choice between the safe/orderly and the horrific projections of Denmark.

The post-9/11 civilizational antagonism acquired a particular moralization dynamic in in the aftermath of the so-called **''cartoon crisis'' of 2005**. As such, the controversy around Prophet Muhammad's cartoons published in the Danish conservative journal Jyllands-Posten escalated into a domestic crisis between the Muslim minority and the native Danes, also spreading internationally with violent protests occurring in several European and Middle Eastern countries (Bergmann, 2017; Agius, 2017). As against to the perceived Muslim ''over reaction'' (Agius, 2017: 247) to the cartoons and escalation of violent protests, the DF catered a 'moral panic' around the loss of core progressive Danish values such as freedom of speech, tolerance, democracy, equality and human rights. As such, the anti-Muslim fantasizing in the aftermath of the cartoon crisis largely revolved around a 'values battle' between the native Danes and the Muslim community, with populist right reinstating the myths around Danish progressivity, in particular the freedom of speech, as a core signifier of Danishness. On the contrary, the Muslim subjectivity was imagined as an intolerant, irrational, violent and emotive subjectivity, stealing the Danish enjoyment of peaceful, tolerant, rational and progressive ideal (Agius, 2017: 247).

As exemplified by Pia Kjærsgaard's speech in the annual party gathering in 2005, freedom of speech is crystallized as a peculiar signifier of Danishness that not only enjoys constitutional protection, but also historically rooted and well-deserved national pride that should be rightfully enjoyed by the native Danes. By reinforcing the trope of ''theft of enjoyment'' around freedom, Kjærsgaard reproduces Danishness as a progressive and humanitarian ideal, while simultaneously positioning the Muslim subjectivity as an object of anxiety in realization of this 'fuller' Danish identity. By revitalizing the historical trauma of the Nazi occupation, Kjærsgaard also connects the previous threats to 'Danishness' with recent Muslim immigration by affectively invoking a similar sense of urgency and collective victimhood around the imagined loss of freedom. Arguing that

[3] See the visuals used in DF's election campaign in 2001
https://www.facebook.com/DfUngdom/posts/2071036162986859/

‘‘during the time of the Occupation, Danes risked their lives’’ not only in the form of ‘‘bloody firefights with German soldiers’’, but also for free speech. For the right of a free people to think, speak, write – and draw’’ Kjærsgaard recontextualizes the Nazi occupation of WWII into the ongoing cartoon crisis to evoke a sense of ‘proud victimhood’ around the Muslim presence in Denmark (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Speech, 17.09. 2005). By narrating freedom as a fantasmatic object, an essential Danish value for which people lost their lives in the past, Kjærsgaard seeks to invoke a ‘resistance-like’ anti-immigrant mobilization similar to Danish resistance to Nazi troops during the WWII. In this light, the mythopoetic construction of freedom in the wake of the cartoon controversy has contributed to DF’s emotional governance, again creating a ‘difficult-to-oppose’ discursive setting to be embraced by wider political spectrum in the mid 2000s (Agius, 2013; 248).

The orchestrated battle over freedom was also part of the ongoing moralization of the immigration debate and the ‘‘cultural and values struggle’’ that had been initiated since the early 2000s (Rytter and Pedersen, 2014). As put by Conservative Culture Minister Brian Mikkelsen in 2005, ‘‘new front of the cultural struggle’’ was to be waged against the ‘‘medieval Muslim culture’’ and particularly Muslim immigrants ‘‘who refuse to acknowledge Danish culture and European norms’’ (Brian Mikkelsen, Conservative People’s Party Meeting, 25.09.2005). As exemplified through Mikkelsen’s speech, the so-called ‘cultural struggle’ against Islam is constructed as a binary choice between beatifically imagined Denmark imbued with values such as democracy, freedom, equality and human rights and horrifically-imagined future Denmark led by the ‘medieval Muslim culture’. This civilizational antagonism is further supported by temporal registers pitting Danish authentic heritage against a medieval Muslim culture: ‘‘A medieval Muslim culture will never be as valid here at home as the Danish culture, which once grew up on the piece of old land that lies between Skagen and Gedser and between Dueodde and Blåvandshuk’’ (Brian Mikkelsen, Conservative People’s Party Meeting, 25.09. 2005). As seen, the narrative trope of ‘old vs medieval’ is also utilized during the cartoon controversy of 2005 to reaffirm an authentic Danish *Self*-identity against the perceived Muslim *Other*. Within this existential antagonism, the fantasmatic closure is imposed upon the notion of ‘‘cultural rearmament’’ as the only way for guaranteeing the full enjoyment of Danishness in the future. As such, by ascribing an ontological significance to the cultural integration of Muslim immigrants into the Danish way of life, the narrative

reinforces collective identification around Danish *Self*-identity in the form of a progressive, democratic and humanitarian ideal. At the same time, the temporal narrative template also promises ontological security to the 'anxious' Danes by imposing a 'civilizing mission' premised upon Danish moral superiority over the 'falsely enlightened' Muslim *Other*.

In this connection, the Mikkelsen' storytelling also hints that the Danishness is imagined as ''always-already unfit for inclusion'' (Plesis, 2020; 91) for some groups of people such as the Muslim immigrants. Namely, driven by an inherent ''superego demand'' (Zizek 2009 cited in du Plessis, 2019; 91) for cultural sameness, Mikkelsen articulates an inherently incompatible civilizational imaginary between the Danish and Muslim culture throughout his speech, projecting a sense of 'ever-unobtainable' enjoyment for the latter. In conclusion, the cartoon controversy of 2005, which revived through several other occasions during 2010s continues to be a critical moment in Danish politics. Since then, the securitization of immigration has gained a particular momentum around imagined incompatibility of the Muslim immigrants with the core Danish values and way of life, which served to legitimize further restrictions on immigrants' rights.

4.5 Social Policy as Fulfillment: Populist Storytelling, Fantasy and Myths in Recapturing Danish Welfare Society

Having empirically analyzed the thriving of the Danish right-wing populism over the past decades in the face of key global and national junctures, the previous section has argued that the DF's storytelling in the late 1990s and early 2000s rely on wide range of populist tropes such as: Crisis, 'us/heroes versus them/enemies', emotions, black/white simplification of reality, anti-elitism as well as heavy reliance on historical and fantasmatic temporality. Especially, with regards to latter, the empirical analyses revealed that the DF commonly instrumentalized the memory of the Nazi occupation, the mythical welfare society, generational temporality as well as a past moral order imbued with *folkish* and *hyggelig* values in justification of its Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant position. These historical and temporal anchors, as argued, helped DF to translate the global anxieties of the time into nationally-appealing moral panics. Particularly the affective mobilization around the anti-immigration sentiment has eventually become the political mainstream in

Denmark by reinforcing an increasingly narrow and defensive national identity based on ‘‘small, proud but constantly threatened’’ *Lille Danmark* imaginary that still abides today. Under this evolving emotive context, the upcoming section will argue that the politics of redistribution and solidarity has also become particularly powerful affective avenue for further perpetuating the populist imaginations of nationhood and peoplehood in the face of sudden loss of normality and certainty. As such, the next section will empirically analyze the populist social policy narration in response to three major ‘crises’ in the new globalized era between 2008 and 2022, which has facilitated a particular need for populist reassurance.

4.5.1 2008-2015: Post-2008 Economic Anxiety and Reimagining Deservingness

Setting the Crisis Context: Welfare-State of Emergency and Immigrants as ‘Economic Burden’ on the Welfare State

As commonly argued, the global recession of 2008 and the Eurozone crisis of 2010 had contributed to a ‘populist *Zeitgeist*’ in many parts of the world, including Denmark. Shaking the very foundations of the Western capitalism, the crisis brought economic uncertainty, severe public cuts, socio-economic insecurity as well as widening of social inequalities (Agustín and Ydesen, 2013). In this climate of uncertainty and anxiety, the imaginary of ‘small but proud nation under constant attack’ was further strengthened by the right-wing populist actors. Especially, the unfolding anxiety around socio-economic deprivations and lost status in the face of economic downturn (Gest et al, 2018), has provided a fertile emotive context for Danish populist politics to link the economic crisis with broader issues around multiculturalism, immigration, welfare state and European integration (Keskinen et al.,2016).

Although Denmark was somewhat less affected by the global financial crisis as well as the Eurozone crisis as compared to its European counterparts (Goul Andersen, 2019), between 2009-2011 the country suffered ‘‘4.4% drop in GDP, 4% rise in unemployment, and public deficits above the European Commission standards’’ (Chueri, 2022: 391). In effect, a newer research group from University of Southern Denmark studying generalized insecurity in Denmark, the financial crisis of 2008 has especially become a pivotal moment for a persistent mood of insecurity among the Danish public, especially

shared among the lower-income group (Starke, 2023).[4] By capitalizing on the growing feelings of economic insecurity, the right-wing government supported by the DF, furthered its ongoing austerity agenda that had been implemented since 2001, accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the 'deservingness' of the vulnerable people such as the unemployed or the immigrant communities (Goul Andersen, 2019; Careja et al, 2016). In particular, the party directly linked the post-2008 socio-economic anxiety with the urgency around immigration, cultivating a renewed state of emergency around the welfare state, not only in terms of its alleged insolvency but with respect to dissolution of the very foundation of Danishness and its distinct way of life built upon notions such as mutual solidarity, trust, responsibility and cohesion.

In governing the post-2008 anxiety, populist narratives oftentimes built on emotionally-charged plotlines depicting non-Western immigrants as unjustly benefiting from the welfare state at the expense of the natives. Similar to mythopoetic articulation of freedom as a rightfully deserved Danish value, the values such as solidarity, equality and trust also emerged as historically-rooted signifiers of identity, which were heavily used by the populist right to invoke a sense of 'welfare-state of emergency' around the immigrants in the post-2008 context. Particularly, the notion of solidarity was fantasized as a 'threatened object' primarily by non-Western immigrants, who were failing or unable to contribute to the welfare society as the native Danes. For instance, as exemplified through Pia Kjærsgaard's speech at the annual party meeting of 2010, the enjoyment of the welfare society is once more firmly secured to those who are able to actively participate and contribute to the welfare state based on a shared understanding of mutual responsibility and reciprocal trust. ''Denmark is not a country of immigrants, where everyone can freely seek happiness or go to. Denmark is a nation state and a welfare society…Denmark is obliged to ensure that the foreigners who come here are *both* able and willing to contribute'' (Pia Kjærsgaard's, Annual Party Meeting, 18.09. 2010).

Against this imagined national solidarity, immigrant subjectivities are framed as potentially non-contributing, passive, lazy, abusing beneficiaries who are unrightfully benefiting themselves, thus, threatening the very foundation of the Danish welfare society, not only financially but also spiritually. Accordingly, the analysis of speeches in

[4] Read more on the generalized insecurity in Denmark since 2008 https://nordics.info/show/artikel/the-age-of-insecurity-and-the-danish-welfare-state

the post-2008context demonstrated that the participation in and contribution to the welfare state has become a new and powerful signifier of Danishness as well as *Othering.*

Similarly, in another statement conveyed by Pia Kjærsgaard in 2014, notions such as interpersonal trust, care and solidarity are framed as distinctively unique Danish values that goes well beyond sharing the ‘‘overall Western values with other countries…which form the basis for our [Danish] way of organizing society’’ and ‘‘the backbone of our welfare society’’. (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting, 20.09.2014). In doing this, Kjærsgaard storytelling is also embedded in the imaginary of *folk* peoplehood bound with community spirit and heart-felt civic responsibility of one another. By revitalizing this utopian Danish peoplehood based on responsible and moral citizenry, the DF articulated a linear ontological security discourse promising a continuous and authentic *Self,* while reshaping the boundaries of inclusion and national belonging between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ subjectivities in the society.

Peter Skaarup (DF) in a party gathering in 2013, similarly emphasizes ‘Danish happiness’ as a distinctively unique Danish value that is currently being under attack by open borders and multiculturalism. ‘‘Why are the Danes so happy? As far as I'm concerned, it's just right. It is connected to our high degree of homogeneity, our cohesion, the security most of us feel in everyday life and the mutual trust we have in other Danes. But security is also under attack from the open borders’’ Skaarup claims (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting, 15.09.2013). As such, largely embedded in *hyggelig* ideal of Denmark, happiness is articulated as a core repository or Danish distinctiveness and ontological security, which are currently being threatened by the non-Western immigration. The imagined distinctiveness around Danish happiness is further supported by temporal references to the construction of the welfare society, as another unique Danish asset that should be preserved and protected by internal and external enemies. ‘‘The Danes, who through hard work have built up our society over generations, see welfare crumbling before their eyes.’’ (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting, 15.09.2013). By arguing that Danes’ happiness is also rooted in the distinctively organized welfare society, Skaarup invokes a crisis narrative around the dissolution of the welfare state with its solidary, just and egalitarian foundations, if the policy of immigration is continued. In doing this, Skaarup draws on a generational narrative trope by pitting an imagined proud past against an ‘anxious’ future, while envisaging a crisis-driven present that needs an urgent policy

action. Here the generational trope helps activating emotions such as proud victimhood around the ongoing immigration to Denmark while also keeping the subjects wary about the potential loss of a historically-rooted national pride. ‘‘We have created a society where there is no big difference between rich and poor, and where there is help to get if you get into trouble. It must be the foundation that secures Denmark in the future’’ (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting, 15.09. 2013).

As argued previously around the Danish freedom fantasies, fantasies around solidarity and reciprocity have also become means for reasserting Danish moral superiority in the form of a ‘‘civilizing mission’’, through which the immigrant *Other* should learn ‘‘to partake in a civilized manner in “our” superior way of structuring society’’ (du Plessis, 2020; 91). The historical narratives of the welfare state and *folk* peoplehood not only reproduce the hierarchical constructions of *Self* and *Other* in access to social citizenship, but also largely denies the prospects of such civic participation for some deemed ‘less-deserving’. To sum, the linking of welfare and immigration in the context of post-2008 economic crises contributed to emotional governance of DF, enabling the party to further capitalize on the perceived ‘‘excessive enjoyment’’ of the Danish way of life by the ‘undeserving’ immigrant *Other*. The fantasmatic ideal of Danish welfare society proved to be a powerful affective anchor for DF’s populist mobilization, while promising ontological fullness through transposing the perceived socio-economic anxiety onto the ‘non-contributing/undeserving’ immigrants.

Social Policy as Fulfillment: Welfare Retrenchment as Reassurance and National Solidarity as the ‘Object of Desire’

As mentioned previously, certain events in the early 2000s such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Danish cartoon crisis of 2005 had served as certain emotional validity of the DF’s populistic and anti-immigration imaginations, enabling the party to link its anti-immigrant sentiment with wider cultivated anxieties around the sustainability and survival of the welfare state, core values of Danishness as well as the superordinate Danish way of life. As argued, the party abandoned its neoliberal stance in the late 1990s by adopting a center-left position on distributive issues (Chueri, 2022). In the wake of the 2001 elections, the DF has particularly projected itself as the main defender of the Danish

welfare state and the interests of the 'ordinary' native Danes in the face of multiculturalism, immigration, economic globalization and EU integration.

However, the policy changes during the 2001-2011 period reveals that rather than completely abandoning its neoliberal approach, indeed the party adopted a highly selective/exclusionary approach towards social policy by stratifying between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' subjects. As such, during the identified period, the center-right government supported by the DF, actively pursued a welfare retrenchment agenda by introducing active labor market policies, cutting social protection and creating more private benefits (Campbell and Pedersen, 2007; Goul Andersen, 2019). As compellingly argued by Careja et.al, (2016), although the majority of the social policy reforms until 2011 were universally designed targeting all citizens in the context of the overall retrenchment agenda, the policy schemes were disproportionally affecting non-Western immigrants and the native 'undeserving' such as the long-term unemployed, representing a form of ''indirect welfare chauvinism''. As was also argued in the same study, while the government representatives often frame the policy as an incentivizing necessity for immigrant integration into the labor market, the DF commonly justified the neoliberal policy framework by fueling the immigrant induced-moral panic around the welfare abuse of the Danish social assistance system (Careja et.al, 2016). In addition to immigrants, since 2012, through the discourse on individual responsibility, the party also evoked a generalized welfare state of emergency including the native poor who are supposedly abusing, misusing or cheating welfare benefits (Chueri, 2022). Accordingly, the policy discourse has increasingly become more exclusionary, particularly demarcating the 'hard-working/deserving' Danes, mainly including the white, native, elderly from the 'non-contributing/undeserving' immigrants and native poor. As such, through the analysis of party programmes, public statements as well as the parliamentary debates, this section will analyze the DF's legitimizing discourse around the major labor market reforms during the 2009-2011 period. This period is particularly important as it covers the major policy reforms of the government in response to the 2008 global financial crisis, in which the DF played a key policy influence as a support party in government.

First of all, in response to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the right-wing coalition government launched an economic programme entitled the *Recovery Package (2010*) to restore and consolidate public finances and stimulate economic growth, including various

welfare cuts to unemployment and family benefits, activation policies for the unskilled workers as well as direct cuts to immigrant welfare benefits (Careja et al., 2016; Goul-Andersen, 2019; Chueri, 2022). However, the public communication of the austerity reforms, especially as encapsulated by the DF representatives entailed a significant affective hold by framing the urgency around the austerity agenda as a black/white choice over the sustainability of the Danish welfare society. By cultivating moral panics and horrific visions around immigrants' 'excessive enjoyment', DF's social policy narration not only promised ontological reassurance to the anxious Danes, but also helped maintaining the *Lille Danmark* imaginary as the hegemonic ontological security discourse in the post-2008 setting.

DF's policy discourse on the *Recovery Package* mainly rested on fantasmatic narrative plots that frames the Danish welfare state as a 'zero-sum' social contract, a desired ideal that should be rightfully enjoyed by the Danes only. As seen from the quote below, Pia Kjærsgaard justifies further welfare retrenchment as the only way to preserve the Danish prosperity for the future generations of Danes. By directly linking the prospect of natives' welfare with the extent of immigration, the narrative justifies further cuts to immigrants' welfare as the only way to achieve an ontologically secure future. By simplifying immigration into a black/white reality around the survival of the welfare state, Kjærsgaard once more invokes an exclusivist and homogenous imaginary of the welfare state that should be enjoyed by the native Danes only. Imbued with a fear-mongering discourse, the welfare retrenchment agenda is again narrated as a binary moral choice between maintaining high-quality welfare services and dystopian futures.

The anti-elitist trope also provides additional affective energy in provoking a sense of victimization and humiliation, against which Kjærsgaard positions her party as the only savior of the Danish welfare prosperity from being 'stolen' by several internal and external *Others,* including the opposition parties, global elite and the EU. The cultivated victimization also resorts to a conspiratorial storytelling referring to a unified *Them* of enemies which are allegedly serving the Danes' rightfully deserved prosperity to the 'incompetent' Muslim *Others.* This was also reinforced through pitting the national pension policy in direct antagonism with the immigration policy, through which the party also invokes a lost and threatened sense of natives' social reassurance, if the immigration to Denmark is not hindered.

> The Danes' core welfare is at stake these years. The worldwide crisis has left its mark. Therefore, the Danish People's Party had to help ensure continued welfare and, in cooperation with the government, incorporate the Recovery Plan, where we had to find DKK 24 billion to cover the overdraft. And I can tell you that it is NOT because "unfinanced tax breaks have been given to the very-richest", as the fairly newly-engaged in the Social Democrats and SF otherwise parrot-likely repeat (…) And it IS not because the Recovery Plan massacres welfare! This is what the red part of the so-called government alternative claimed throughout the spring and summer. No, the Danish core welfare is at stake as long as an unholy alliance of the EU on the one hand and a whole parade of Danish parties on the other hand do not WANT or CANNOT understand that our future prosperity and welfare are inextricably linked with both, how many foreigners there are in Denmark, who they are, what they want and what they do (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 18.09.2010).

In a parliamentary debate on amending the Social Pension Act (regulating rules for calculation of residency and national pension), Martin Henriksen (DF) similarly articulates a horrific future vision in which the native Danes will be financially disempowered and disadvantaged in comparison to foreigners. In doing this, Henriksen's policy storytelling is also heavily grounded in evoking emotions such as feelings of fairness, justice, humiliation and loss. As such, structured around the Danish fantasies of welfare, the overall legitimizing narratives about the austerity reforms are mainly built around the trope of 'theft of enjoyment' depicting immigrants as lazily exploiting or incapable of participating in the welfare society. This narrative trope not only promises an imaginary fullness by reasserting national myths of homogeneity and distinctiveness, but also inscribes a moral basis for the nature of the distribution around the 'legitimate' and 'rightful' members of the imagined welfare community in the context of post-2008 anxiety.

> Today, that people who have been granted asylum status in Denmark are financially better off than Danish citizens who have been traveling in the wider world or are financially better off than immigrants who have come to Denmark to work. It is unfair to people who are citizens of this country and to immigrants who have come to work and contribute positively to this society (…). The unfairness has consisted in the fact that they have had better economic conditions than Danish citizens and immigrants who have come to Denmark to work. It is unreasonable, and it is a mystery that the Social Democrats cannot see it (Martin Henriksen, Parliamentary Speech, 30.11.2011).

The below policy narratives further exemplify this tendency of reproducing Danishness and the nature of 'deservingness' in relation to participation in and contribution to the welfare state in the post-2008 crisis context. In doing this, the generational narrative trope is also heavily utilized by the populist right, invoking an affective temporality around a mythical/glorious past in which the Danish people collectively laid the foundations for

the welfare society through hard work, responsibility and self-sacrifice. Accordingly, the invocation of this generational time frame again serves as an affectively mobilizing discursive strategy in justification of the proposed welfare retrenchment agenda, by even legitimizing discrimination against the immigrants as the only way for securing the survival of Danishness, as put by Pia Kjærsgaard. Structured as a clear-cut choice, immigrant-centered welfare cuts are justified as the only way to secure the welfare of the imagined future generations from being stolen by un-Danish *Others.* By building on this fantasmatic temporality, pitting an imagined past generation of Danes against an imaginary of disempowered future generations, policy narratives not only invoke a desire for recapturing an ethnically-homogenous welfare society in the face of immigration, but also stimulate feelings of distinctiveness, pride and superiority in contrast to perceived *Others.*

> If we don't maintain the strict line, and sometimes tighten up, discriminate and make demands that may seem insurmountable for foreigners, then our children and grandchildren will not be able to afford the Denmark we have today. That's the way it is. The radicals, well flanked by the Liberals in the Liberal Alliance and the conservatives, talk reforms away in one breath every time they breathe. They would actually rather take something from Danes on transfer income than they want to keep incompetent Somalis, Pakistanis and Palestinians out of the country! They would rather reform the pension again and again than they want to talk about which foreigners we should basically welcome! (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 18.09.2010).

> So, quite frankly, how can it be that you imagine that you should be able to come from abroad into Danish society, a welfare society that has been built up on generation after generation of work, and then believe that you can come in and from one day to the next get hold of the welfare benefits that are part of the unique Danish society? Why don't we say to the immigrant: Welcome to Danish society. Give and then enjoy. So, this is the correct order. (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 18.09.2010).

> As you know, Denmark is not so badly plagued by public debt, because fortunately we were able to pay off the debt in the good years of the 2000s. That is why we have been able to keep our noses in check after the financial crisis, while other countries such as England have cut deeply into welfare. In Denmark, on the other hand, we have adopted a number of reforms which can ensure that we can preserve our welfare society. However, welfare did not come out of nowhere and it will require that we all work together if we are to preserve it in a form that we want and have become accustomed to (Pia Kjærsgaard, 2011, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 17.09.2011).

The Grundtvigian idealization of the *folk* is also commonly revitalized in the populist social policy debates in justification of the welfare cuts in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. As such, by revitalizing this pride-imbued past as well as the imaginary of the 'ideal citizenry' in the policy debates, the DF's policy storytelling often promises a linear

ontological security discourse providing a 'morally legitimate' and widely-shared foundation for policy action. The reactivation of the (proud) distant past, thus, helps creation of a legitimate discursive setting for the proposed policy change, while reshaping the boundaries of inclusion and national belonging between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving'. As seen, the policy actors often invoke the myth of welfare reciprocity built around a civic and moral obligation of subjects to contribute to national wealth and redistribution. Accordingly, the enjoyment of Danish welfare is only secured to those who contributes and participate in the national solidarity based on a shared understating of mutual responsibility and reciprocal trust. Shaped under this mythical citizenry, DF often frames the immigrants as non-contributing, passive, lazy or abusing beneficiaries who are unrightfully enjoying Danish national wealth at the expense of the native population. Thus, it can be argued that the ideal of national solidarity was rearticulated in the post-2008 context as a core signifier of national belonging, solidarity and 'deservingness' in the Danish welfare society.

As put by Pia Kjærsgaard below, in addition to reinforcing immigrants' alleged passivity and inability in contributing to the welfare society, Kjærsgaard also seeks to justify further welfare cuts on the basis of immigrants' alleged cultural incompatibility and everyday safety concerns. In this light, Kjærsgaard seeks to broaden the sense of urgency around the welfare retrenchment agenda, by further inciting fear and victimization around the destruction of secure, unitary and coherent Danish way of life. In this sense, the policy narratives inherently hint that the immigrant integration/inclusion into to the welfare society is already a hopeless endeavor and will always be ''imperfect'' (du Plessis, 2020; 91). As such the articulation of the welfare retrenchment agenda not only promises a reassurance from the imagined destruction of the Danish welfare society, but also reinforces the cultural uniqueness and moral superiority of the Danish *Self*.

> The point is simply that there will be fewer of us in the future who have to provide for more and more people. There must therefore be an end to large groups of people coming from the third world and failing to participate in the maintenance of welfare, and even failing to participate actively in providing for themselves. It costs Danish society up to DKK 20 billion annually plus/minus, which we take from core welfare, that we have to pay for the failed 15 immigration from the 1980s and 1990s, and the burdensome integration of people from the third world. That burden has become too great! It cannot be right that we have to cut welfare to pay otherwise healthy and able-bodied adults not to participate in our society. We have even seen some of them running around and agitating against other Muslims participating in the democratic process, in the election last

> Thursday. They have tried to sabotage the functioning of democracy in some neighborhoods in Copenhagen. We even pay young criminals who, through gang activity and destructive behavior, make whole neighborhoods unsafe, while they destroy the unity and idyll of their fellow citizens. (Pia Kjærsgaard, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 17.09.2011)

In addition to welfare retrenchment agenda under the *Recovery Package* that disproportionally affected the immigrants during 2009-2011, the DF has also been a vocal supporter of generous social transfers and increased care services for the 'elderly' in the post-2008 context, while strictly opposing the policy proposals such as increasing the user fees or terminating the early retirement scheme (Chueri, 2022). Especially since 2011 elections, the party has positioned itself as the staunch defender of the elderly and health policy in the face of global economic dislocations as well as the ensuing immigration anxiety. In this selectively imagined solidarity, promising extensive social welfare for the 'deserving' and welfare cuts for the 'undeserving' (Bergmann, 2017; 62), the party framed the elderly as the 'true' and 'rightful' members of the Danish welfare community by directly linking the nature of distribution with the survival of the Danishness. As such, the issues around redistribution are reformulated as a matter of preserving Danish values, traditions, its superior way of structuring and enjoying life, including its safe, familiar, *hyggelig*, welfare society. Although the government shifted to Social Democrats in 2011 after a decade-long right-wing rule, the DF has gained particular political legitimacy and mainstream acceptance during the 2011-2015 period (Bergmann, 2017; 62).

A key facet of DF's emotional governance during the identified period was the cultivated antagonism between the members of the imagined welfare community based on a moral categorization between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' (Rydgren, 2010). Particularly, by reclaiming the ownership of protection of the 'deserving' -including the white, native, elderly, sick, disabled and children-the party popularized a discourse that the core welfare of the 'deserving' natives is at stake by the immigrant *Other*. This is exemplified by Kristian Thulesen Dahl's (DF) speech below, which constructs the story on elderly care as a clear-cut, moral choice between the 'dignity of the elderly' (beatific) and the 'immigrant's welfare' (horrific). By again drawing on the generational story of the welfare society, the narrative reinforces the deserving members of the imagined welfare community, securing its enjoyment only to those who have built and contributed to it in the past. This generational time frame is again instrumentalized to stoke fear, frustration and victimization over a 'stolen' national pride to keep the Danish subject wary about the

dangers-to-come, if the policy of integration is continued. Values such as security and trust are also actively fantasized as core signifiers of Danish way of life, whose full enjoyment is currently under threat by the immigrant *Other*. This policy narrative, thus, channels desire towards a nativist recapture of the Danish welfare society including its safe, familiar and unique way of organization of enjoyment. Besides, the emphasis of dignity also appears as a promise of ontological security as part of the beatific side of the nativist fantasy, whose recapture is also dependent upon a strict immigration policy only.

> We must ensure that the society we have been handed down from previous generations, and which we value so much, can be preserved and defended (…). The Danish People's Party must be known as a party that zealously throws itself into the fight for core welfare – conditions for the elderly, health, security. But also, as a party that never doubts how values are created. Who earns the money? The money, which we can then talk about how best to distribute in our welfare society. And when we talk about distribution, as you know, you can only use the same krone once. And we have to choose: welfare, security and trust? Or waste money on failed and hopeless integration, language courses and expensive housing? We want to ensure a dignified and safe old age for our elderly citizens (…). We MUST have dignity back in care for the elderly (…). The policy of the Danish People's Party is, after all, designed according to one goal: to keep Denmark Danish, to ensure our national self-determination and to constantly develop the welfare society that we value so much and which fundamentally gives us a country where we can live and work and move around in confidence and security. When we want a strict immigration policy and border control, it is to secure this goal. When we want dignity for our elderly, it is to ensure this goal. When we fight for better hospitals, more beds, better and faster treatment, it is to ensure this goal. (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 19.09.2015).

Pia Kjærsgaard's storytelling at the DF's annual meeting in 2013 draws on a similar emotionally-charged generational temporality in in defense of the natives' welfare, especially the elderly. Accordingly, elderly is constructed as the 'most deserving' of the imagined Danish welfare society, whose defense should also be the highest value in politics of welfare. The invocation of generational temporality, thus, acts as a powerful affective catalyst to justify an elderly-centered policy agenda over any *Others*. This not only simplifies the complex policy context into a binary, moral choice, but also provides emotional and ontological guidance for the right course of policy action. Structured as such, the policy narrative is articulated as a beatific scenario of an anxiety-free, safe and dignified future, in which the native elderly would be able to enjoy the sense of 'wholeness' that they rightfully deserve, while at the same time foregrounding the very 'threat' of immigration as the main obstacle in realization of this ideal.

> In reality, all politics is value politics – to a large extent also the politics of distribution. There is the distribution of goods, which emphasizes the prioritization of values. The values policy is primarily about the direction in which we want society to move. (…) Value struggle is also about how we take care of our elderly and weak - the elderly has built this country. They deserve dignified and caring treatment (…). A Denmark where we continue to have resources for care and help, where we have resources to develop core welfare for the sick and elderly and the vulnerable. Where there is safety! This is why the Danish People's Party is here. To keep Denmark Danish. To ensure the welfare society that generations before us have built up. In order to preserve a society where we basically move around in safety and can have trust in each other (Pia Kjærsgaard, Constitutional Speech, 05.06.2013).

4.5.2 2015-2019: Refugee 'Panic' and Symbolic Othering Through Social Policy

Setting the Crisis Context: Revitalizing Cultural Anxiety Through the 'Hygge'

The evolving ''regime of normality'' around the narrowly defined Danishness was further consolidated with the outbreak of the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015/16 which triggered an overtly anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic turn in almost all European countries, including Denmark (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019; Wodak, 2018; 2020). Already in June 2015 elections, well before the refugee movement reaches its peak, the mainstream debate was in large part centered around who would be harsher on curbing immigration as well as hardening integration. In addition to the cultivated distress around the dissolution of the welfare state which overwhelmingly dominated the pre-2015 policy discussions, the refugee movement to Europe also brought back the cultural anxieties to the forefront of political debates and the very survival of the Danish way of life. Although Denmark received relatively few asylum seekers compared to most EU states, including its Scandinavian counterparts[5], as the majority of the asylum seekers were passing through Denmark on their way to Sweden (Whyte et al., 2018), the 'crisis' moment provided policy makers with emotive justification for restricting the immigration and asylum regime further.

In 2015 elections, capturing 21% of the votes and becoming the second largest party in the Danish Parliament the DF once again acquired a critical support position in the

[5] Denmark received 20,825 first time asylum seekers in 2015 with 43% increase in 2014-numbers, while this corresponded 108% in Sweden and 179% increase in Norway. Visit the link for more information on EU-wide asylum figures of 2015 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6

formation of the Conservative-Liberal minority government (Careja et al.,2016). As such, the global refugee movement provided a fertile emotional setting for DF to revitalize the *Lille Danmark* imaginary in performing the unfolding immigration anxiety. With emotionally loaded anti-Muslim sentiments becoming increasingly mainstreamed and normalized in the public debates, the trope of *Othering* has also spread across wide range of signifiers, conjoining various cultural, racial, gendered and symbolic forms of exclusion and differentiation. In reproducing Danishness in the wake of the so-called refuge 'crisis', DF's crisis storytelling frequently makes use of national myths, reimagined memories, traumas as well as national fantasies of homogeneity and distinctiveness. By often instrumentalizing temporal registers of identity, DF representatives invoke a sense of crisis, loss and collective victimhood around the ongoing refugee inflows, acting as an affective stimulus for DF's anti-immigrant mobilization through which the 'anxious Danes' could reclaim ontological security in the face of the heightened refugee panic.

For instance, in the annual party meeting of DF in 2015, Peter Skaarup reactivates the Danish national trauma of Nazi occupation in the debate against contemporary Syrian refugee inflows to Europe, arguing that the refugees must stay at home and resist for their freedom and independence as the Danish resisters 'bravely' did in the Second World War. ''I can't help thinking about our own country's history. The last time there were refugee flows of this kind, it was a world war - not regional wars like now. And what happened then in Denmark? Many people risked their lives to fight against Nazism. It should be the case now too, just in Syria and other war-torn places'' (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 20.09.2015). Here, the memory of the Danish (proud) resistance serves as an emotional justification for seeking differentiation and moral superiority from the Syrian refuge *Other,* while downgrading refugees' potential victimization and suffering on their way to Europe. ''The young men must not be lured to Denmark with promises of family reunification and high social benefits'' Skaarup claims. As such, by reactivating this narrative of national pride, Skaarup reinforces the moral antagonism between the Danish *Self* and refugee *Others*, especially by depicting the latter as 'undeserving' 'young men' who 'cowardly' leave their families and children behind just to enjoy Danish welfare benefits.

By reactivating an imaginary of a heroic, proud and freedom-lover peoplehood, Skaarup's speech not only reinforces collective identity, but also invokes affective sentiments such as anger, loss and humiliation around the ongoing immigration to Denmark. Accordingly, the national trauma of Occupation is also utilized to invoke a sense of crisis around the loss of freedom. So, as in under Nazi occupation, the freedom is narrated as once more 'at stake' under the present-day refugee inflows to Denmark. In this way, similar to 'cartoon crisis' of 2005, freedom remerges as an object of 'stolen enjoyment' in the face of unfolding refugee panic. Although the aspired sense of distinctiveness is also reinforced through the fantasized portrayals of Denmark as a ''peace-loving, helpful, cooperative'' nation, Skaarup emphasizes the precedence of the 'hardly-won' Danish freedom and independence over any identity signifiers, even if it requires withdrawing from its ''good state brand'' (Browning, 2021). Arguing that Denmark should come first before the immigrants, Skaarup cultivates an affective temporal narrative of 'Danish nationhood' ''created as it is by the Danish generations who went before and sometimes paid a high price for our generation to live in freedom and independence today'' (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 20.09.2015). Similar to the articulation of the post-2008 welfare state of emergency, Skaarup's narrative employs a similar generational time frame to reinforce the sense of 'proud victimhood' around immigration by constructing freedom as a 'hardly-won' and 'highly-valued' signifier of Danishness that should be preserved for the upcoming Danish generations.

Morten Messerschmidt (DF) similarly draws on a fantasized past to reclaim the sense of authenticity and distinctiveness in governing the ensuing immigration anxiety. ''Denmark is a country that stretches from the Wadden Sea in the west to the Sound in the east. It is a country that has had a number of different cultures over time. From Viking times to the present day. Denmark is a country that has had a number of different outside influences (…) But it is also a country that has retained its uniqueness and culture over time. It is a country with a proud history and a strong identity'' (Morten Messerschmidt, 2018). Reimagining Danish historical trajectory, including its glorious Viking heritage that eventually culminated into today's smaller Denmark, Messerschmidt recontextualizes an imaginary of a proud and superior past in the face the anxiety-ridden present, while reinforcing the national fantasy of Danishness as an ethnically and culturally homogenous whole. The use of distant past, here, not only serves a nostalgic anchor in the making of the beatific part of fantasy by promising a coherent, continuous and superior Self-identity,

but also keeps the subjects wary about the ongoing victimhood and dangers-to-come in the future, if the threat of immigration is not overcome. In doing this, Messerschmidt also draws on a generational temporality by linking an imagined collective peoplehood of the past and future into a single narrative plot. He argues that immigration must be overcome to ‘‘ensure that our [Danish] children and grandchildren can grow up in a Denmark that is still Danish’’ and to ‘‘secure Denmark's future as a free and democratic society’’ (Morten Messerschmidt, 2018). Namely, by connecting the mythical virtuous past with a dystopic future in which an imagined future generation of Danes will be threatened by ‘‘Islamization’’, Messerschmidt reinforces the immediacy around present-day immigration, while promising a linear ontological security discourse to the ‘anxious’ Danes.

In this context, as differently from earlier periods, the Syrian refugee movement of 2015/16 helped flourishment of a particular fantasmatic/populistic discourse around non-Western/Muslim immigration. As such, other than seeking differentiation and moral superiority based on participation to welfare state, the post-2015 populist fantasizing has become more firmly tied to reproducing Danishness as form of a unique, superior and (mostly) unattainable ethos in contrast to Muslim *Other*, as represented in various everyday practices and symbolic forms of belonging. In particular, the myth of *hygge* has particularly become a compelling fantasy of Danishness in the post-2015 context, which acted as a powerful mechanism of survival as well as means for differentiation from the perceived immigrant *Other*, while partly denying the practical possibility of inclusion of the latter in the imagined ethos.

The analysis of DF’s post-2015 political discourse demonstrates that the anti-immigrant sentiment is mostly reinforced through the perceived threats to Danish *hyggelig* way of life, characterized by notions such as safety, trust, security, cohesion, comfort, joy, happiness, which is also accompanied by shared values, history, culture or language. As mentioned previously in the historical analysis of Danish ontological security, *hygge* does not have a direct translation in English, and is often roughly translated as coziness (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). This is also highlighted by both DF representatives throughout their speeches in an effort to reconstitute Danishness as something particularly ‘unique’ that cannot be easily translated or imitated by *Others*. ‘‘Foreign countries are envious of our comfort...Isn't it because we feel safe? Isn’t it because we feel we are with

others who basically have the same values and norms as ourselves? Perhaps precisely because of our history and culture…Is that why you can't just translate the word "hygge" into other languages?'' (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Meeting, 15.09.2018). As such, the *hyggelig* Denmark is constructed as something unique and unattainable by *Others* in the context of the recent pressures posed by immigration, multiculturalism and European integration. The invocation of this mythical national feeling serves not only to reaffirm romantic idealizations of Denmark as a 'safe, protected, inner space' in the face of anxiety-inducing conditions of globalization, but provides emotional justification for measures taken against the perceived 'enemies' such as the non-Western immigrants who are allegedly unable to perform or feel the *hygge.* Gender, for instance, has been actively fantasized in the post-2015 political debates as integral part of Danish *hyggelig* everyday sociality. Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DF), for example, articulates a story of victimhood around Islam's perceived incompatibility with Danish progressive gender norms as well as everyday sociality underpin by *hyggelig* values of cohesion, harmony and equality. By further playing on the trope of imagined future generations, Dahl argues that Denmark should be protected from Islam so that ''in the future our [Danish] children can also grow up with security, high welfare and the same opportunities…so that equality between men and women is not erased and replaced by gender division and covering up'' (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Speech 15.09.2018). Embedded in this affectively structured temporality, Dahl's storytelling frames the present as a crisis setting that requires an immediate action, while arguing that Danes ''have a special responsibility to ensure that future generations can also feel something particularly Danish about the concept of "hygge'' (Kristian Thulesen Dahl, Annual Party Speech 15.09.2018). As such, he seeks to translate the perceived ontological insecurity into a collective mobilization to preserve and secure the imagined '*hyggelig*' Denmark in the future, as a moral duty.

Similar juxtaposition is also utilized in Peter Skaarup's (2017) speech at the DF's annual party gathering, who pits the beatific imageries of *hyggelig* Denmark against chaotically imagined Nørrebro, a Copenhagen district hosting the ''highest concentration of immigrants'' (Schmidt, 2019: 44). To begin with, Skaarup similarly frames the *hygge* as a unique signifier of identity embedded in Danish historical and cultural heritage, a ''special Danish mindset'' characterized by high degree of trust, safety and security, yet in many ways difficult to fully explain (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Speech 16.09.2017). However, Skaarup later elaborates on the *hygge* by explaining ''what is at least not

Danish, that which creates mistrust and insecurity'' as in the case of Copenhagen district of Nørrebro. Embedded in a crisis discourse, Skaarup (2017), articulates a black/white vision of Denmark between the 'beatifically' narrated *hyggelig* society and the 'horrifically' imagined multicultural Denmark envisioned through imageries of ''shrouded women'', shops with ''Arabic scripts'' as well as ''deadly violence and shootings'' (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Speech 16.09.2017). By recontextualizing the myth of *hygge* in the context of present-day immigration, the Danish *Self* is once more victimized as being no longer able to enjoy the sense of 'wholeness' that they rightfully deserve. At the same time, Muslims immigrants are aggressively portrayed as 'ruining/stealing' the enjoyment of this 'uniquely' secure, safe and superior everyday life.

Despite not directly referring to *hygge,* the unfolding moral panic around immigration since the outbreak of the global refugee movement of 2015 had also been widely shared across the political spectrum, with mainstream parties also articulating crisis-narratives around the loss of Danish everyday security in the face of immigration. As exemplified by Liberal-Conservative leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (V) speeches in 2016 and 2018, the hegemonic discourse on immigration is increasingly attached with *hyggelig* values, notions such as familiarity, security, cohesion, safety, sameness or equality. ''It challenges our cohesion when many come from very different cultures. People who are not familiar with the unwritten rules and norms that are so obvious to us. Because we have grown up in a tradition of freedom and equality…And it basically challenges our values and image of who we really are.'' (Lars Løkke Rasmussen, New Year's Speech, 01.01.2016). As seen from Rasmussen's (V) speech, in addition to fears over immigrants' 'unjust' enjoyment of the welfare, Danish mainstream have also resorted to articulation of moral panics and narratives of victimhood over the loss of Danish national identity in the form of a progressive, free, democratic ideal with a safe, secure and familiar domesticity. Rasmussen's constitutional speech in 2018 similarly nourishes the sense of crisis over the cultural incompatibility of Muslim immigrants with Danish national identity. ''Our cohesion - culturally and socially- is challenged by the fact that the number of Danes with non-Western backgrounds has increased tenfold in one generation…It is a problem when too many outsiders do not respect and share our fundamental values''(Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Constitutional Speech, 05.06.2018). Especially, freedom appears as a peculiar signifier of Danishness as part of its progressive, liberal self-image, yet the narrative also hints that ''freedom is not freedom unless it is Danish'' (du Plessis, 2019:

89). As Rasmussen argues, ‘‘Denmark must be open to foreigners, but then foreigners who want to live their lives here must also live up to the reasonable demands we make… freedom does not mean that we must accept all life values and life patterns as equally good’’ (Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Constitutional Speech, 05.06.2018). Through several references to stereotypical ‘Muslim way of life’ such as ‘wearing of burqas’ or ‘forced marriages’, Muslim immigrants, with their excessive and ‘perverse’ way of enjoyment, are framed as threats to Danish superior freedom.

Finally, against this anxious background, Rasmussen’s narrative further legitimizes a stricter immigration policy as the only way towards recapturing a safe, secure and progressive Denmark ideal in the future. Rather than being at odds with Danish self-image as a progressive, liberal and humanitarian ideal, a strict immigration policy justified as the only way to preserve Danishness. ‘‘I can hear some people questioning whether the many things we have done in the area of foreigners are now compatible with our values of freedom and liberalism. But to me, our immigration policy is a defense of what is uniquely Danish. A defense of freedom. A defense against eclipse. A fight for equality’’ (Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Constitutional Speech, 05.06.2018).

Social Policy as Fulfillment: Producing New Emblems of Difference Through Symbolic Politics

As argued, across Europe and including the Nordic region, the so-called ‘‘refugee crisis’’ of 2015/16 (Bjerre et al, 2021; Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019; Wodak, 2021) has created a powerful emotional context for the thriving of transgressive politics that broadly build its political agenda on revitalizing fantasies of national homogeneity, cultural sameness as well as the ideals of ethnically-culturally homogenous social solidarity. The post-2015 populist anti-immigrant fantasizing has further reinforced the securitization of the Muslim immigrants as culturally incompatible, deviant, immoral, irrational and unmodern subjectivities. These populist articulations, often deeply rooted in mythopoesis and moralization, have sought to reactivate the nativist desires for full enjoyment of Danishness, including its safe and morally superior *hyggelig* life as well as historically admired welfare society. In governing the collective anxiety around the ensuing refugee ‘crisis’ these historically rooted national anchors not only promised ontological certainty and means for differentiation, but also kept the cultivated ‘Danish victimization’ alive by

urging towards stricter political action in defense of the survival of Danishness, not only in terms of securing the welfare system, but its distinct cohesion and way of life.

In this context, with even more powerful DF presence in the parliament, the right-wing government has embraced a radical policy stance towards immigration to cultivate a 'new image of Denmark' as a 'bad destination for refugees' (Bjerre et al, 2021). While this has been carried out by several governments since 1990s with the gradual reduction of immigrants' welfare benefits and social rights, since 2015 the government has adopted an outright 'deterrence-oriented' policy agenda in a way to lessen the attractiveness of Denmark as a refugee destination (Bjerre et al, 2021). As part of the deterrence-oriented policy regime, the government has actively engaged with social policy tools to exclude the 'immigrant Other' from the imagined welfare community based on increasingly ethno-culturalist and symbolic forms of national belonging and solidarity. Social policy, in this sense, not only has become a powerful mechanism of migration-control with reduced social benefits and rights, but also acted as an affective symbolic mechanism of ontological reassurance for the native majority Danes, promising a recapture of Danish way of life from being destroyed.

The first social policy response in this direction has been realized through the adoption of drastic austerity measures through the ***amendment of the Aliens Act*** in December 2015. This included measures such as direct cuts to social assistance for those who have not been in Denmark for more than seven of the last eight years, restricting access to family reunification for people with temporary protection status as well as restricting eligibility criteria for permanent residency, including harsher language tests and cultural integration requirements. Among the notable policy reforms adopted under the punitive and assimilationist austerity agenda has been the infamous ***Jewelry Law*** that entered into force in February 2016, approving the confiscation of refugees' and asylum seekers' valuables including cash and jewelry assets more than 10,000 Danish kroner (Folketingstidende A., L87, 2015). According to this highly normative provision, the police is entitled to search and seize the valuables of the arriving refugees and asylum seekers if they can prove that they are financially able to pay for their stay in Denmark (Bjerre et al., 2021; Joormann, 2020). Although the measure was highly symbolic as part of fostering country's newly adopted 'unwelcoming' self-image, it has significantly

affected the hegemonic political discourse on ontological security by further solidifying immigrants' image as potentially abusive and exploitative subjectivities.

In justifying the policy measure, alongside the austerity measures under the amended Aliens Act, the government representatives have frequently instrumentalized the Danish fantasies of the welfare society structured around the idealized notions of mutual responsibility and solidarity, depicting immigrants as excessively enjoying themselves at the expense of the native Danes. This fantasmatic narrative, which has been fiercely utilized in justification of the post-2008 welfare retrenchment, has also been reformulated to further legitimize the immigrants' 'subordinate inclusion' (De Genova, 2013) into the imagined welfare community. Accordingly, this policy storytelling not only reinforces the imagined 'undeservingness' of the non-Western immigrants and refugees, depicting them as potentially passive, lazy, dependent and non-contributing subjectivities, but also reproduced a 'desired migrant ideal' arguing that the aspiring refugees would only be tolerated/welcomed in the country if they lack economic capital, namely if they can prove that they are 'truly' in need (Abdelhady, Gren & Joormann, 2020).

Embedded in the national narratives of Danish welfare society, Ruling Liberal Party's spokesperson similarly justifies the policy as a very basic necessity of ensuring the working of the welfare system. In this imaginary, the much-admired generous welfare model is only rewarded to those who financially contribute to the society, as the essence of Danish moral citizenry. Drawing on this imagined conditional enjoyment and the idealized Danish 'peoplehood', Liberal Party spokesman Jakob Ellemann-Jensen (V) legitimizes this punitive policy measure as a fair and reasonable expectation, which would make the refuges or asylum seekers contribute to the national wealth in one way or another, even if by force. As such, the contribution-based policy narrations help reactivating a sense of Danish victimization under the immigrants' perceived enjoyment of the national welfare, while also reinforcing its self-proclaimed image as a morally-superior, humanitarian, egalitarian ideal in contrast to non-contributing, undeserving immigrant 'Other'.

> All Danish citizens and refugees coming here receive universal health care; you receive education from preschool to university, and you receive elderly care; you receive language training and integration training free of charge, paid for by the government. The only demand that we set to measure this is if you have the means to pay for your housing and for your food—regardless of whether you are a Dane or whether you are a refugee—then you should (CNN, 15.01.2016).

Besides, as shown through the parliamentary speeches below, both Stojberg (V) and Henriksen (DF) instrumentalize a fear of 'undeserving' refugees who would unjustly enjoy the Danish welfare society at the expense of the 'deserving' Danes. However, in addition to perceived lack of financial contribution, both policy narratives invoke an idealized 'moral citizenry' based on compatibility with Danish culture, language, values and everyday sociality. As such, via framing immigrants as potentially non-contributing as well as incompetent subjectivities that can fully grasp the Danish way of life, the punitive austerity agenda is justified in a way to reaffirm Danish subjects' sense of superior self-identity, desires for distinction and differentiation. In doing this, the policy story exacerbates the fear over 'unassimilable' immigrants by reinforcing their status as incompetent subjectivities unable to internalize Danishness with a deeply-felt motive.

> Well, I think that all of us, and at least a number of the parties here in Parliament, want the refugees who come to Denmark – (…)- to be able return home to their homeland. But we will also have to join the real world and realize that there are many who will not return home, and if it is such that you will have to live your life in Denmark, then act that about becoming a positive contributor to Danish society. The tracks are scary. After 1 year, 10 per cent are in work, and after 3 years, just under 30 per cent are in work, and then it becomes very, very expensive, not only financially, but also the set of values, because they do not get what you could call ordinary Danish everyday life under their skin. Therefore, it is a huge challenge that we are facing. Because if you don't move around in the labor market, if you sit in a ghetto and don't speak Danish well and don't participate in the surrounding society, then you don't get the ordinary Danish everyday life under your skin either or then you don't become part of the value set that we have. And I actually think that it is absolutely crucial that you do, i.e., that you embrace Denmark if you live here. (Inger Stojberg, 2016, Parliamentary Speech, 26.01.2016).

In justification of the legislation, Martin Henriksen (DF) similarly hinges on Danish fantasizes of distinctiveness, in particular the superior welfare society. Through building on a generational time frame, Danish welfare society is once more narrated as an 'object of desire' that should be enjoyed by the native Danes only, as the ones who have created it in the past. As a well-deserved, historical pride rooted in the nation's glorious past, this powerful myth is instrumentalized by Henriksen to justify further restrictions on immigrants' welfare for the imagined survival of the future generations of Danes. Namely, within this generational trope of Danish peoplehood, immigrants are once again excluded by nature from the very genesis of the Danish welfare community, so the prospects for 'equal' enjoyment of Danish way of life. Besides, Henriksen further justifies the welfare cuts on the basis of inherent difference and incompatibility of Muslim

subjectivity from the Danish *Self*, while redefining the latter as a distinctively unique, superior and unattainable ethos. The trope of 'impossibility' of integration implied by Henriksen, thus, serves as an affective means for differentiation in contrast to Muslim *Other*, while acting as a politically mobilizing rhetoric to justify further restrictive policy measures.

> In our opinion, it is crucial that we limit non-Western immigration, including immigration from Muslim countries, and it is crucial that we continue to work towards foreigners with asylum status only being temporarily in Denmark, and that they must be sent back home. For the majority of those who have come, and the majority of those who will come, will unfortunately never be integrated, for the simple reason that we are too different (…) Basically, it's about what kind of country we want to pass on to those who come after us. It is about ensuring that the values that we widely in society appreciate are preserved, so that our descendants can also benefit from what has been built up over many generations. We must help people fleeing, but we must not destroy our own country in the attempt to do so – I believe that is indefensible (Martin Henriksen, Parliamentary speech, 26.01.2016).

In this sense, through offering a highly-simplified, beatific/horrific visions, Henriksen's policy storytelling imposes a strong degree of ontological closure by legitimizing the restrictive measures as the only way to uphold Danishness for the upcoming generations. Also, the mythopoetic construction of the welfare state once more appeals to nativist desires for recapturing Danish homogeneity in the face of perceived loss, disempowerment and victimization. Accordingly, while the temporal registers help dramatizing the sense of victimization around the possible loss of Danish way of life, framed as a rightfully deserved, historical pride that should be transposed to further generations, the policy amendments are justified as the only way to put an end to the ongoing disempowerment of the native *Danes*.

> In the view of the Danish People's Party, refugees should not be better off than Danes. In the Danish People's Party, we are of the opinion that outsiders should not be better off than our own, and therefore it is also good that with this proposal we remove some of the discrimination, but unfortunately not all of it, but that is how it is with political compromises. This is not just a matter of technical changes to legislation. There are much bigger things at stake in the opinion of the Danish People's Party. Basically, it's about what kind of land we want to pass on (…) So we would like to see even more tightening, and the Danish People's Party is working on that further, but this is certainly a sensible proposal, and therefore I can announce that the Danish People's Party supports it (Martin Henriksen, Parliamentary speech, 26.01.2016).

In 2018 a controversial ***ghetto initiative*** entitled '*A Denmark Without Parallel Societies – No Ghettos in 2030*' was adopted by the right-wing government, also supported by

Social Democrats and Socialist Party which intended to physically demolish the ghetto neighborhoods 'once and for all' until 2030 and turn them into residential areas (Regeringen, 2018). The initiative, commonly called as the Ghetto Plan, has so far been the most punitive and assimilationist ghetto strategies ever launched by the Danish governments since the early 2000s (Seemann, 2020: 599; Kiely and Swirak, 2022). By reclassifying ghettos into three sub-areas as 'vulnerable housing, ghettos and hard ghettos', the initiative not only conditioned social rights and welfare benefits upon residency status, but also adopted an overtly ethnicized criteria by redefining ghettos as urban areas where over 50% of the population is of non-Western origin (Regeringen, 2018). Framing the ghetto neighborhoods as ever-increasing burden on the Danish welfare system as well as impediment to social cohesion and societal security, the 2018 initiative has promised a more 'balanced' Denmark by dismantling the 'parallel societies' (Seemann, 2020).

In realizing this aim, the government launched a range of coercive measures including lowering of social assistance for those moving into hard ghetto areas, banning the allocation of social housing for welfare claimants and family reunification for those living in vulnerable areas as well as conditioning welfare benefits on mandatory cultural integration (Regeringen, 2018). For the latter, the law imposed a parental obligation to enroll immigrant children in Danish day-care centers from the age of one and attend 25-hour weekly compulsory programme living in vulnerable ghetto areas, accompanied with welfare sanctions in case of non-compliance (Kiely and Swirak, 2022; Seemann, 2020: 600). In this context, the policy scheme has so far been the most radical social housing plan ever launched on ghettos in Denmark, which directly imposed special cultural conditionalities and 'duties' in access for welfare for people living in vulnerable areas. The requirements such as conditioning welfare benefits on enrollment to Danish-day care centers, also confirmed the ongoing culturalization of social citizenship in Denmark with additional spatial and symbolic dynamics in excluding the immigrant 'Other' from the imagined welfare contract.

Most notably, the policy scheme also expanded the use of penal power against the crimes committed in ghetto areas by doubling the length of sentencing (Seemann, 2020: 587; Barry and Sorensen, 2018). As such, in the name of restoring cohesion, equality and preventing spatial segregation, the policy initiative legalized the extension of penal

powers towards the ghetto inhabitants by reframing the Muslim neighborhoods as exceptional criminal spaces that should be governed and intervened by the state (Kiely and Swirak, 2022: 112). Thereby, the ghetto initiative imposed entirely different treatments and laws to the ghetto inhabitants as compared to rest of the society (Kiely and Swirak, 2022: 112). As such, through criminalizing and culturally-assimilationist policy means, the Ghetto plan is proposed as a reassurance to the majority native population in response to prevailing sense of anxiety since the 2015 refugee 'crisis', by reasserting desires for upholding Denmark as a socially and culturally cohesive, homogenous whole.

In justification of the policy, the story presented by Prime Minister Rasmussen's is largely built around horrifically imagined portrayals of Denmark in which the very existence of Danishness is under threat by non-Western residential areas. Embedded in national myths of homogeneity and distinctiveness, the policy narrative again exposes an ''anxious logic'' (du Plessis, 2015: 16) in preserving the 'Danish enjoyment' from being stolen and ruined by the Muslim *Other*. Framing the immigrant residential areas as 'cracks' in the Danish map, Rasmussen constructs the ghettos as areas of multiple social problems, crime, insecurity and oppression; being not only a burden on the welfare community due to immigrants' perceived inactivity, but more importantly in terms of culture, values, customs, gender norms as well as the daily habits. In this sense, the communication of the policy was also illustrative of the evolving criminalizing political discourse in relation to immigration, linking the spatial 'problem' of parallel societies with primordial anxieties around the loss of Danishness, its progressivity and safe/familiar ordinary life. In doing this, the narrative employs a remarkable moral justification in creating an urgency around the 'cracks' in the Danish map, framed as areas where the progressive Danish values such as 'equality, freedom and tolerance' are no longer leading. The cultivated moral panic is also manifested through gendered narratives which reinforces the Muslim *Other* as an oppressive/patriarchal subjectivity impediment to very essence of Danish selfhood as a progressive and egalitarian ideal.

> I am talking about the residential areas where young people are forced to marry a person they do not love. Where women are considered less important than men (…). Throughout the country there are parallel societies. Many people with the same problems are bunched together. That creates a downward spiral. A counter-culture. Where people do not take responsibility, do not participate, do not make use of the opportunities we have in Denmark – but stand outside the community. Cracks have appeared in the map of Denmark (…) Because the ghettos also reach out their tentacles into the streets where criminal gangs create insecurity (…) into society at large where

> Danish values such as equality, broad-mindedness and tolerance are losing ground (…) I am convinced that decades of a lax immigration policy has played a contributory role (…) We must set a new target of phasing out ghettos altogether (…) We must close the cracks in the map of Denmark and restore the mixed neighborhoods where we meet people from every walk of life. And when I am engaged in solving problems of parallel societies, it is because it is a matter of something greater (…) It is a confrontation with barriers between people. It is a defense for tolerance, freedom and broad-mindedness. If we eliminate the hotbeds for gangs, the police can make an effort in other places. And create safety and security in the streets and in everyday life. (Lars L. Rasmussen, New Year's Speech, 01.01.2018)

As such, by drawing on these deeply-shared identity signifiers, the policy narrative appeals to subjects' desire for ontological security by reaffirming an ethno-culturally homogenous and cohesive Danish national identity. Besides, the securitization of non-Western immigrants as criminal and violent *Others* also helps reaffirming the Danish Self-identity through which the 'anxious' Danish *Self* could reconstitute itself as a civilized, liberal and progressive ideal as against the ''falsely enlightened'' (du Plessis, 2019: 91) Muslim *Other*. In addition, the imagined insecurity around the parallel societies is also deeply rooted in the mythical ideal of the *hyggelig Denmark* as a key signifier of Danish sociality premised upon the notions of safety, security, familiarity, togetherness and cultural sameness. Framing Muslim culture and norms as direct opposites of this idealized national feeling, Rasmussen's policy storytelling largely denies the ''ghetto's inclusion'' into the wider community.

Similarly, through a press release, Minister of Economy and the Interior Simon Emil also legitimizes the *Ghetto Plan* by framing it as a black/white choice between the two oppositional visions of Denmark, dependent on the fate of immigration. As a common populist narrative trope within the Danish anti-immigration discourse, the legitimizing story around the *Ghetto Plan* similarly draws on an excessively clear-cut visions of Denmark, structured between a nostalgically portrayed beatific Denmark led by 'Western values and norms' and a horrifically imagined Denmark at risk of losing its very essence. Shaped under this simplified imagery, the welfare society built by the mythical Danish 'we' is once again emotively mobilized as an object of desire that should be protected and recaptured by dismantling the parallel societies. To sum, both policy narratives appeals to desires for recapturing Danish way of life in the face of non-Western immigration, often manifested through instrumentalization of 'objects of desire' such as freedom,

equality or tolerance in a way to legitimize the punitive policy measures as the only path towards a fuller Danish *Self.*

> Denmark is not the same place as when I was born. Over the last 40 years, more and more people with non-Western backgrounds have come to Denmark. Fortunately, many of them have chosen Denmark. They greatly appreciate the freedom and the many opportunities that can be found in few other places in the world. But there are also immigrants and descendants who live in physical or mental isolation and have not adopted the Danish way of life. This challenges the cohesion of Denmark. We must safeguard Western values and norms. Otherwise, the common foundation on which we have built Danish society for many decades will be undermined (Ammitzbøll-Bille, Press Release, Ministry of Economy and the Interior, 02.02.2018).

In an opinion article, DF's Morten Messerschmidt engages with an emotionally-loaded narrative in justification of tougher policy measures towards ghetto areas by cultivating a sense of victimization as if the native Danes are under direct assault and oppression by the Muslim way of life. Building on a historical comparison between the past and modern form of ghettos, Messerschmidt rather seeks to victimize the Danish *Self* by portraying immigrants as 'abusive' subjects who are luckily and comfortably exploiting the generous welfare offers at the expense of the native Danes. As a common anti-immigrant populist trope, the story of Danish victimhood around immigrants' 'excessive enjoyment' not only stimulates feelings of such as injustice, anger and frustration towards the immigrant *Other,* but also helps reaffirming Danish moral superiority by redefining itself as a generous, hospitable, humanitarian and peaceful ideal.

> The word 'ghetto' used to suggest that an oppressed and persecuted population group has been locked up - typically against its will - to protect or isolate it from a hostile society (…). The German Nazis created ghettos to exterminate the Jews (…). Today's ghettos in Denmark and other European countries have nothing in common with those of the past (…). The inhabitants of today's ghettos are not victims or losers; but the winners of the great lottery among millions who have found that no country like the Western, Christian societies gives people dignified treatment and a life of material comfort. No Arab or African could dream of better opportunities for themselves and their children. No Dane should feel bad about the fact that they do not have the desire or ability to take advantage of the generous offers that Danish society offers them. With the contemporary use of the word ghetto, reality has been reversed. Today's ghettos are not inhabited by tight-knit people who fear persecution. On the contrary: it is the citizens outside the ghetto who fear the ghetto's residents (…). The goal must be that what we today call ghettos is one fine day transformed into well-ordered housing communities with law-abiding, working citizens in well-functioning families. The remedy is that the anti-Danish elements who create the problems are sent out of the country and that no more are added. And that requires the Danish state to show unequivocally who will decide in the ghettos (Morten Messerschmidt, Opinion Article, Ekstra Bladet, 11.01.2018).

In August 2018, a similar punitive and assimilationist bill was passed by the right-wing government including the DF, and with support from the Social Democrats, ***banning the wearing of burqas and niqabs*** in public places on the grounds that they pose a threat to public safety and undermine social cohesion (Folketingstidende A, L 219, 2018). Similar to ghettos, burqa is also symbolically constructed as an ‘‘un-Danish’’ practice that ‘visibly’ represents the presence of parallel societies in Denmark. As such, the policy design can be argued to be a highly moralized form of ‘forced’ liberalism or ‘‘cultural enlightenment’’ (du Plessis, 2019: 90) by urging Muslim immigrants into a certain way of life. In this sense, similar to the ghetto plan, the law on burqa was also premised upon reaffirming Danish distinctiveness and moral superiority by reasserting Danish self-identity in the form of a liberal, progressive, peaceful and *hyegglig* ideal in contrast to Muslim way of life.

As shown through the official policy narrative of the government, covering one’s face in public is constituted as something fundamentally ‘‘un-Danish’’ (Rytter 2019) impediment to the foundation of Danish cohesion encompassing range of values, ways of behaving and feeling. In this sense, the policy narrative reinforces the moral hierarchy between the Danish *Self* and Muslim *Other,* while framing the latter as threat to the very essence of Danish everyday routines and way of life. In this way, by framing the ‘face’ as central to Danish selfhood, the policy narrative also fosters collective identification with Danish *hyggelig* sociality in governing the collective anxiety around the parallel societies. Accordingly, the ‘face’ has become the new emblem of belonging and inclusion into the imagined community. In this imaginary, burqa is redefined as an object of anxiety inherent to parallel societies that should be overcome in defense of Danishness.

> With this bill, the Government wishes to emphasize that, in the Government's view, it is not compatible with the values and cohesion of Danish society or respect for our community to keep the face hidden in the public space. The face is thus the basis for recognition between people, just as the face makes it possible to read the signals and emotions of others. The face plays a crucial role in interaction in our society. In the Government's view, if you cover your face, you are signaling that you do not want to be part of Danish society. It is an expression of anonymization, where you reject interaction with your fellow citizens (…). It wears on the cohesion in Denmark and can contribute to creating the setting for parallel societies with their own norms and rules. (Folketingstidende A, L 219, 2018).

In justification of the bill, both Conservative Justice Minister Søren Pape Poulsen and DF’s Martin Henriksen resort to heavy use of value justifications As such, both actors

invoke moral panics around the loss of fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, equality, gender egalitarianism and trust, as values making ‘‘who the Danes are’’, as put by Poulsen in the same speech. The instrumentalization of these historically rooted and widely-shared national anchors help activating affective sentiments around the urgency of the bill, attributing an ontological significance to the banning of public covering. On other hand, both speeches construct the ‘hidden face’ as impediment to cultivation of *hyggelig* sociality and interactions, the sense of togetherness, trust and conformity that is integral to Danish selfhood. Within this imaginary, Muslim communities with their diverse traditions, customs and religious practices including their dressing and family/gender roles, are directly excluded from enjoying the Danish *hygge.* In this way, both narratives contribute to the exclusion of Muslim subjectivity from the imagined familiarity and safeness created by *hygge*, whose practices are rather associated with alienation, estrangement, disorder and lack of trust, as stressed by Poulsen.

Henriksen further supports the burqa ban as a key necessity for securing public safety by further criminalizing immigrants as suspects of terrorism and crime. As such, the policy narratives not only elicit desires for fulfillment through the recapture of *hyggelig* Denmark, but also promise ontological closure by further securitizing the Muslim *Other* for Danes’ missing/stolen enjoyment. In addition, the legitimizing discourse on the burqa ban is also heavily reliant on the gendered claims, through which the right-wing populist actors redefine themselves as the champions of gender egalitarianism in contrast to horrifically depicted, oppressive, patriarchal Muslim *Other*. As such, while gender equality would inherently include progressive norms, in the Scandinavian context, where it is valued as a core identity signifier, anti-immigrant fantasizing frequently resort to such stereotypical gender imaginations, depicting Muslim women as passive victim of Muslim oppression in need of protection. The last script from DF’s Henriksen parliamentary speech also exposes the very paradoxical nature of Danish fantasies of freedom and gender equality in the debate against the burqa. Namely, while freedom is often articulated as a fantasized ideal as central to Danish progressive, liberal self-image, the legitimizing discourse on the burqa ban shows that ‘‘freedom is not freedom unless it is Danish’’ (du Plessis, 2019: 89). Namely, the policy narrative hints that freedom is only secured to those who wishes to be like ‘Danish’, while any practice encroaching Danish way of life should be rightfully subject to government intervention and punitive authority, even if it may lead to dissonance in the Danish autobiographical narratives. Henriksen

similarly proposes to use of illiberal means onto communities who chose not to become Danish through a 'forced liberalism'. In populist anti-immigrant fantasizing, this seemingly contradictory stance is rather justified through a defense of the imagined national homogeneity, unity and cultural sameness.

> It is crucial for people's interaction and coexistence in Denmark that one does not hide one's face or one's identity from one's fellow citizens, and we find it crucial for social cohesion that masking and full-covering face coverings such as burqa and niqab will be banned in Denmark. We must not believe that Islamization and radicalization have abated, rather it has increased. In these years, many people come to Denmark from different countries, and it is important that they are met by a society that clearly shows our strong democratic and Danish values, and therefore clearly signals that life in Denmark is lived in respect for equality between men and women, why there are certain things that just cannot be accepted. At the same time, a ban will strengthen security for all of us. Both terrorists and other criminals can benefit from full-coverage clothing to conceal their identity when carrying out acts of terrorism or other forms of crime. (Martin Henriksen, Parliamentary Speech, 19.04.2018)

In doing this, Henriksen paradoxically presents liberalism as the main 'obstacle' to realize the promised ontological fulfillment, framing it as a ''boundless freedom'' allowing the destruction of the authentic Danish culture and way of life. Cultivating horrific descriptions of culturally impoverished and rootless Denmark, Henriksen ascribes an ontological significance to the banning of burqas in defense of the authentic Denmark. By juxtaposing the Jelling which symbolizes the 'birth' of Denmark as a Christian nation against today's Nørrebro, a neighborhood hosting the ''highest concentration of immigrants'' in Copenhagen, (Schmidt, 2019: 44) also seeks to cultivate a sense of significance around the proposed burqa ben. By invoking an idealized past moral order and pitting it against today's perceived multicultural Denmark, Henriksen's policy story further adds to the drama around the ongoing Danish victimhood, while ascribing subjects with a historical obligation to protect the Christian Denmark from the threat of Islamization.

> The discussion about a burqa ban illustrates that all too often it is ideology that stands in the way of doing what is necessary in the defense of our country (…). The story of the burqa ban serves as an excellent example of how dangerous the liberal worldview can be. The world will not be a freer place without authority. On the contrary in practice, it becomes a society where you have to insure yourself against all kinds of dangers and accidents, and where trust in each other is eroded by the expectation of self-interest-maximizing behavior of your fellow human beings. The idea of boundless freedom without any kind of obligation leaves man rootless and culturally impoverished (…). Our language and our cultural heritage must therefore take precedence over selfish needs or foreign religious dogmas for that matter (…). Liberalism is one of our worst enemies in the fight to avoid rootless Danes. It is crucial here that we collectively protect our common cultural

> origins. Even if the consequence can be legislation that interferes with the individual's scope of action. The most crucial thing is that the Danes feel at home in Jelling, as well as in Nørrebro. The essence is a story that for historical reasons we are obliged to protect Denmark. A story that contains the story of a people united under royalty, fatherland and Christianity (Martin Henriksen, Opinion Article, Kristeligt Dagblad, 30.01.2018).

Another controversial law as part of the deterrence-oriented asylum regime came with the adoption of the ***handshaking law*** in 2018 with the proposal of the right-wing populist DF. Accordingly, the law required new citizens to attend a constitutional ceremony and to shake hands with officials, usually from local municipalities as a final necessary step to acquire Danish citizenship, while rejecting citizenship claims of those who refuse to shake hands with the state officials (Folketingstidende, 2018a, L80). While the law was universally designed targeting all citizens, it was mainly regarded as a deliberate effort to target some Muslim communities who as a matter of faith would prefer avoiding physical contact with the opposite sex (Lindhardt, 2021). Accordingly, the law also included a provision prohibiting wearing of gloves when shaking hands. Similar to construction of 'face' as a common display of commitment to Danishness, now the practice of handshake has been constructed as uniquely and distinctively Danish and everything that Danishness stands for, including its superordinate gender norms and *hyggelig* sociality. In doing so, the law provided new emblems of identification, moral superiority and means for differentiation for the Danish *Self*, while further widening the transgressive socio-political space around immigrants' perceived incompatibility with the Danish culture and norms.

As seen from the below parliamentary speeches delivered by Minister of Immigration Inger Støjberg (V) and Christian Langballe (DF) handshake is constructed as a fundamental display of the aspiring citizens' commitment and embracement of Danish norms and culture. Most notably, shaking hands with someone from the opposite sex, is constructed as a symbol of committing Denmark and everything it entails in terms of embracing its progressive values such as freedom of expression, religion, equality and gender egalitarianism. The speeches by Støjberg and Langballe explicitly evoke this new emblem of belonging by further nurturing the difference between the morally superior/progressive Danish 'we' from the Muslim *Other* (Lindhardt, 2021), while redefining the hierarchy of social behaviors and attitudes accordingly. In doing this, the generational time frame again emerges as an affective narrative trope to mobilize the masses around the defense of a 'hardly-won', freedom. As a common temporal narrative

trope, a mythical past generation of Danes is instrumentalized to mobilize sense of proud victimhood around the perceived 'stolen freedom' in justification of the handshaking law.

> This legislation covers people who want to become Danes. I can only say that I think it is entirely appropriate that you should participate in a constitutional ceremony, where you are signing that you are now taking the foundation, the very foundation of freedoms that Denmark is founded on and which generations before us have laid. And it is a foundation that allows you to believe in exactly the god you want, that you can express yourself exactly as you want, that there is complete equality between the sexes – girls and boys, women and men is worth just as much (…). That is the central point in this legislation, namely that you sign, that you take the foundations – everything from freedom of religion, freedom of expression to equality – to yourself at the moment when you become a Danish citizen, thanks for it by shaking hands with the official who is now in charge of the ceremony (Inger Støjberg, 2018, Parliamentary Speech, L80 Proposal for an Act amending the Act on Danish citizenship).

> After all, I believe that giving a handshake is more than just greeting each other. It is actually part of contract law. This means that in the handshake there is also a promise that you will respect the Danish values and what Denmark stands for. If a person for religious reasons – possibly and perhaps a Muslim – regards the person in question, i.e. the mayor who might want to shake hands, as impure, this Muslim should not have citizenship at all. I think that is in the nature of the matter. Because then that person will not be part of the Danish community at all (…). I also believe that in the handshake - at least in my view - there is an indication and a promise and a declaration of solidarity in relation to Denmark, the Danish, the constitution, etc. That is to say, it indicates that you stand in solidarity with the country in which you have become a citizen (Christian Langballe, Parliamentary Speech, L 80 Proposal for an Act amending the Act on Danish citizenship)

A final example of the symbolic social politics during the identified period revolved around discussions on ***eating pork*** and even making the dish mandatory in public institutions, which has been a recurring theme in local and national debates in Danish politics since 2015 (Lindhardt, 2021; Karrebæk, 2021). As argued previously, especially under the recent deterrence-oriented welfare regime, symbolic issues such as eating pork, handshake, mixed gender swimming pools or circumcision (du Plessis, 2019: 90) have acquired emblematic status for Danish difference from the Muslim way of life, while reinforcing newly adopted Danish self-image as a 'bad destination' for refugees. In this context, the consumption of pork has also been more recently instrumentalized as a signifier of authentic and distinctive Danish culture in populist anti-immigrant fantasizing. In particular since the mid 2010s, the issue of pork has frequently emerged in Danish politics and media debates about whether pork should be removed from the menus in Danish schools or day care centers with Muslim children majority as a matter

of respect for the faith (Lindhardt, 2021: 1148). However, suggestions on removal of pork or offering different food options for Muslim children have often been constructed as a direct attack on Danish cohesion, traditional culture and freedom. In particular, in 2016, the pork issue has been revived when a regional city council dominated by the DF approved serving pork as a mandatory dish in public day-care institutions, which is often known as the so-called ‘‘The Meatball War’’[6] (Karrebæk, 2021). Since then, it occasionally appears in populist anti-immigrant discourse to invoke moral panics around ‘Islamization’ and the loss of superior Danish freedom and authentic culture by Muslims’ ‘perverse’ and ‘unjust’ enjoyment.

> We must speak up. We must fight the creeping Islamization of our country. We must put an end to demands for religious special treatment. Where it is about the pork having to leave the canteen. That girls and boys must be separated. That the class in the elementary school should no longer visit the church in December for the sake of Muslim children. We must stop the spread of mosques, calls to prayer in public space. We must set new conditions for becoming Danish citizens. We must be able to opt out of halal slaughtered products. There is plenty to be done. Denmark is a Christian country. Our society is rounded out by the Christian cultural heritage. Denmark must be Danish - also in 30, 50 and 100 years. That is why we are fighting against the creeping Islamization. We have just launched a major new initiative with a large number of concrete points. For Danish values. Against Islamization. It is a cultural battle we are in the middle of. A battle we MUST win in order to secure the Denmark we dream of for future generations. (Kristian Thulesen Dahl's speech at the Danish People's Party's annual meeting 2020)

As articulated by Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DF) in his speech above, Danish right-wing populist narratives invoke a sense of moral panic around the loss of Danish way of life in the face of several ‘‘un-Danish’’ practices of Muslim enjoyment. Accordingly, symbolic issue areas such as eating pork, serving halal food, separate swimming pools or church visits have been frequently instrumentalized to justify the anti-immigrant policy instruments as the only way for reaffirming a full Danish enjoyment. Dahl similarly articulates a crisis narrative over the perceived victimization of the Danes in the face of Muslim way of life. In justification of the symbolic policy measures, Dahl’s storytelling also resorts to temporal registers to intensify the sense of loss and proud victimhood around ‘Islamization’. By conflating an imagined past rooted in Christian cultural heritage with an imaginary of future generations, the policy moral is justified as a

[6]‘‘Danish city makes pork a must to ‘protect food culture’’’ January 22, 2016 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/1/22/danish-city-makes-pork-a-must-to-protect-food-culture

black/white necessity for winning the ‘‘cultural battle’’ against Islam to uphold the destined greatness of Danishness for the upcoming generations. The conflation of past, present and future again serves as a powerful affective discursive strategy to reinforce collective identity, while mobilizing subjects’ emotions between the anxiety of existential threats and the desire for ‘‘Denmark we dream of’’.

4.5.3 2019-2022: Covid-19 Pandemic and the Authoritarian Turn of the Welfare State

Setting the Crisis Context: Criminalizing the Immigrant ‘Other’ and Securitization of Immigration through the ‘Samfundssind’

DF’s anti-immigrant mobilization since the early 2000s have left significant marks on the contemporary ontological security discourse in Danish politics, gradually strengthening a unitary, cohesive, and homogeneous conception of Danish self-identity while increasingly excluding the ‘Others’-mostly the Muslim immigrants from the imagined community. This has become even more evident ahead of 2019 elections, when the center-right Liberals and the Social Democrats competed for adopting the strictest immigration agenda. The new challengers from the extreme right; the heavily nativist, Islamophobic and Eurosceptic ‘New Right’ and the outright-racist ‘Hard Line’ (Bergmann, 2017:150) have similarly exploited the affective socio-political space that was deeply shaped by the Manichean ontological assumptions of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. As the immigration-hostile space was becoming increasingly normalized and fragmented across the political spectrum, the DF has become the new mainstream in Danish politics, being both challenged by the center and newly emerging periphery parties (Bergmann, 2017:150).

In this context, promising ‘‘zero-asylum-seekers’’ ahead of the 2019 elections, the Social Democrats secured an electoral victory, recapturing so many voters back from the populist DF (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2020). Although the party was gradually abandoning its socio-liberal stance and copying DF’s harsh anti-immigration rhetoric over the past years, a significant shift occurred in 2019 when the Social Democrats under the so-called ‘‘paradigm shift’’ adopted an outright authoritarian stance towards immigration. It was under this specific ontological security context that the outbreak of the global pandemic in 2019 further reinforced the demarcation between the ‘real’ Danes (Rytter, 2010) and the Muslim ‘Other’.

As elsewhere, the outbreak of the global health crisis evolved to be a major global shock to Danish way of life, radically replacing the supposedly *hyggelig* sociality and everyday routines with social-distancing, lockdowns and quarantines. In governing the sudden loss of normality, the government launched a national campaign in March 2020 by calling upon collective display of social responsibility and solidarity in the fight against the 'invisible enemy' (Rytter, 2023: 5). Most notably, by recontextualizing the historically-rooted Danish ideal of *Samfundssind*, roughly translated as a 'community spirit/mindedness or civic consciousness' (Rytter, 2023), Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen sought to affectively mobilize the Danish people around an imagined 'national moral contract' (Dannesboe et al.,2022). Stressing the necessity of ''placing society's interests higher than one's own'' (Danish Language Council, 2020 cited in Gardiner, 2020) and individuals' moral obligation to its wider national community, especially the vulnerable (Rytter, 2023), this rarely used fantasized ideal has shaped the hegemonic discourse in Denmark, which was also well-received and utilized by wider political spectrum, including the extremist/populist voices in the wider pandemic debate.

Stretching back to 19th century Grundtvigian *folk* citizenry as well as the political discourse popularized by Social Democratic Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning (1873–1942) during the years preceding WWII (Rytter, 2023:7), the *Samfundssind* was reinvented by the Social Democratic Prime Minister in governing the 'joint struggle' against the global pandemic. Invoking a similar sense of solidaristic attachment, the government-led mobilization around the *Samfundssind* sought to ensure that the pandemic restrictions- i.e., social-distancing or wearing masks-were strictly adhered by the whole population, while also reimagining the boundaries of solidarity and belonging in the imagined welfare community. Especially in the subsequent periods, the Danish fantasized ideal turned into an overtly exclusionary narrative frame, mainly excluding the Muslim 'Others' who are supposedly unwilling/or unable to exhibit and practice *Samfundssind* in the joint pandemic struggle. As in other Scandinavian countries such as Norway where Nordic welfare state imaginary has become a, underpinned by values such as solidarity, responsibility and trust has become core affective mechanisms in governing the collective pandemic anxiety (Nilsen and Skarpenes, 2020). Similar to populist storytelling around the *hygge* in the immigration debate, the Danish national ideal of *Samfundssind* was also actively fantasized throughout the pandemic as a key modality of

enjoyment referring to an inherently unique and distinct way of life, behaving, feeling and thinking.

As exemplified through Frederiksen's speeches conveyed at several public occasions since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, the main mobilizing narrative around the pandemic precautions was mostly built around the Danish myth of *Samfundssind.* The analysis of the speeches reveals that Frederiksen frequently invokes a Danish 'we' which reinforces an imagined community as a socially/morally responsible, solidaristic, coherent and consensual collectivity. In particular, by reinforcing Danish fantasies of distinctiveness and authenticity, the *Samfundssind* invokes an ideal moral citizenry based on a shared sense of community spirit and collective responsibility. The invocation of *Samfundssind* also frequently involves war metaphors, heroism and military vocabulary such as ''fighting in the front line'' in the outbreak of the pandemic, portraying Denmark as being in the war against the enemy as similar to country did during the World War II. For instance, in a press conference on March 2020 Frederiksen argued: ''At no time since the Second World War have, we made such big decisions in such a short time in Denmark…We are fighting a new disease. And there is one thing that is completely evident, and that is the Danish way of doing things works'' (Mette Frederiksen, Press Conference, 30.03.2020) Linking past wartime experience with the collective struggle against the ongoing health crisis, Frederiksen's mythopoetic storytelling promises a linear ontological security discourse, while appealing to Danish desires for distinction at a time of national and global uncertainty.

Likewise, Frederiksen's pandemic storytelling involves frequent references to Danish heroism, claims for authenticity, uniqueness as well as simplicity underpinned by the myth of *hygge*. In a new year's address, Frederiksen argued that ''2020 will go down in history as a year that has had many heroes. Because our heroism during the pandemic is also what we didn't do. That we didn't shake hands…The way of being "hero" is probably good for us Danes. We are not into big arm gestures. But we know how to take responsibility and look after each other…It's that simple. And so unique'' (Mette Frederiksen, New Year's Speech, 01.01.2021). Accordingly, as put by Frederiksen in the same speech, Danish *Samfundssind* is an ''invaluable'' asset and source of ''strength that cannot be imitated.'' Similarly, in a different speech, Frederiksen invokes Danish heroism by stating that ''the social spirit of the Danes, our *Samfundssind* is the single most

important explanation of the fact that we have come through the crisis so well''(Mette Frederiksen, Congress of the Social Democrats 18.09.2021). In this way, the cultivated sense of heroism and uniqueness underpinned by the Danish *Samfundssind* served as an emotional boost by fueling feelings of pride, self-esteem and agency, providing 'anxious' majority subjects with an 'existential purpose' and sense of distinction in the joint struggle against the pandemic.

Similar to populist fantasizing around non-Western immigration, Frederiksen's pandemic storytelling also regularly draws on a mythical welfare society in reproducing the boundaries of Danishness in the context of the global pandemic. Through an emotive language, Prime Minister frequently resorts to a generational temporal template to evoke a nostalgic, proud past in which the Danish welfare community is collectively established by the past generations through hard work and sacrifice, which also rendered the Danish *Samfundssind* possible during the joint struggle against the virus. ''In Denmark, we have chosen our path. We find common solutions to common problems. We have a proud and long tradition of doing that. And right now we are fighting for the generation that laid the first stones for our welfare society'' claimed Frederiksen in a press conference on March 2020 (Mette Frederiksen, Press Conference 03.2020). Embedded in this generational temporality, particularly the elderly was constructed as the most deserving (and vulnerable) group in the collective struggle against the virus. As a powerful modality of enjoyment in the making of Danishness, the welfare state once more appeared as an affective and stabilizing ideal in the national pandemic mobilization, while providing a moral and legitimate base for fostering a sense of collective responsibility towards protecting the elderly. At the same time, the recontextualization of the mythical welfare society into the national pandemic mobilization also reinforces its unique and unattainable status that is exclusively reserved to the rightful enjoyment of the native Danes.

Despite not being directly demarcating the Danish *Self* from the perceived *Others,* at least in Frederiksen's early speeches, the pandemic fantasizing around the Danish *Samfundssind* was inherently exclusivist. As argued, the desired ideal of *Samfundssind* was mostly built around promoting a specific way of acting and behaving that was 'strictly' Danish, while framing the Danish *Self* as a unique subjectivity who has a particular understanding of the welfare community values such as collective responsibility, solidarity and trust. Indeed, as argued by Rytter (2023), the rearticulation

of *Samfundssind* was exclusionary from the very onset of the pandemic. Namely, as was also stressed in the previous analyses of populist discourse, the mythically constructed welfare state in Frederiksen's speeches broadly invokes an ethnically-homogeneous national ideal referring to the ''birth of the welfare state before the immigration of labor migrants, family reunifications, and refugees (which began in the 1960s)'' (Rytter, 2023:7). As such, the enjoyment of *Samfundssind* was already broadly secured to Danish citizens only who are able to share this unique, heart-felt civic and moral responsibility towards the wider community. Within this imagined spiritual unity, exhibiting and practicing *Samfundssind*- for instance in the form of wearing masks, following isolation and social-distancing rules- has become the new signifier of Danishness. This historically resonant anchor not only acted as a powerful ontological boost to the Danish 'we' at a time of heightened uncertainty, but also helped in time the flourishment of antagonistic narratives demarcating the 'un-Danish' 'Others', such as the Muslim immigrants from the imagined Danish *Samfundssind.*

This was particularly the case in August 2020, when the half of the infections occurred in Aarhus, the second largest city of Denmark within the city's Somali population. As such, the politicians from the populist right immediately framed the issue as a matter of cultural and religious incompatibility, linking the risk of contamination with Somali culture and lack of *Samfundssind.* For instance, on the Danish Constitution Day in 2021, Pia Kjærsgaard argued that the pandemic exposed that Denmark has ''a serious problem with parallel societies'' that are ''completely isolated'' from native Danes ''with other values, other norms and other customs'' (Pia Kjærsgaard, Constitutional Speech, 05.06. 2021). As similar to previous examples of populist anti-immigrant fantasizing, Kjærsgaard's pandemic storytelling rests on Manichean ontological demarcations between the 'inherently good' and 'evil' subjectivities. While reaffirming Danish *Self* as responsible, community-minded, solidaristic citizen ideal, Muslim communities are constructed as impediment to collective pandemic struggle by framing them as irresponsible, trouble-maker or deviant subjectivities that are not following ''our rules''.

In doing this, Kjærsgaard's storytelling around pandemic invokes further moral panic around the loss of Danish freedom, democracy, thereby the very essence of Danish way of life. By comparing pandemic restrictions with the perceived 'Muslim oppression' imposed upon the native Danes' freedom, Kjærsgaard frames Islam as form of a

restriction ‘‘worse than pandemic’’ ‘‘which will mark the lives of future generations of Danes and transform them for the worse’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, 05.06. 2021). Embedded in this horrific future projection, the cultivated moral panic is also further dramatized with historical references to the ‘‘birthday of the constitution’’ as the backbone of the ‘‘162-year-old Danish democracy’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, 05.06. 2021). By juxtaposing this proud distant past against the anxiety-ridden present and horrific future, Kjærsgaard’s pandemic storytelling advances a sense of ‘proud victimhood’ around the perceived threat of Islamization. Accordingly, by linking distant virtuous past with anxiety-ridden present and dystopic futures, present is denoted as a critical conjuncture, assigning the subjects with historical obligation to "take back the Constitution’’ and ‘‘become master of our own house again’’ (Pia Kjærsgaard, 05.06. 2021).

To sum, as exemplified through the analyses above, Covid-19 provided a renewed emotive context for Danish populist right to further securitize immigrants as irresponsible, incompatible subjectivities alongside growing stigmatization of ethnic minorities as ‘disease carriers’ and ‘threats to public health’ (Falkenbach and Greer, 2021) informed by a biological conception of insecurity. While the invocation of the Danish *Samfundssind* has acquired a particular discursive supremacy across the political spectrum which was difficult to oppose, it soon turned into an exclusionary trope by nurturing the illusionary distinction between the ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ of the pandemic. Accordingly, the analysis of Frederiksen’s and Kjærsgaard’s speeches revealed that while the elderly is often constructed as the most ‘deserving’ through ‘‘caring narratives’’ (Halberg et al.,2021), ethnic minority groups have oftentimes been narrated through the narratives of incompatibility, inadequacy and irresponsibility. Accordingly, political parties from the far-right as well as the ruling Social Democrats were able to construct a discourse that the non-Western citizens are "again" creating security problems for community in the context of the pandemic struggle, which further facilitated the legitimization of policies disciplining and criminalizing the immigrant communities. As elsewhere in the world, securitization of immigration has become a viable populist strategy in Denmark for transforming the abstractness of the disease into identifiable objects of fear, thereby making the crisis more ‘‘manageable and controllable’’ (Dionne and Turkmen, 2020).

Social Policy as Fulfilment: 'Island' and Deportation as the New Fantasies of Exclusion in the Nordic Welfare State

Denmark's post-2015 'deterrence-oriented' asylum regime, operating through the merging of social welfare and migration-control (Ataç, 2018; Lindberg, 2020), has gradually consolidated a hierarchically structured social citizenship regime, characterized by an increasingly racialized and moralized welfare community imaginary. Especially, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the anti-immigrant fantasizing has increasingly been revolved around the notions of crime, fraud and abuse, depicting them as 'immoral/disrespectful' *Others* impediment to imagined Danish *Samfundssind.* This has reinforced the process of what Barker and Smith (2021) calls as the ''crimimmigration'' or the efforts at 'penal nationalism' through which the ''unwanted immigration'' has become an issue of criminal justice. In the post-2019 context, immigrants' social problems have also been subjected to extreme ''moralization'' which often resulted in policy justifications for further disciplining, monitoring and surveillance (Kiely and Swirak, 2022). Accordingly, the increased conflation of immigration with perceived criminality of the immigrant *Other* has led to a particular emotive context in which the use of penal power is justified as a promise of ontological security to the 'anxious' Danish majorities.

In fact, with the inauguration of the 'paradigm shift' in 2019, the political discourse has become particularly hostile and criminalizing towards the ''unwanted'' non-Western refugees and immigrants with an emphasis on increased welfare conditionality, detention, deterrence or even complete withdrawal of essential welfare from the rejected or 'illegalized' asylum seekers (Barker, 2018). As the asylum policy changed from integration to deportation, the Danish welfare nationalism has also increasingly relied on penal nationalism in which the perceived *Others*, particularly the non-citizens or ethnic/racial minorities are exposed to increased state intervention and crime control in the name of securing the national interest, including upholding national identity and the welfare nation state (Barker and Smith, 2021; Corry, 2022). In the case Danish welfare state, rather than being at odds with the ideals of Nordic exceptionalism as a humanitarian and egalitarian ideal, the expansion of penal powers is indeed illustrative of the resilience of Danish fantasies of welfare society as a strictly homogeneous and cohesive national ideal (Barker and Smith, 2021), exposing the very nature of its exclusionary underpinnings.

To begin with, the so-called **''paradigm shift''** officially introduced by the former right-wing government in 2019 with support from the Danish People's Party, gave a specific momentum to the ongoing conflation of social welfare and penal nationalism by further securitizing the immigrant welfare recipients as undeserving, unproductive, immoral subjects to be 'governed' and 'intervened'. The policy shift implied an outright turn towards temporary protection by changing the country's asylum policy ''from integration to temporariness and repatriation'' (Lindberg, 2022: 31). With particular emphasis on 'temporariness', the law consolidated the ongoing deterrence-oriented regime by reasserting Denmark as a bad place for refugee destination. The law also included reductions on social benefits, imposed further restrictions on family reunification with additional symbolic elements such as renaming the "social benefits" as "repatriation benefits" and exchanging the ''integration programmes'' for ''return programmes'' (Lindberg, 2022: 420). The incumbent Social Democrats which took the government in 2019 further expanded the restrictive approach by introducing Denmark's first ***deportation law,*** legalizing the deporting of people to their countries as soon as it is legally possible, opening of detention centers outside Denmark and Europe, while also pressuring 'non-deported' people to leave the country with reduced social rights/benefits accompanied by increasing use of surveillance, monitoring and coercion mechanisms (Lindberg, 2022: 30).

Especially when faced with an 'existential threat' to its homogeneity as in the case of 2015 refugee 'crisis', welfare-oriented social control has become a powerful tool for reaffirming ontological security by redrawing the boundaries of desirable peoplehood in the welfare community. In this sense, the emergent penal nationalism acts as a both material and symbolic means for exclusion and bordering, acquiring a particular 'communicative' capacity under the recent 'deportation regime' in reproducing the boundaries of deservingness, belonging and moral worthiness among the members of the imagined community (Barker, 2018).

In the new deportation-oriented regime evolving since the reception 'crisis' of 2015, welfare state apparatuses have become even more powerful mechanisms for governing mobility and 'undesired' immigrants, ranging from limiting access to welfare-including housing, social aid or healthcare, depriving social rights in asylum and deportation camps to increased surveillance and monitoring of the 'non-deported' asylum seekers (Lindberg;

2020, 2022). As such, alongside the worsening of material conditions of asylum seekers with increased precarity and social marginalization in asylum and deportation camps (Lindberg, 2020, Floros and Jørgensen, 2020), the conflation of welfare and penal policies have also reshaped the political discourse on ontological security by reinforcing the boundaries between the 'desired' *Self* and 'undesired' Others. Especially, the processes of detention, isolation and confinement imbued with minimum welfare benefits eventually lead to ''the social death'' of the detained asylum seekers by reaffirming their status as ''racialized nonpersons without rights'' (Mountz, 2020: 20). To this extent, deportation has become a new political fantasy in Denmark, which appeals to nativist desires for restoring Danish homogeneity, cohesion and distinctiveness. Shaped under this fantasmatic imagination, the welfare-oriented deportation regime has reasserted spatial, racial and social boundaries among the members of the Danish imagined welfare community in the post-2019 context.

Among the most controversial policy measured adopted under the paradigm shift was confining the 'unwanted' immigrants (rejected asylum seekers with or without criminal sentence) into a **''prison island''** called Lindholm (Baker and Smith, 2021; Lindberg, 2022), which used to be ''house to research laboratories for infectious veterinary diseases'' in the past (Lindberg; 2022: 99). Since the launch of the deportation camps, their location has been subject to fierce political debate due to perceived insecurity caused by the non-deportable asylum seekers in the Danish neighborhoods near the camps (Lindberg, 2022: 98) As such, the previous right-wing government had launched a new detention camp to be built on a remote island called Lindholm. Although the planned relocation was dropped because of its perceived financial costs by the incumbent Social Democratic government in 2019[7], 'the island' has become a powerful object of political fantasy in the contemporary Danish political discourse by channeling the collective anxiety around the perceived everyday insecurity around immigrants towards an imaginary remote space as the only way to secure the imagined Danish community.

[7] 'Denmark ends plan for 'deserted island' deportation facility'
https://www.thelocal.dk/20190920/denmark-ends-plan-for-deserted-island-deportation-facility

As such, the racial social imaginaries underpinning the fantasies of 'remote island' have shaped Danish political discourse on ontological security by further securitizing the racialized *Others* as potential criminals that should be confined, isolated, monitored and deprived of social rights. In this sense, as argued by Mountz (2020), the idealized remote 'island' has served as an affective tool for dehumanization and securitization while ''shifting legal grounds and moral compasses governing the preservation of human rights, building on fear and premised on national security imperatives'' (Mountz, 2020: 30-31). In this way, the 'island' has not only served as an emotionally mobilizing imaginary for further material exclusion of the racialized *Others* from the imagined community by their physical 'remoteness', but also plays on the collective anxiety by keeping the Danish subjects alarmed about the future security threats posed by the non-deportable people, if the politics of deportation is not continued.

In this context, in justification of the deportation and repatriation policies, the DF representatives commonly invokes the trope of 'failed integration' by invoking the inherent impossibility of the integration of Muslim immigrants into the imagined Danish community. As exemplified through Henriksen's opinion article, the Danish national identity is once more constructed over the presumed difference/incompatibility of the Muslim community from the Danish *Self.* The construction of 'Western' as against the Islam is illustrative of this self-proclaimed moral/cultural superiority over the Muslim *Other*. Embedded in the national fantasies of distinctiveness and homogeneity, the failed integration discourse not only appeals to a stable and superior *Self*, but also invokes fear and victimization around the ongoing and future costs of 'hopeless' integration endeavor on the Danish way of life. The use of metaphors such as 'blood, sweat and tears' also seeks to stimulate feelings of frustration, resentment and anger in justification of the new asylum regime, while further criminalizing the Muslim *Other* in relation to the perceived 'human costs' of the integration. As a common narrative element in DF's storytelling, the temporality is once again constructed emotively over the trope of generational continuity and responsibility of upholding Danishness. Through this temporal frame, ordering Danish virtuous/mythical past, anxiety-ridden current and imagined future generations, the policy narrative offers a linear ontological security continuum of Danish peoplehood, while harnessing affective and emotional sentiments around the legitimatization of the deportation regime.

> I cannot watch while mass immigration and Islamism erode the culture of trust that has existed in Denmark for centuries. Repatriation is of utmost necessity (…) No matter how much it hurts culture-denying radicals, immigration, especially from Muslim countries, is an expense. Economic, cultural and social. Ruud Koopmans, who has been researching integration for more than 20 years, cannot point to a single Western country that has been successful in integrating Muslims (…). It is not a bill that our children and grandchildren will have to pay. (…) To recognize that we are dealing with a population group which, for one reason or another, is difficult to integrate. We have invested enormous sums as well as blood, sweat and tears in various integration plans over the past 30 years - all without success. (…). We have to see society as an organism that needs to hang together. And here the repatriation of refugees is therefore necessary if we are to continue to be able to pass on a safe and coherent Denmark to our descendants (Martin Henriksen, Opinion Article, Altinget, 20.03.2019).

In defense of the deportation policy regime and externalization of the reception centers, DF representatives such as Peter Skaarup, Pia Kjærsgaard as well as New Right's (NB) Pernille Vermund frequently accuse international conventions of preventing Denmark from externalizing asylum process to a third country outside Europe-including plans to build a Danish reception center in Rwanda. In justification of the deportation regime, policy narratives often build on historically-embedded signifiers of Danishness and values such as security, trust, order, cohesion and social awareness underpinning the mythical welfare society. Framing them as under threat, Both Skaarup and Vermund evoke a siege mentality in fostering the Manichean ontological description between the 'good/victimized' Danes and the 'evil/criminal' Muslim *Other*. NB's Vermund, for instance, evokes the salience around the deportation regime by linking the notions of uncontrolled immigration with issues of crime, violence and fraud to further dehumanize the unwanted migrants as undeserving of rights and protection. In particular, the criminalizing discourse was politically appealing and mobilizing in constructing the 'unwanted' migrants as object of anxiety, while simultaneously obscuring their potential victimization and oppression that they subject to (Lindberg, 2022: 99).

Rooted in a fantasmatic logic, the speeches depict the international conventions as obstacle to Danes' 'whole' identity with Skaarup resorting to a conspiratorial logic by invoking a unified 'them' of 'convention lovers' stealing the idealized Danish sovereignty. The appropriation of victimhood status through the conventions as well as the 'criminal' Muslim *Other* also appeals to feelings of injustice, unfairness as well as insecurity, while arousing desire to recapture Danish national pride and uniqueness. The affective pull around the cultivated victimization also hinges on the nostalgically

structured past moral order in which the Danish *Self* is imagined as an ontologically secure, safe, cohesive and sovereign whole. By revitalizing these mythical signifiers in the context of recent challenges of immigration and connecting them with a crisis-ridden present, both speeches construct the deportation regime as an utmost necessity to secure the survival of Danishness for the future generations.

> It is the conventions that make it impossible to deport violent foreigners (…). For the convention lovers, the rights of criminal foreigners are obviously more important than the well-being of the Danes (…). But for us in the Danish People's Party, the Danes come first in all respects. Therefore, we are prepared to take any step to get the criminal foreigners thrown out of the country and win back the country's sovereignty. And if it is a law change or a showdown with the conventions that is needed: Then that is what we do...! (…) We fight for a society where social awareness and order form the framework for our existence. A society where security and trust are a matter of course. We will fight for cohesion. We will fight for Danish culture, tradition and history. We DFers want to protect Denmark. Our Denmark! (Peter Skaarup, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 19.09.2021).

> Violence, rape, robbery, fraud – yes, a foreigner can do almost anything in this country and still be protected by a convention that pays more attention to the criminal than to the victim (…) And they also know very well that far too many of those they have let in do not share our values at all. That far too many immigrants from the Muslim countries prefer to live according to their own Islamic norms, raise public welfare and develop their own system in a parallel economy and in a parallel society detached from the Danish one (..) A country's immigration policy must of course benefit the country's own population – first and foremost (…) For us at New Right, immigration policy is not a fight against anything. It's a fight for something. It is a fight for something precious. Something beautiful and something unique. It is a fight so that we as people can survive in our own country and live according to the values that bind us together. Values that have been developed and refined over generations and that have created the foundation for one of the world's best countries (Pernille Vermund, Annual Party Meeting Speech, 30.10.2021).

Criticizing failed attempts at offshoring asylum centers outside Denmark and Europe, particularly referring to plans on a reception center in Rwanda, Pia Kjærsgaard's similarly attacks the conventions as obstacles prohibiting idealized Danish completeness, epitomized in objects of desire such as the 'constitution, sovereignty, freedom of expression' and 'right to a safe existence'. Danish fantasies of freedom and sovereignty once more appear as compelling ideals to evoke a sense of proud victimhood around 'uncontrolled' immigration. Besides, throughout the speech, she also evokes the trope of 'excessive enjoyment' by depicting foreigners as passively living on social benefits and welfare privileges at the expense of the native Danes. Other than invoking fears around the 'unjust' enjoyment of the imagined national welfare solidarity, the notions of

'hospitability and privileges' also appeals to Danish desires for distinction and differentiation from the perceived *Others,* as a uniquely progressive but victimized ideal. Finally, similar conspiratorial logic is also embedded in Kjærsgaard's storytelling on conventions that frames the global and national elites as part of an orchestrated attack on the Danish people.

> The government will never establish an exit center in a corrupt African country. Of course, there is also a reason for that. The reason is called "conventions". (…) The conventions are the foreigners' party - but for the Danes, the conventions mean insecurity and limitations in everyday life. In more and more countries, people are realizing that the development cannot continue. That the attempt to integrate the many foreigners has been a disaster (…). It is time we "take back the constitution"! That we become master of our own house again! That it is US and not others who decide who should stay in this country and benefit from our hospitality and privileges! That the restrictions on Danes' freedom of expression and right to a safe existence on Danish soil be removed! (Pia Kjærsgaard's, Constitutional Speech, 05.06.2021)

The below script from DF's parliamentary proposal also builds on a highly simplified, emotionally-loaded, fantasmatic temporal template in defense of the deportation regime. Largely building on a discourse of crisis, the narrative is structured around an excessively horrific imaginary of future Denmark completely destroyed/changed by Muslim way of life, whose recapture would only be possible through repatriating as much refugees as possible. By invoking moral panic around diverse ontological threats to future Denmark, ranging from public safety concerns to 'handshake avoidance', the policy moral is reduced into a black/white choice between Danish versus immigrants' interests.

> In the view of the authors of the proposal, integration has failed and led to the proliferation of parallel societies around the country, especially in the larger cities. Too many people live here people live with their own norms, rules and values, which that differ from those of the rest of society (…). They are changing the country in a negative direction and create divisions in the population. There are almost daily discussions about gender-segregated swimming pools, handshake avoidance, headscarves, Muslim free schools, halal cooked food, gender inequality, minarets, large mosques, radicalization, social control, low education, education, gang crime, ghettos, social fraud, high unemployment, etc. (…). Non-Western immigrants are clearly negatively over-represented in a number of statistics on crime, public welfare benefits and educational attainment (…). In addition to the human, value and cultural problems caused by immigration from Muslim countries, there is a massive economic challenge that costs Danish society costs Danish society DKK 31 billion every year (…). This is money that the proposers would much rather spend on welfare for the Danes (…). The authors of the proposal are of the opinion that if we allow immigration from these countries to continue and do not repatriate more, we are looking into a future with an even more dramatically changed Denmark than we are already

> witnessing, and with problems that we will never be able to deal with, but instead destroying the country. (Folketinget A., B 84, 2023).

Another significant policy debate in response to 'moral panic' over the perceived insecurity posed by the 'unwanted immigration' has been around the ***welfare fraud*** which was particularly facilitated by the emergency around the Covid-19 pandemic, reinforcing immigrants' stigma as potential abusers and cheaters. As argued, the Covid-19 has casted more doubts on the 'moral worthiness' of the non-Western immigrants in access to welfare, which has translated into ever-increasingly restrictive pandemic countermeasures in the form of welfare-oriented social control. First, among the notable legal changes in this direction was realized with the ***amendment of the Penal Code*** in April 2020, introducing harsher punishments (such as the doubling of sentencing) in relation to pandemic-related offences including ''stealing protective equipment, face masks, hand sanitizers or impersonating a doctor or a nurse''. (Folketingstiende A., 2020, L 157). The amended Penal code also introduced harsher penalties for misuse of welfare aid, credit or subsidy packages in relation to Covid-19 relief funds. However, an additional legislative change was also proposed by the right-wing populist and extremist parties in the parliament such as the DF and NB, providing a legal base for deportation of the 'criminal foreigners' in relation to above mentioned corona-related offenses (Klinge, 2021).

In justification of the deportation of 'criminal foreigners' from pandemic related offences, both party representatives from the DF and NB frequently invoke the Danish fantasy of *Samfundssind*- the mythical frame mobilized for governing the pandemic anxiety-as being unjustly exploited and abused by the criminal non-citizens. As argued, the mobilization around the *Samfundssind* was exclusionary from the onset of the global health crisis premised upon nationalistic fantasies securing Danishness only to those participate in the creation of Danish welfare state, which also led to regeneration of Grundtvigian *folk* citizenry based on virtues such as solidarity, trust and responsibility. Embedded in these mythical imaginaries of peoplehood and nationhood, the populist policy narratives around the pandemic also heavily rests on clear demarcation of 'heroes' and 'villains. Especially, non-Western immigrants have become the magnets for fraudulent and criminal behavior. Vermund's below parliamentary speech on Covid-related penal amendments exemplifies this highly racialized and moralized imaginary,

which directly frames Muslim as a suspect criminal population who abuse the Danish *Samfundssind.*

As such, the speech not only invokes further feelings of fear, frustration and disempowerment around the perceived abuse of Danish community spirit, but also reinforces immigrants' perceived 'undeservingness' as immoral, disrespectful and abusing subjectivities. Drawing heavily on Danish fantasies of 'peoplehood' and emotive identity signifiers such as trust and responsibility, the criminalizing political rhetoric not only resonates desires with homogenous conception of Danishness at time of a dislocation, but also perpetuates the political fantasies around deportation and remote detention as the only way for national subjectivities to become ontologically secure. The notion of 'trust' is especially constructed as a fantasized ideal throughout the speech as a stolen and exploited enjoyment, which could only be recaptured through sending immigrants as remote as possible.

> The way Danes have increasingly taken responsibility for each other has warmed me. It gives me faith that we as a people – despite the tragedies we are experiencing now and which will come in the coming time – can come out of the crisis stronger. The trust we have in each other helps us in this time (…). But unfortunately, there are people who abuse the Danes' trust in the worst possible way. We hear daily about how criminal persons take advantage of the current crisis situation to commit criminal offences (…). The other day you could also read in several media about a man who stole hand sanitizer at Aarhus University Hospital, after which he threatened the hospital guard with a knife. Police described the man as Middle Eastern in appearance. In a time like this, when we Danes experience a huge intervention in our everyday life to reduce the spread of infection, it is even more unacceptable and frustrating if possible, if foreigners who commit crimes are allowed to stay in the country (Pernille Vermund, Parliamentary Speech, 02.04.2020).

A similar fantasmatic legitimation can be identified through another parliamentary speech made by Pernille Vermund stipulating deportation of non-citizens if they are convicted of social security fraud (Resolution proposal B278 on increasing penalties so that social fraud always results in a deportation sentence for foreigners). By way of legitimizing the fraud-related deportation, Vermund' storytelling rests on a fantasmatic narrative template structured around the coexistence of beatific and horrific imaginations of Denmark. As a common narrative trope long intrinsic to Danish populist right, Vermund's storytelling similarly draws on a mythical welfare society built by the imagined past generations of Danes as well as historically-embedded signifiers of belonging such as 'solidarity, cohesion, sense of community, shared belonging and trust'. The invocation of these

temporal registers not only establish emotional link between the past and present in the context of contemporary challenges, but also help guiding subjects' sense-making towards a nativist recapture of the Danish welfare as a well-deserved historical pride. Building on these temporal anchors, the policy moral on social fraud is presented as a binary choice with clear construction of heroes and enemies, by depicting immigrants as non-contributing, passive and abusing subjectivities as against the community-minded native Danes underpinned by *Samfundssind*. By building on the trope of 'excessive/stolen enjoyment', the narrative frames immigrants as exploitative subjects impediment to survival of the welfare society both in terms of financial resources that could be distributed otherwise towards the native 'deserving', but also spiritually by ruining the Danish *Samfundssind.*

> For centuries, citizens have worked together to create the moral code and values that we share with each other in Denmark today. This solidarity between citizens is the result of a national mindset shaped by both our geographical borders and our shared history. When we Danes feel a sense of community across the country, it is because we can see ourselves in each other (…). That is why it is a prerequisite for continued support for a modern welfare society in society in Denmark that citizens have an understanding of the Danish community. If the sense of community disappears, so does solidarity across geography and social classes will also disappear. And solidarity is challenged. The sense of community that is the prerequisite for solidarity between citizens is today under pressure from immigration and a welfare state that has lost sight of its purpose. When we absorb too many people who do not understand, respect and contribute to the community, we lose cohesion and a sense of shared belonging with each other. Civic solidarity crumbles when too many people abuse and exploit it to receive public benefits without becoming or being part of society. Trust between citizens is diminished to the detriment of the individual and the community, but the need for laws, rules and controls increases (…). Deportation for social security fraud can not only contribute to cut off welfare benefits to the most vulnerable in society, but also to prevent other criminal offences. (Pernille Vermund, Parliamentary Speech, 10.05.2021).

In this connection, by often building on these nationally-resonant anchors during the pandemic, populist actors seek to mobilize national subjects' emotional and ontological attachment with the proposed extension of penal powers. Particularly, given the centeredness of the welfare state in the Danish biographical narratives, it has contributed to the creation of a fantasmatic socio-political space around 'normalization' of deportation and other penal means to govern 'unwanted' immigration. Structured around a fantasmatic logic, the criminalizing policy rhetoric on welfare fraud in the post-Covid 19 context has contributed to the imagined 'deportability' (Lindberg, 2022) of non-Western immigrants and asylum seekers by casting more suspicion of their moral worthiness, desiredness and perceived inclusion into the welfare community. By framing

immigrants as fraudulent, criminal and immoral subjectivities that should be intervened, the right-wing political discourse has served to strengthening of a hierarchically ordered welfare regime that is deeply tied to penal means of exclusion and bordering. As such, fantasies of 'deportability' is reproduced and reconfigured during the Covid-19 crisis in conjunction with Danish welfare myths and imaginaries in a way to invoke nativist desires for fuller enjoyment of Danishness. In terms of policy response, the social-fraud storytelling not only exposes the racial and spatial borders of the welfare state with ever-restrictive means to govern 'undesired' populations, including policing, remote detention and deportation, but also helps fueling of ontological security imaginations in Poland around the desired moral peoplehood, boundaries of belonging and social citizenship.

Chapter 5

FAMILY POLICY AS A PROMISE OF ONTOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT: THE ROLE OF MYTHS AND FANTASY IN POISH POPULIST STORYTELLING

5.1. Introduction

> We have to redouble our efforts in the face of a threat that persists. We draw strength from the values that we hold dear: our families, our homes, our Christian faith. We must keep our eye fixed on the Poland we want to build—one that defeats our adversaries by promoting dignity, equal opportunity and justice. We must remain alert—lest we wake up, one day, in the old Poland (Beata Szydło, 21.10.2017, cited in Cap, 2022: 74).

In a parliamentary debate in 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydło frames the government's pro-family social policy as an existential necessity for building the 'New Poland'. By triggering ontological insecurities around a possible return to 'Old Poland', characterized by injustices, inequalities as well as anti-familial/liberal ideology, the policy speech legitimizes governments' pro-family orientation as the only way towards achieving an ontologically-secure future. By juxtaposing these two antagonistic visions, the speech not only invokes fear and sense of loss in relation to the past order, but also reactivates 'traditonalist' desires towards building a 'New Poland' underpinned by generous welfare, morally strong, just and dignified future. By building on this highly simplified, emotionally-loaded, antagonistic temporal template, the newly launched pro-welfare family policy vision is proposed as the only way towards recapturing a 'privileged' future (Cap, 2021). In this way, the policy context is presented as a binary choice between the horrifically imagined 'Old Poland' and the beatifically portrayed 'privileged Poland'. Thereby, the policy narrative not only mitigates anxiety by foregrounding the 'threat', but also arouses desire towards a neo-traditionalist restoration of Polishness, as the only way to achieve an ontologically secure future.

In this connection, this study aims to untangle the distinctive social policy shift undertaken by the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party since 2015 in the context of Poland's ongoing demographic challenges. As such, the main question is how and why Poland, as one of the historical laggards in social policy and family policy (Szelewa, 2017) defined by an 'implicit family regime', has radically moved towards an 'explicitly family-oriented policy regime' underpinned by a generous and universal system of cash benefits since 2015. Especially generous family benefits such as the Family 500+ has become the new pillar of PiS' popularity since 2015 by well transcending the traditional and conservative base of the party. CBOS Survey of 2019 found that 62% of adults expressed positive evaluations on the PiS' government's pro-family benefits, while the previous surveys point out that positive opinions could not exceed 16% between 1996-2015 (Meardi and 19 Guardiancich, 2021: 141). Likewise, the popularity of the programme also had forced the liberal-conservative opposition, PO to ensure the continuation of the 500+ programme in their electoral pledges (Meardi and 19 Guardiancich, 2021: 141).

However, despite the seemingly universal character of the family benefit system, the pro-family welfare regime has also increasingly become reliant on demarcation between the biopolitical 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Most notably, with the launch of the new welfare model in 2019, the exclusionary and discriminatory genre of the policy rhetoric has been strengthened by directly excluding the large groups of society from the expanded welfare benefits. In parallel to the illiberal transformation of the democratic regime since 2015, the welfare state has also become increasingly selective and exclusionary, being framed as inclusive only for those who conform to the 'idealized Polish normality' in the form of white, heterosexual, Catholic, large families with many children. In contrast, people who don't fit into this ideal, such as single mothers, unmarried/childless couples or sexual minorities saw their social and civil rights significantly reduced.

Accordingly, this chapter asks how and why family policy in Poland has radically moved towards from 'implicit' familalism into 'explicit' familial orientation in 2015? Most notably, how can we account for the popularity and broader appeal of the PiS-led familial welfare regime in wider sections of the population in Poland? In particular, despite the apparent failure of pro-natalist family benefits; most notably the signature 500+

programme-in boosting fertility rates[8], how can we understand the broad policy commitment of the government, even forcing liberal opposition to promise the continuation of the programme ahead of recent elections in 2019 and 2023?

In this respect, by building on the proposed theoretical link between social policy-Lacanian ontological security, I aim to uncover the communicative agency of populist politics in driving Poland's familial policy transformation. As such, I argue that PiS' policy narrativity in the realm of family policy is deeply built upon a particular fantasmatic-historical populist narrative template, which not only captures multitudes of historically-embedded insecurities and emotions rooted in recent and distant past, but constantly transform them into future promises of ontological security. In this respect, Polish case demonstrates that PiS' family policy narration not only appeals to material and cultural insecurities of the electorate by both redistributing cash or restoring traditional gender roles, but acts as a wider ontological security instrument through which the historically 'wounded' Polish *Self* can reaffirm a sense of self-esteem, recognition, status and moral superiority.

In this respect, the first section provides a brief overview of the Polish transformation as well as the state of the existing studies. In what follows, I provide a historical reading of the evolution of the key pillars of Polish national identity. Then, I provide a brief empirical exploration into PiS' emerging emotional governance since the early 1990s in the context of major national transformations. This section provides a background setting to understand the PiS-led welfare transformation in the mid-2010s. Building on the performative aspect of populism as both the 'trigger' and the 'solution' of the manufactured ontological insecurities, the second section of the article proposes a three-staged empirical analysis of Polish family policy development. (i) First stage covers the years between 2008-2015 which marked the transitory period from an implicit to explicit familalism under the influence of economic crises as well as the Poland's evolving 'war on gender'(ii). The second stage covers the 2015-2019 period in which the right-wing populist PiS came to power through an interrelated crisis performance of immigration and

[8] ''No boost to births from Poland's flagship child-benefit scheme, government admits'' Notes from Poland, Jan 23, 2020 https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/01/23/no-boost-to-birth-rate-from-polands-flagship-child-benefit-scheme-government-admits/

gender, and fundamentally transformed the family policy regime (iii). Finally, the third section will trace the evolution of family policy and the creation of the Polish 'version' of welfare state since 2019 to Present, in the context of 2019/20 election cycles as well as the Covid-19 emergency.

5.2 The Polish Puzzle: Background and Existing Research

The post-communist Polish welfare state was characterized by significant state withdrawal from generous social policy programmes including the sphere of family policy and formal child-care services until the early 2000s in comparison to other countries in the region (Szelewa, 2017: 129; Saxonberg, 2013; Szelewa, 2014). The post-1989 ''shock therapy'' reforms led to significant retrenchment on the family policy with considerable cuts on state support for formal care which was also accompanied by spending cuts in family benefits (Szelewa, 2017: 129). The relatively generous and pro-family policy legacy of the state socialism was abandoned in the name of limiting the role of the state and opening space for private providers in the free market (Szelewa, 2014: 37). This radical retrenchment of social policy in the neo-liberal era was also resulted in a general neglect of formal cash support, family allowances, underdeveloped maternity leave framework, reliance on means-testing as well as disappearance of childcare services for the early-age children, which culminated into a logic of ''austerity-driven privatization of care'' (Szelewa, 2017: 137). For this reason, various scholars have argued that the post-communist Polish welfare system represented a form of 'implicit familalism', (Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Szelewa 2014; Suwada, 2021) through which the general neglect of formal state support implicitly ascribes the burden of child-care on families, in particular women (Szelewa, 2014, 2017; Suwada, 2021).

It is also worth mentioning that until the late 1990s, there was no significant ideological difference across the political parties, including the right-wing parties and the post-communist left in the field of family policy. Rather, there has been an almost widespread consensus and recognition about the central role of family and motherhood in the society (Saxonberg, 2013). In addition to neoliberal restructuring on the social policy domain, the 'implicit familalism' was also supported by the ideational and institutional conservative power of the Catholic Church in the post-communist Poland, which however similarly did not facilitate comprehensive changes in the family policy regime around explicit

financial and material support to families. Despite growing recognition of comprehensive family policy since the early 2000s, manifested through policy developments in the realm of maternity leave or income relieves for families, there was a general neglect in interfering in the family realm during the first two decades of neoliberal transformation (Szelewa, 2017: 137).

Although the issues around family policy were brought to the mainstream politics, especially under the PiS government of 2005-2007, it was not until 2015 that the right-wing, populist Law and Justice (PiS) came to the power and eventually transformed the Polish family policy from an 'implicit' regime into a truly, family-oriented comprehensive policy regime. According to Szelewa (2017), this shift implied a radical turn towards explicit familalism in Polish social policy regime, driven by a system of extensive cash support to families accompanied by weak development of formal care. Accordingly, the explicit financial and material support to families not only reinforces the traditional role of family as the primary care giver in the society, but also broadly rejects other care options, including formal state care, alternative to families. In this context, this transformative shift constitutes the main puzzle of this study.

Drawing on the existing literature (Szelewa, 2014; 2017; Inglot, 2020; Suwada, 2021) it should also be noted that the transformation of the Polish family policy was also interesting for two reasons: First, the country has been facing serious demographic pressures since the early late 1990s due to the sudden drop-in fertility rates and waves of emigration to Western Europe. Since the fall of state socialism, the fertility rate has steadily declined from 2.31 in 1985 all time lowest in 2005 with 1.23, reaching 1.37 in 2010 with a slight increase, much below the level of generational replacement (Statista, 2023). In addition, since the accession to the EU in May 2004 Poland has been steadily exposed to negative demographic trends given the massive emigration of almost 2 million, young, working-age population out of Poland, predominantly to Western Europe (Stubbs and Lendvai-Baiton, 2019). However, despite the evolving demographic emergency there were no attempts at substantial policy change towards explicitly familalist direction, except for PiS' minority government during 2005-2007. In a similar vein, the subsequent liberal governments until 2015 had made no major attempts at developing formal childcare system in response to risk of depopulation in comparison to other conservative welfare regimes such as in Germany or Spain (Szelewa, 2014: 33).

Second, Poland was also the only country in Europe that overcome the 2008 economic crisis in a good shape, making the budgetary pressures and austerity less of a serious concern in contrast to other EU countries (Szelewa, 2014:33). This, however, again did not translated into substantial investment in state's provision of formal childcare or more balanced parental leave schemes in contrast to country's conservative counterparts such as Germany or France (Inglot, 2020: 7). For Szelwea (2014; 2017) to address the twin challenges of economic crisis and declining fertility, countries like Sweden or 'male-bread winner' countries such as Germany and France significantly invested in the development and availability of formal childcare services to increase female labor participation. On the other hand, Poland remained rather low spender in in the area of family both in terms of provision of cash spending as well as development of formal childcare institutions (Szelwea 2014; 2017). Poland is still one of the lowest spenders on early childhood education and care in the EU and OECD countries accompanied by poor investment in public services such as the national health care and education (OECD, 2023). Although the successive conservative liberal governments between 2007-2015 expanded familial efforts such as through increasing maternity leave, it was the Law and Justice party since 2015 that adopted a radically comprehensive and innovative family policy instruments aimed at individual households (Inglot, 2020).

Previous research has produced rich literature to account for Poland's post-2015 social and family policy turn in the context of illiberal turn in CEECs in relation to conflation of conservative ideas, authoritarian populism and neoliberalism (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020; Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton,2020), while some accounts specifically analyzed the rise of *500+ Family Plus* programme in the context of 'commodification of social reproduction' (Shields, 2021; Baranowski, 2021). Some studies have also approached the familial turn with respect to neo-nationalist (Grzebyk,2021) or conservative/economic nationalist tenets of PiS' illiberal turn (Orestein and Bugaric, 2020) which also shaped the ideological repertoire of social and family policy. On the other hand, the existing research has also foregrounded the role of religion, especially the legacy of traditional Catholicism together with the emerging ideological expansion towards familalism as an important right-wing populist electoral strategy (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2021). Some studies have also focused on the joint influence of the Catholic Church and the resurgence of Catholic civil society mobilization in Poland

(Szelewa, 2021), as important triggers for refamilialisation of public and policy space in the post-2015 context.

However, despite these scholarly attempts at explaining nationalist, conservative, familalist, religious, neoliberal, authoritarian or populist basis of the post-2015 social policy changes, shaping the ideological repertoire of the governing PiS' social agenda, less attention has been paid to communicative agency of PiS in repackaging these ideological substances in a culturally acceptable manner at the local context. While such approaches might shed well light on the appeal and popularity of PiS' pro-family policy agenda to a certain extent, a more nuanced and contextual analysis would center on explaining political actors' narrative patterns and storytelling including, myths, history, memory, symbols and other forms of cultural signifiers that garner meaning at the national contexts. Accordingly, in line with the theoretical proposition of this study, this chapter adopts a historically-informed, narrative-centered approach to understand the PiS' populist agency in the realm of social policy, which is also under-studied in the existing literature. To fill this gap, this chapter adopts a historically-informed critical narrative inquiry into to PiS' social policy narration through the lens of ontological security, used as the main theoretical lens for understanding the popularity and resilience of the pro-family policy.

5.3 Polish Ontological Security in the Making: From Historical Myths to Neo-Traditionalist Fantasies of Family

The foundational aspects of contemporary narratives of Polishness are deeply rooted in the country's past characterized by territorial discontinuities, foreign oppression and limited state sovereignty for large part of its existence, during which Poland had to continuously reinvent itself and seek for a fuller and continuous Self-identity both domestically and externally (Krasnodębska, 2021: 83). Accordingly, several scholars have focused on key historical epochs in understanding the imagined community of Poland in construction, including the age of 'statelessness' between 1795-1918, the 20th century communism and the more recent European integration (Zubrzycki 2006; 2011; Krasnodębska, 2021). In the light of these critical junctures, this section will map out the evolution of key national Self-identity narratives and national myths that constituted the contemporary Polish ontological security regime.

Accordingly, it is argued that under these critical pressures since the 18th century, Poland's ontological (in)security is predominantly characterized by continuous fear over existential *Others*, political annihilation, cultural extinction, lost sovereignty as well as constant status of backwardness in relation to West. In addition, these historically-rooted ontological insecurities have not only culminated into a narrowly imagined, highly defensive (Ágh, 2016) Polish national community since the late 19th century, but also led to emergence of powerful myths and national fantasies in a way to reaffirm ontological security, agency and moral superiority in the domestic and external sphere. As such, these historical narratives, mainly originated in the nation's traumatic past continues to inform the current articulations of the Polish *Self* and the *Others,* especially acting as identity-reaffirming mechanisms in critical situations. In this context, the following sub-sections will identify the key critical junctures, dominant national narratives and myths out of which the contemporary Polishness is created. It is argued to be crucial in understanding the current workings of populist political storytelling in Poland and its quest for ontological security in the face of recent crises of globalization, multiculturalism and European integration.

The Age of Partitions 1795-1918: Trauma of Statelessness and Political Annihilation

The Polish history is commonly divided into two distinct epochs, between the one covering the 16th and 17th centuries of territorial expansion, influence and sovereignty (Domanska, 2000), and a period of decline characterized by territorial partitions, lost sovereignty and eventual ''disappearance from the European map'' (Zubrzycki, 2006: 17). The first epoch covers the 'golden age' of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) which was a multi-ethnic and multi religious federal republic covering the large areas of today's Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. For various scholars, this period was marked by territorial expansions, economic prosperity and sense of cultural distinctiveness, which overall culminated into a grand narrative of Polish uniqueness and exceptionalism in relation to its absolutist Western counterparts (Domanska, 2000; Zubrzycki, 2006, Krasnodębska, 2021).

Most notably, its political system of the time called as the 'noble democracy' was exceptional in the age of absolutism, underpinned by the idea of 'golden freedom', a parliamentary system guaranteeing the nobles to right to elect the king and hold the

legislative power (Krasnodębska, 2021; Zubrzycki, 2006). Other than its democratically superior political system (Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2002), the Polish nobility had also differentiated itself from its Western counterparts through a self-proclaimed moral superiority based on a ‘‘mythical tribal identity’’ (Zubrzycki, 2006: 40) of ancient Sarmatians as well as Roman Catholicism. Accordingly, Polish nobles had promoted a national narrative of a superior ‘‘gentry republic’’ over the Western monarchy both politically and culturally, while framing Poland as a ‘‘bulwark of Christianity’’ (Walicki 1994: 11). Finally, the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth based on agricultural trade had also been narrated by the nobles as a means for differentiating the Polish *Self* from the ‘industrialized’ West, by fostering a distinctive imaginary of Poland as a ‘‘Great Mill of Europe’’ (Domanska, 2000: 254) and ‘‘bulwark of Christendom’’ (Walicki 1994:11). These ontological means for identification and differentiation, however, did not mean an overall abandonment of the West in *Self*-identity narratives, rather the Polish noble identity was cultivating an alternative interpretation of Western civilization based on Roman Catholicism and ‘‘republican traditions of the Antiquity’’ that still informs today’s perceived ‘Polish exceptionalism’ in relation to Western civilization (Krasnodębska, 2021: 88-89)

Although the legacy of the gentry republic has left significant marks on the contemporary Polish ontological security framework, particularly in relation to its ‘exceptional self-image’ in contrast to West, the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 was a key transforming trauma in Polish history. The gradual weakening of the Commonwealth through wars and internal problems had eventually led to the dissolution of the republic by the neighboring powers of Russia, Prussia and Austria, which paved the way for a long and turbulent period of statelessness, lasting over hundred years. This period is commonly characterized by the ‘period of partitions’ between 1795-1918 representing a transforming trauma in Polish history, which mainly created the narrative structure of today’s Polishness. The dissolution of the Polish state in 1795 is defined even by some political elites as the ‘death of the state’ and Polish nation (Zubrzycki, 2006: 44), making the fear of political annihilation and external *Others* an enduring characteristic of Polish national identity. Namely, as stressed by Domanska, the long experience of statelessness translated into a deep-seated ‘‘wound culture’’ built upon victimization, humiliation, suffering and melancholy (Domanska, 2000: 255), that still informs contemporary articulations of Polishness.

In response to the eventual dissolution of the Polish Commonwealth in 1795, the political elites had to redefine Polishness and nationhood throughout the 19th century. In the absence of state, the nation was reimagined as a 'moral entity' of common history and culture binding Polish people under a common ideal of regaining independence and statehood (Zubrzycki, 2006: 44). As such, the dissolution of the multiethnic republic fundamentally challenged the existing Polish self-image as a morally superior, influential and sovereign political entity in Europe, triggering a deep sense of ontological insecurity. In a way to reaffirm ontological security in a 'stateless' nation of Poles, Polish patriots cultivated an imaginary of Polish nation based on moral unity underpinned by shared ideals and values, rather than institutions as the basis Polish nation. In this imaginary, the state had acquired a less significant position providing only an outer structure, while the nation is narrated as a heart-felt moral entity that ''resides in the souls'' of the Poles (Zubrzycki, 2016: 44). In the absence of state, the civic conception of identity under the former multiethnic republic had become increasingly difficult to provide an overarching ontological security framework, paving the way for an ethnically and religiously narrow and homogenous conception of Polish *Self*-identity.

The Myths of 'Christ of Nations', Messianic Martyrology and Polish Victimhood

The ontological insecurity around statelessness during the 19th century further strengthened the role of Roman Catholic church in the imagined Polish community, making Catholicism a defining feature of Polishness. In the absence of a state organization, the Catholic Church was largely seen as the primary ontological security affirming institution, providing morally legitimate and stable set of meanings. The romantic poets such as Mickiewicz were particularly influential in crafting this novel imaginary of Poland as ''a nation without a state, the Christ of Nations'' (Domanska, 2000: 255). This self-proclaimed identity was deeply rooted in the notions of sacrifice, suffering and victimization by attributing the Poles a missionary role to free the enslaved nations from oppression and 'evils' with a promise of universal salvation (Zubrzycki, 2006, 2011). As such, the notions of messianism and martyrdom provided an ontological security framework for the stateless Poles through which they can reaffirm sense of agency, self-esteem, status and ontological security. In this sense, the messianic martyrology, as argued by Zubrzycki (2006), provided an overall narrative structure, a renewed 'vocabulary' (Zubrzycki, 2010: 27) for the 'anxious' Poles that they would enjoy

identifying with, by merging Catholicity with the aspired sense of Polish uniqueness and exceptionalism.

This aspired vision of Poland as a savior and martyr was also rooted in a fantasmatic logic projecting the Poland as an enslaved, victimized but chosen nation, projecting both anxiety and ontological security simultaneously. This fantasized ideal of messianism, thus, not only promised ontological security to the stateless Poles under the partitions but gradually translated into a core narrative of Polishness, providing Poles with an overarching role and agency in relation to their meaningful existence throughout the nation's entire history. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Catholic Church had also become a central institution in popularizing this romantic self-image through religious practices, rituals and symbols. Also, the highly simplified nature of romantic literature underpinning the Polish messianism based on legends and myths of heroes (victims/martyrs) and villains was influential in consolidation of a fantasmatic space around collective identification with the Polish messianism, with Catholic Church becoming the main ''national'' conveyer of the ''romantic civil religion'' in the absence of state authority (Morawska cited in Zubrzycki, 2006: 49).

The Polish *Self*-proclaimed messianism shaped under the partitions period also paved the way for construction of a sense of 'proud victimhood' as a key characteristic of Polish identity narratives over the course of its history. As such, as argued by Domanska (2000), the trauma of dissolution of the republic during the 19th century had led to creation of a status of victimhood as a desired ideal for Polish *Self.* In fact, Poland's traumatic historical epoch characterized by the cycles of political partitions, liberation and foreign occupations during the 19th and 20th centuries have contributed to a sense of victimhood as an aspired status. Namely, rather than exposing vulnerability and fragility, the victimhood status had also promised Poles with ontological security by reclaiming moral superiority against the *Others,* while justifying political action towards *Others'* evil and unjust deeds. Appealing to feelings of loss, shame and humiliation, the status of victimhood around messianism, thus, appears as an affective mobilizing means for the Polish *Self* throughout its 'anxious' history by reaffirming national self-esteem and pride. For Domanska, the conditions of death and suffering are even existential for Poland's ontological continuity, making its victimization as a desirable status ''for the nations' periodic renewal and revitalization'' (Domanska, 2000; 256). In this sense, this proud-

imbued messianic victimization narrative since the 19th century served as a key ontology-affirming means towards making sense of the 'Polish existential enigma' by translating the cycles of suffering and humiliation into narratives of rebirths, resurrection and tragic heroisms (Domanska, 2000: 257).

'Rebirth' of Poland in 1918 and the Myth of Polak-Katolik (Pole-Catholic)

Shaped under this interpretative frame, the reconstruction of Polish state at the end of the World War I was narrated as a ''rebirth'' of Poland (Zubrzycki, 2010: 28). As argued, towards the end of the 19th century Polish civic nationalism had gradually embraced a narrower conception of identity based on ethno-cultural-linguistic homogeneity. This framing of national identity was also firmly advocated by Roman Dmowski, a leading ideologist of modern Polish nationalism in the late 19th and 20th centuries (Walicki 2000). He was particularly influential in crafting an ideal of Catholic Poland under the ''*Polak-Katolik*'' *Self*-identity and politicizing it around a common national programme (Zubrzycki, 2006: 60). The fusion of religion and ethnicity, thus, not only promised Poles with a powerful unified narrative, but also forged new identification means for differentiation and *Othering.* As such, Jews have become the main objects of ethno-religious *Othering* during the interwar years promoted by the newly established Polish state and the Catholic Church (Zubrzycki, 2006; 2010). The new national mobilization around the *Polak-Katolik* identity framed the Jews as the primary internal *Other* due to their perceived association with ''social radicalism, for they represented both liberalism and communism'' which were both ''godless and antinational'' (Zubrzycki, 2006: 59). The demonization of Jews as 'secular, godless, antagonistic' *Others* was also strategically mobilizing during the interwar years in response to the rise of the secular Left (Zubrzycki, 2006, 59).

The Myth of Matka Polka (Mother Poland)

Another significant myth mobilized under the traumatic experience of partitions was rooted in the Polish romantic mythology called as the *Matka-Polka* (Polish Mother), which envisioned an idealized femininity and motherhood within the struggle of Polish independence and statehood during the 19th century. This myth, dating back to the conceptualizations of the Virgin Mary of the 17th century Poland, was reactivated

throughout the partitions period to cultivate a patriotic female imagery as protector of the Catholic Poland and guarantee of the nation of 'stateless' Poles. As such, the myth stands for an idealized femininity, a devoted mother figure who raises her children in patriotic spirit and who is supposed to make sacrifices for her family. As articulated in Gaweda (2017):

> Clothed in black, Mother Poland [Matka-Polka] (…) cultivated Polish identity and traditions at home, maintained the religion, language and customs. Years spent without men taught mothers ironclad self-reliance – they had to teach themselves to run the family after their husbands were killed or exiled. Mother Poland's heroism pressures women to be perfect. Their reward is high prestige in society and family but being placed on such a pedestal narrows the spectrum of socially acceptable behaviors (…) The Polish Mother has had to be good, faithful, strong and devoted; it would not do for her to submit to desires or pursue her own passions or dreams (Gaweda, 2017: 49).

This idealized figure has acted as a stabilizing ontological anchor during the turbulent partitions period, promising fundamental role and agency to the Polish women in the imagined national salvation, which resulted in strong merging of women's social and cultural roles with the nation's imagined survival both physically and culturally (Graff, 2008). Accordingly, the 'perfect' Polish mother is associated with a heroic 'multifunctionality' (Imbierowicz, 2012:141) capable of bearing housework, taking care of family and raising children. Most notably, this self-sacrificing, heroic and patriotic mother ideal is considered as the 'natural bearers' of authentic Polish culture and values, for passing along Polish language and tradition to the successive generations of Poles (Imbierowicz, 2012:142). As seen, this idealized patriotic motherhood is also deeply rooted in the Polish messianic martyrdom that is heavily loaded around the topoi of suffering, sacrifice and victimization. As such, the idealized patriotic Polish motherhood had acquired an ontological significance within the imagery of Polish messianism, who were imagined as transmitters of Polish martyrdom to the future generations, guaranteeing the survival and continuity of the Polish existence under the constant anxiety of annihilation and extinction (Plach, 2020). Additionally, this heroic, self-sacrificing motherly role had also long been a means for seeking differentiation, recognition and ontological security for the Polish female identity. As put by Imbierowicz (2012): ''Matka Polka is the formula for women to become part of the national Polish community. For a woman in Poland motherhood is to ingratiate oneself in this community" (Walczewska, 1999 cited in Imbierowicz, 2012: 53).

Polish nationalism shaped under the Dmowski's influence during the interwar years further instrumentalized this myth in the national mobilization around the *Polak-Katolik* identity by projecting a masculinist idealization of Polishness. Other than the ethno-religious *Othering*, non-traditional women or sexual 'Others' have also become internal *Others* threatening the moral unity of Poland by making the nation ''weaker and more effeminate'' thereby rendering the nation vulnerable to external threats (Grudzinska 2021). The ontological insecurities displayed through this gendered *Othering* has increasingly become attached with the country's increasing encounter with 'European modernity' during the 20th century. In order to pin down the unknown anxieties around social modernization, the nationalist elites invoked a moral panic around the loss of traditional family, masculinity and sexual morality, besides all aspects of women's and sexual liberation were narrated as anti-Polish and threats to national survival (Graff, 2008). This idealized femininity around Polish martyrdom continues to inform the Polish self-identity narratives today, especially being instrumentalized under contemporary demographic challenges as a means for ontological closure by complementing the sense of Polish messianic uniqueness, national pride and moral superiority.

Polak-Katolik versus the Communist 'Other'

World War II and the Communist period were similarly narrated within the frames of Poland's historical suffering and victimization as part of its existential narrative. As such, the Second World War was narrated as the 'Fourth partition' of Poland, while the communist rule represented the 'Fifth Partition' within the Polish national narratives (Zubrzycki, 2010: 28). Most notably, the ''Western abandonment of Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War'' leaving Poland vulnerable to the communist subjugation also reactivated Polish ontological insecurity in relation to 'West' by further contributing to the imagined victimization around the Polish *Self* (Mälksoo, 2010: 75). In this sense, the end of the WWII and the subsequent communist rule marked as another traumatic moment in the long story of Polish historical suffering, adding further anxieties to the Polish *Self* around the feelings of suffering, betrayal, injustice, inferiority and a heightened status of ''liminal Europeanness'' (Mälksoo, 2010: 73).

In response to the emergent collective anxiety, the Polish myths of 'Christ of nations' and messianic martyrdom again served as ontology-security reaffirming narratives to the

'anxious' Poles to redefine themselves and their sense of meaningful existence under the communist rule. With losing almost 3 million Jewish population during the Holocaust and the massive emigrations from the region following the end of the war, the ethnic composition of Poland was also dramatically altered turning it into an ethnically and religiously homogenous nation (Zubrzycki, 2010; Krasnodębska, 2021). Under this emergent demographic make-up, Catholic Church had consolidated its position as the guarantee and protector of the Polish nation, while the Catholic Poles were once more narrated as self-sacrificing, heroic subjectivities as protectors of the European salvation against the evil 'oppressors'- targeting this time, the 'atheist' Communists (Zubrzycki, 2006: 60).

The Polish socio-political space under the communist rule witnessed two dominant narratives in competition to represent the Polish *Self*: the communist party-state envisioning a civic and secular national identity and the Catholic Church fostering an ethno-religious idealization of nation (Kania-Lundholm, 2012). Given the failure of socialist state to cultivate a 'socialist Polish identity', the Catholic Church enjoyed a particular symbolic role in spearheading the imagined ethno-Catholic nationhood. Particularly, in the absence of a legitimate state authority, the Church increasingly became the only legitimate source for seeking moral and ontological certainty. By cultivating an antagonism between the 'good/true/authentic Poles' and the 'bad/alien/atheist' Communists (Kania-Lundholm, 2012), the Catholic Church and its social teachings also projected a highly simplified and moralized imagery of society, while revitalizing the ongoing sense of victimhood and unjust suffering inherent to Polish autobiographical narratives. This polarizing discourse promoted by the Catholic Church also allowed Poles to reclaim moral superiority over the Communist *Other,* while simultaneously linking communism with historical anxiety of foreign occupation and national/religious repression.

Furthermore, the nationalist mobilization around the *Polak-Katolik* patriotism also provided a moral base for the emergence of an anti-communist resistance movement called the 'Solidarity' towards the end of the 1980s (Kubik, 1994; Zubrzycki, 2006). Heavily influenced by Polish romantic nationalism and Catholic conceptualizations of 'good' and 'evil', the movement also reinforced the ontological status of Poles as 'victimized but chosen' people reminiscent of the 19th century Polish mythology. This

mythic narrative trope also provided an affective impetus for popularizing the opposition movement among the Polish masses by recontextualizing the shared trauma of statelessness and foreign oppressions in the ongoing struggle against the totalitarian regime.

Finally, as the Catholic Church became the only 'guardian' of Polishness in opposition against the communist regime, it had also increasingly secured its monopoly over Polish tradition, culture, including the family and gender roles. Under the emergent Solidarity movement, the self-sacrificing and patriotic imaginary of the Polish Mother *(Matka Polka)* was further consolidated (Imbierowicz, 2012:143). The idealized motherhood was also incorporated into the Solidarity movement to mobilize the Polish women around the national struggle for independence, while reassigning an ontological meaning to their motherly role in the imagined national survival. Similar to partitions period of the 19th century, *Polak-Katolik* women were once more assigned with domestic and reproductive roles who should make sacrifices for the national resistance by nurturing patriotism at home and transmitting them to further generations.

Therefore, the anti-communist mobilization under the guises of Catholicism reinforced this 'nation-oriented' idealizations of women by further signifying the Polish motherhood as a devoted, proud but mournful/suffering subjectivity. By providing a linear ontological security discourse, this myth was also instrumentalized by the socialist state to craft a Socialist *Matka Polka* (Imbierowicz, 2012) underpinned by an imagery of 'female communist worker' who both enters the labor force, carryout housework, raise children and make sacrifice for the common good envisioned by the communist regime (Corrin, 1992). Despite the improved conditions of women under the communist regime with participation in the labor force, education and liberalization of reproductive rights, the Socialist *Matka Polka* also projected a gendered social order by reinforcing an idealized 'domestic femininity' and the ontological functions of women in nation-building.
Although both the Catholic Poles and the Communist state utilized this imaginary as part of fostering collective identities and legitimizing their political programmes, the myth particularly appealed to the Catholic-Polish desires for patriotic restoration of the Polishness in response to deeply shared humiliation and oppression under the 'alien' communist regime. Besides, this fantasized motherhood ideal again served as a means for identification and differentiation from the communist *Other,* while complementing Polish

autobiographical narratives in relation to its ‘‘proud victimhood’’ serving as an ontological coping mechanism in the communist era.

‘‘Return to Europe’’ and Post-transition Identity Crisis

Within the historical narrative of Polish suffering and victimization around foreign occupations and conquest, the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 represented another critical juncture in the making of Polishness. In this context, as argued by Zubrzycki (2010), the post-communist transition was narrated as an another ‘revival’ in the long story of Polish suffering by the oppressive powers. However, this time, it was ‘‘first and foremost understood by Poles as a national one’’ in constructing a national ‘‘state *of* and *for* Poles’’ (Zubrzycki, 2010: 38). Regaining independence from the ‘communist oppressor’, the newly constructed society also sought to reinvent itself by liberating itself everything associated with the old communist regime (Kania-Lundholm, 2012: 99) including its myths, narratives and symbols. In this context, other than profound transformations in the economic and political sphere, the newly emerging Polish nation-state had also to redefine national identity and signifiers of belonging. For Halas (2002), the disappearance of the communist *Other* as the common enemy had led to a particular ‘‘ambiguity in Polish identity’’ (Halas, 2002:125) in the post-1989 context, also leading to questioning of the ‘‘social and moral monopoly’’ of the Catholic Church over the Polish national identity (Zubrzycki, 2001: 640). The fall of communism was particularly challenging for the discursive appeal of the Catholic Church as there were no longer any *Other* to be positioned against the Polish *Self*, reducing significantly its affective mobilizing potential in the emergent multi-institutional setting.

With the advent of the legitimate and national statehood and the reduced appeal of the Catholic Church, the public space was also divided into two competing narratives around the civic and ethno-religious conception of Polishness (Zubrzycki, 2001: 640). The civic discourse was promoted by the liberal elites in relation to Polish historical civic heritage and offered a redefinition of Poland as a modern, European and secular state, challenging the dominance of the national Catholic ideology over Polishness. Despite the criticism of the Catholic Church and the right-wing elites over the proposed civic vision and the moral questions of Europeanization, there was a pressing consensus among the Polish political elites to ‘catch up’ with the West both economically and politically (Kania-Lundholm,

2012: 102). As such, the Europeanization narrative became highly dominant promising a 'return to Europe' framed as a long-awaited back to 'normality' from 40 years of Soviet oppression as well as centuries-long territorial discontinuities (Krastev and Holmes, 2019).

According to Mälksoo (2010), the 40 years Soviet legacy had also left significant marks on Polish ontological security, triggering a deep sense of inferiority, backwardness and exclusion throughout the Cold War, which culminated into an anxious status of liminality in relation to West despite perceiving themselves as part of Europe (Mälksoo, 2010: 88). In response to these prolonged ontological insecurities, Europe appeared as a stable anchor through which Poland could reinvent itself both physically and ontologically. In particular, Europeanization narratives appealed to the desires for fulfilling the Polish perceived ontological lack and becoming finally 'fully' European by overcoming its historically-rooted status of liminality, feelings of collective shame and humiliation in relation to its communist legacy (Krasnodębska, 2021:26).

However, the growing dissatisfaction with the 'shock therapy' reforms in socio-economic terms as well as the issues surrounding 'cultural' modernization led to questioning of the dominant Europeanization narrative and what the European 'normality' actually stands for Poland and Polish national identity (Kubik, 2018). Most notably, the transition reforms were mostly seen as the ''imitation of the West'', which according to Krastev and Holmes (2019) led to further 'moral and psychological downsides' in the Central and Eastern European countries as the position of the imitator inevitably reactivated the historically rooted senses of inadequacy, inferiority and backwardness (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002; Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 151). Namely, although catching up with Europe was initially seen as a promise of ontological fullness to liminal European identity, it gradually turned into a major threat to the very essence of the Polishness and its meaningful existence.

> The imitation of moral ideals, unlike the borrowing of technologies, makes you resemble the one you admire but simultaneously makes you look less like yourself at a time when your own uniqueness and keeping faith with your group are at the heart of your struggle for dignity and recognition. The prevailing cult of innovation, creativity and originality at the core of liberal modernity means that, even for the inhabitants of economically successful countries such as Poland, the project of adopting a Western model under Western supervision feels like a confession of having failed to escape Central Europe's historical vassalage to foreign instructors and inquisitors (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 21).

In particular, as stressed by Krastev and Holmes (2019), the moral 'shock therapy' in the form of cultural and moral conversion to European values and way of life revitalized the Polish ontological insecurity over the lost sovereignty and foreign domination, putting authentic/morally superior Polish national identity at risk, further evoking feelings of shame, humiliation and inferiority in relation to West. The fear over 'moral loss' in relation to Europe, especially since the country joined the EU in 2004, has become more evident with the resurgent anti-liberal, anti-EU politics in the post-communist Europe. In Poland as well as in Hungary, the populist actors have successfully capitalized on these heightened emotions and ontological insecurities by cultivating moral panics around the loss of authentic, traditional and national identities, and channeling them towards traditionalist restoration with a promise of ontological completeness. In this context, the next section will contextualize the rise of Poland's right-wing populism under the impulses of post-1989 Europeanization and globalization with a focus on how the populist right instrumentalizes the historically rooted socio-psychological emotional bonds, myths and narratives to legitimize newer crisis and emergencies in the new globalized and multicultural era.

5.4 Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Poland and the Making of the 'Moral Demographic' Anxiety in the Post-Communist Poland

The previous section has sought to disentangle the Polish 'existential enigma' through the lens of ontological security with a particular focus on fundamental myths and narratives that have shaped the Polish psychic development since the 18th century. Uncovering these historical roots provides us with deeper understanding of Poland's recent illiberal turn, and the sources of wide popular support and resonance of Poland's traditionalist populist surge since the early 2000s. In this context, moving from the centrality of historical anchors in providing emotional guidance to contemporary nationalist projects, this section will empirically analyze the rise of Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) in the post-communist Europe as part of the broader anti-liberal backlash in the Central and Eastern Europe since the early 2000s. In doing this, this section will primarily focus on the role of fantasies, myths and historically rooted ontological insecurities in the making of Poland's post-communist 'moral-demographic anxiety' (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 84) over the past decades. Through an empirical focus on populist narratives deployed at key

political junctures, this section aims to map out key discursive features of PiS' storytelling in the early phases of post-communist transition.

As argued previously, the process of Europeanization followed by the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, has marked a psychologically challenging, even traumatic transformation on collective identities. Especially the emergent 'moral hierarchy' of values between the West and the East, as the latter was trying to imitate the former under the guises of Europeanization, modernization and democratization, has become a defining feature of the post-communist collective anxiety and the 'identity crisis' in the Central and Eastern European region (Krastev and Holmes, 2019). Besides, the post-1989 emigration to Western Europe and resulting depopulation, which was also aggravated by the EU accession in 2004 further revitalized Poland's existential fears over national and cultural annihilation.

By exploiting these heightened emotions and ontological insecurities, I argue that PiS' fantasmatic storytelling helped perpetuating of a moral panic around the post-1989 liberal transformation, while promising an imaginary fullness to come based on traditionalist restoration of 'Polishness'-including its ethno-religiously homogenous society, sovereignty, freedom and traditional family/social roles (Melito, 2020). In this fantasmatic imagination, several external and internal *Others* have been portrayed as 'obstacles' to realization of the idealized Polishness and 'way of life' (Zizek, 1993). As such, since the early 2000s the EU, liberal elites, post-communists, immigrants, non-traditional women or sexual minorities have been narrated as objects of moral-demographic anxiety as impediment to achievement of fuller Polish identity, while projecting the Polish subjects as passive victims of stolen enjoyment by the *Others*. By articulating highly-simplified, clear-cut, visions of future structured around excessively beatific (i.e., masculinist, traditional family, authentic Polish culture and religion) and horrific (i.e., moral loss, degeneration, cultural extinction) visions of Poland, PiS' storytelling promises ontological security, while simultaneously excluding the perceived *Others* from the national narrative.

The emotional pull of this highly simplified narrative template was also further consolidated by PiS' heavy use of history (Wodak, 2015; Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Bennett, 2022) and fantasmatic temporality, providing Polish subjects with ontologically

resonant and stable anchors of identification during the systemic change. Structured in this way, the Polish case is particularly illuminating due to the centrality of historical narratives in Law and Justice's (PiS) emotional governance. As such, PiS representatives commonly instrumentalize Polish historical trauma of statelessness, foreign domination as well as religious and traditional myths to mobilize emotional attachment around neo-traditional fantasies of Polishness. These historical anchors not only act as 'sense-making' devices (Homolar and Scholz, 2019) at times of heightened uncertainty by providing sense of biographical continuity and rootedness, but also appeal to powerful feelings such as loss, shame and humiliation as well as pride and moral superiority. By employing the power of fantasies, past traumas and national myths, it is argued that PiS' crisis storytelling in relation to Europeanization and Western liberalism contributed to normalization of neo-traditionalist imagery of Polishness since the early 2000s. Within this theoretical premises, this section will empirically analyze the evolution of PiS' emotional governance in the context of key critical junctures in the early phase of communist transition.

As mentioned in the previous section, the trauma over long period of statelessness, foreign occupation as well the communist experience of 20th century had left significant marks on Polish ontological security. As such, being deprived of a legitimate and national state in most of its national narrative, the Polish national identity had developed in large part through identification with a unitary sense of nationhood/peoplehood as genuine expression of Polishness as against the 'alien' oppressors and elites (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019: 68). As argued, the ontological status underpinned by long periods of statelessness had cultivated an imagined moral homogeneity underpinned by Catholicism, traditional and masculinist patterns of family and motherhood as the only guarantee and continuity of Polishness. As argued by Bill and Stanley (2020):

> Poland's history as a nation without a state compelled Poles "to pay special attention to moral unity" and to reject divisions and conflicts within society as threats to vital national interests. While Western liberalism was rooted in political, class, ethnic and moral heterogeneity, the homogeneity of contemporary Poland had created a heavily asymmetrical relationship between the dominant group and those who were at best tolerated, rather than regarded as moral equals (Bill and Stanley, 2020: 380).

Shaped under this historical trauma, the post-1989 ‘imitation imperative’ further complicated the post-communist transition by nourishing a sense of loss in relation to perceived ‘moral unity’ in the face of Western liberalism and Europeanization. In fact, alongside the economic and political transformation, initially the ‘return to normality’ in the post-communist Poland implied a return to pre-communist Polishness by dismantling the communist legacy in social life and restoring traditional family and masculinity, which was believed to be disrupted by the communist rule (Ingbrant, 2018; 576). Thus, the efforts at retraditionalization also aimed at dismantling the Socialist *Matka Polka* imaginary and the state-guaranteed social rights including the ‘‘provision for childcare, maternity leave, nurseries, and kindergartens’’ by reinstating the role of family and mothers as principle care-givers (Ingbrant, 2018; 577). Besides, the post-communist ‘gender restoration’ in the 1990s also aimed to stabilize the masculinist ontological insecurities by withdrawing the reproductive freedoms granted to Socialist women under the communist regime. As such, it was during this context that the issue of abortion became an urgent concern, paving the way for the adoption of one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe in 1993 led by right-wing political groups and the Catholic Church (Graff, 2008). Reinforcing the traditional role of women as mothers and ‘bearers of culture and national identity’, the 1990s led to expansion of masculinist imaginations of the Polishness underpinned by the imaginary of *Matka Polka as* the ‘true’ Polish feminine identity.

However, Europeanization had challenged the efforts at post-communist gender restoration given its own interpretation of human rights, gender roles and freedoms. As such, the evolving post-1989 moral-demographic anxiety was also deeply rooted in the fear over loss of Polish ‘‘hegemonic masculinity’’ (Connell, 1995) as a consequence of exposure to Western model of femininity, feminism, liberalization of women’s rights and reproductive freedoms. Hegemonic masculinity, as argued by Connell (1995) is an aspirational status of masculinity supported by cultural patterns and patriarchal institutional powers, granting the ‘‘dominant position of men and the subordination of women’’ (Connell, 1995: 77). As mostly pioneered by the Catholic Church as well the conservative-nationalist front in the post 1989 context, the perceived liberalization of social life generated a sense of ‘lost enjoyment’ among the imagined hegemonic male identity, rooted in signifiers such as ‘‘whiteness, heterosexuality, Catholic religiosity, patriotism and paternity” in the Polish context (Ingbrant, 2018; 576).

In addition to growing moralization and masculinization of public space since the early 1990s in relation the Western-led 'imitation-anxiety', it was not until the mid 2000s that the right-wing populism thrived in Polish politics by capitalizing on the post-transition grievances and channeling them towards several *Others* such as the liberal/post-communist elites, EU, non-traditional women or sexual minorities. Furthermore, unlike the early political consensus around the rapid and extensive ''shock therapy'' reforms, the second half of the transition period since the early 2000s witnessed growing political discontent towards the socio-economic nature of the transition. Although Poland was the forerunner of economic growth during the years 1989-2000 in comparison to its post-communist counterparts, there were growing discontent around the social costs of the transition, creating a gap between the 'winners' and 'losers' of the neoliberal transformation (Parysek & Wdowicka, 2002). Besides, the pacted, technocratic and foreign imposed nature of the transition (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019; Krastev and Holmes, 2019) also fueled an anti-liberal revolt during the second decade of transformation, enabling aspiring populists to claim ownership of the true, authentic and morally superior Polishness as against the liberal political elites and their envisioned 'Liberal' Poland (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019).

As argued previously, the historical narrative of Polishness shaped under the absence of national-statehood and foreign oppression in large part of its history had created a particular ontological security context based on normative superiority of the nationhood over the state. Namely, in the absence of state sovereignty, the idea of 'popular sovereignty' had become a key anxiety-coping mechanism during turbulent times in Polish history, while reinforcing the Polish collective identity around an imagined moral unity with a foundational purpose. This ontological construct had also shaped the political culture in Poland with strong elements of populistic 'mind' in the political sphere, including distrust towards state elites, glorification of the 'ordinary man', normative superiority of the popular will, Manichean societal vision of 'us' versus 'them' as well as a firm defense of traditional values (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019: 69-70).

With populistic, anti-establishment and EU-critical parties entering into the parliament in 2001 elections, including the anti-neoliberal Self-Defense, radical right-wing League of Polish Families and the anti-communist, conservative Law and Justice, the 2001-2005

parliamentary period saw fierce political debates around socio-economic problems of the transition, corruption and EU accession (Szczerbiak, 2002; Stanley and Czesnik, 2019). The Law and Justice Party, which was founded in 2001, entered the parliament in 2001 elections with a diagnosis of ‘‘serios crisis’’ (PiS, 2001, 1) in relation to last decade of post-communist transformation. As such, the party was initially positioned as an anti-communist, anti-corruption and law-and-order party with deep populistic inclinations designating an antagonistic bloc of self-serving/privileged ‘elites’, composing of both post-communists and the liberal interest groups as opposed to ‘ordinary Poles’ whose full enjoyment was stolen by the former. In this context, within the emergent anti-liberal, anti-EU populist backlash (Millard, 2006), PiS increasingly capitalized on the anger and frustration of the ‘losers’ of the transition, not only in terms of socio-economic resentment, but also with a promise of moral closure, thereby, turning the public’s imagination towards issues such as reproductive rights, traditional family values and gender roles.

In the context of the emergent illiberal political platform in response to the ‘Western-imposed imitation imperative’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 119) PiS pioneered an illiberal revolt to restore imagined Polish moral unity based on Polak-Katolik identity, sovereignty, traditional family and gender roles. Drawing on Melito (2021) it is argued that PiS’ post-transformation emotional governance was deeply rooted in the cultivation of the fantasmatic visions between the ‘traditionalist Poland’ and the ‘Liberal Poland’ (Melito, 2021: 2). The latter imaginary has been particularly consolidated during the **EU accession** period in the early 2000s. As such, the foreign ‘imposed’ European ‘normality’, associated with values such as liberal individualism, cosmopolitanism, secularism, universal human rights, feminism and gender equality, according to PiS, represented a major threat to the very existence of Polishness and the ‘Polish way of life’.

As exemplified through a parliamentary speech by PiS’ Marcin Libicki in 2002, the EU is narrated as the new ‘object of anxiety’ stealing the traditional way of enjoyment of Polishness in the post-transition process. Arguing that Polish ‘‘sovereignty is not 100% secure anywhere, because it does not exist’’ and Poles ‘‘have to defend it in every situation’’, Libicki revitalizes the Polish trauma of statelessness in the face of EU accession to establish an emotional link with the past and present, while offering a linear continuum of Polis ontological(in) security. By recontextualizing the historical trauma of

statelessness and foreign oppression into the ongoing EU debates, the narrative establishes a biographical continuity by reaffirming Polish *Self* as a historically victimized, oppressed but proud subjectivity who had to consistently fight for its sovereignty throughout its existence. As such, 'sovereignty' is once again stolen from Poles in the face of EU accession, after 123 years of statelessness and 40 years long communist subjugation. Projecting the EU as the continuation of the foreign oppression, the mythopoetic recontextualization helps stimulating sense of loss in relation to present day-victimhood under the EU accession. Libicki's storytelling also rests on fantasmatic temporality between the imaginaries of 'traditional' and 'liberal Poland'. Embedded in a horrific scenario, liberal 'Poland' is even associated with the 'death of the nation' through ''moral experiments'' such as ''abortion, euthanasia, anti-clerical or extreme feminist groups'' which is also promoted by ''extreme pressure groups'' in the EU. Against these disastrous 'nation-killing' futures, the fantasmatic narrative reactivates desires to retain sovereignty as the only way to defend the 'lives' of the 'unborn, elderly, sick well as the ''social status of the family'', namely the survival of Polishness.

In addition to fantasies of lost sovereignty and freedom, PiS' post-transition emotional governance is also commonly built on ethno-religious fantasies of Polishness around the *Polak-Katolik* roots of Polishness. As argued, *Polak Katolik* identity has long served as a key signifier of stability and continuity within the turbulent episodes of Polish history. In governing the post-transition anxiety, Catholic Christian myths and narratives have been commonly recontextualized by the right-wing political actors as a promise of ontological security in the face of perceived 'moral decay' propagated by the EU. The analysis of official party discourse through the publication entitled Catholic Poland in Christian Europe reveals that the *Polak-Katolik* identity is commonly instrumentalized by PiS as a threatened/stolen 'object of desire' by the EU, who is allegedly forcing Poland to become part of a post-national and anti-religious entity (Krastev and Holmes, 2019). Articulated as a horrific scenario, EU is associated with moral decay, loss of tradition, religion, faith and authentic culture on which the core embodiments of 'Polish way of life' are built.

As a fundamental aspect of horrifically structured fantasy, the script also provides an emotional guidance by reassigning Poles an ontological purpose in the imagined European salvation, arguing that ''Poles today have a special duty to oppose the moral decadence of the Old Continent and the crisis of Christian civilization''(PiS Catholic

Brochure, 2005: 42). By reference to a continuing sense of Polish suffering and victimization under the EU integration process, Poles were again defined as self-sacrificing, dutiful and heroic subjectivities as defenders of the European salvation against the evil 'oppressors' (Zubrzycki, 2006: 60). The myth of Polish messianic martyrdom, in this sense serves as an emotionally mobilizing historical anchor by providing a key modality of identification and differentiation at times of heightened anxiety as in the case of Europeanization. Shaped under this mythical trope, the above fantasmatic storytelling, thus, provides a linear and morally legitimate ontological security narrative by reaffirming Polish sense of 'proud victimhood' in the face of Europeanization. By reactivating myths of 'Christ of Nations' as well as Polish messianism, the narrative appeals to desires seeking differentiation, sense of uniqueness and moral superiority, while ascribing the Polish *Self* as a historical mission in confronting the EU-led moral decay. In this mythopoetic fantasy, 'sovereignty' is once more constructed as a key guarantee of preserving Polish moral unity, currently being 'stolen' by the EU.

During a constitutional convention in 2003, Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Law and Justice Party, similarly calls for a neo-traditionalist restoration of Poland. Calling 'non-traditional/liberal' Polish identity as ''work of fiction'' Kaczyński calls for a ''moral revolution'' in the face of Europeanization (Jarosław Kaczyński, 2003; cited in Graff 2014). Accordingly, as put by Kaczyński, Poles had to return their authentic and traditional way of life, which has been continuously assaulted by the communist regime and the subsequent Europeanization process, which could only be made possible through a collective mobilization around a 'traditionalist social movement'. Accordingly, by rejecting the Western-imposed liberal Polish-identity, Kaczyński redefines the ideal Polish *Self* as a traditional/authentic subjectivity in the face of Europeanization. As also emphasized in the previous narratives, the EU or the so-called 'Liberal Poland' are commonly associated with notions of ''fiction, rootlessness or moral emptiness'', while calling for a neo-traditonalist revival as the only path towards realizing the aspired Polish 'wholeness'.

Another significant theme that recurrently surfaced in the public debates in relation to post-transition moral anxieties has been the issues around reproductive rights, abortion and euthanasia. PiS was particularly effective in utilizing the anti-abortion/euthanasia

discourses to enhance its illiberal political agenda to oppose the Western-imposed 'normality'. As such, in the early transition period, these practices have been commonly called as 'pathologies' that are 'threat to the very existence of the state' (Catholic Brochure, 2005: 51). Embedded in a narrative of crisis, PiS frequently invoke horrific future scenarios around the dissolution of the moral foundations of the traditional family, social structures and national bond, if they are not overcome. The analysis of PiS' Catholic Brochure (2005) also reveals that the anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia discourses are often justified through religious references to natural law, human dignity or 'right to life' rooted in Christian ethics (Catholic Brochure, 2005: 51). In the early Europeanization debate, these religious references often provide a morally legitimate foundation for PiS to articulate a Manichean antagonism between the 'morally superior' Poles and the 'immoral' Western/European liberalism. PiS' anti-abortion narration also commonly revolves around such antagonistic tropes between the notions of ''civilization of death'' and ''civilization of life'' (Catholic Brochure, 2005: 51), through which PiS positions itself as the guardian of life, human rights, human dignity, rights of the elderly as well as the unborn. Pole-Catholic identity as a significant marker of national identity and belonging.

The instrumentalization of religious myths, in particular, the Pole-Catholic identity provided PiS with additional affective tools to reinforce the boundaries of Polish 'normality' in the midst of systemic change. Similar to abortion and euthanasia, post-transition populist fantasizing often frames the issues around sexual freedoms or gay marriages as Western 'pathologies/moral experiments' that would destroy the moral foundation of Polishness, while further moralizing the East/West divide. In this sense, PiS' Catholic fantasies not only perpetuates the desires for reinforcing collective identity at times of critical change, but also function as a powerful means for reinforcing normative acceptability of behaviors in Polish common sense by demarcating the morally superior Polish *Self* from the 'un-Catholic, unpatriotic and non-Polish' *Others,* and their 'perverse' ways of enjoyment (Zizek, 1993).

Finally, the frequently utilized notion of 'civilization of death' not only implies the moral loss in relation to EU, but also reflects the broader historically-rooted anxieties around physical and cultural extinction, as an enduring feature of Polish psychic heritage. This was particularly reinforced with the EU accession in 2004, leading to massive emigration

of Eastern European populations into Western Europe. Since then, Central and Eastern European populists, including the PiS, have regularly connected the anxiety over depopulation with Western liberalism and cosmopolitanism, leading to further 'death' of ethnically homogenous communities, through their defense of practices such as abortion, euthanasia as well as non-normative patterns of sexuality, family and gender roles.

Another critical moment enabling PiS to dramatize the sense of moral-demographic anxiety in relation to Europeanization and post-communist transition was the overlapping **parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005**. By framing the election scene as an existential choice between the '*Social-Solidaristic Poland'* and '*Liberal Poland'* (Szczerbiak, 2007; Kim, 2021) the party also hinted a shift towards a more social-populistic orientation by reframing itself as the defender of the 'ordinary' Poles' welfare as against the Liberal elites and the post-communists, who were allegedly enjoying themselves at the expense of the 'ordinary' Poles through a system of political and economic privileges (Kim, 2021: 345). In this sense, in addition to moral aspects of the transition, the dual elections also enabled PiS to capitalize on the prolonged socio-economic grievances of the 'losers' of the neo-liberal transformation, who feel 'betrayed' and 'left behind' in the new capitalist Poland (Tworzecki, 2019; Szczerbiak, 2007: 211). The imagined division between two opposing visions of Poland, as pioneered by Jarosław Kaczyński ahead of 2005 elections, has become a powerful narrative trope for PiS' emotional governance that still abides today, even at times of high economic growth, which also contributed to victory of the Law and Justice Party in the dual elections in 2005 (Szczerbiak, 2007; Kim, 2021).

The analysis of the party programme of 2005 entitled ''Justice for All'' reveals that the party ascribes an ontological significance to the elections framing it as an existential choice between 'crisis' or 'path of justice and development' (PiS, 2005: 7-9). By adopting a pronouncedly social solidaristic, egalitarian and socially-cohesive self-image, PiS positioned itself as the as the only true representator of the ordinary Poles' welfare. One of the central political discourses consolidated during the electoral rally was the 'stolen enjoyment' of the 'ordinary Poles' by the post-communist liberal elites, who were allegedly enjoying the prosperity of the neo-liberal transformation at the expense of the society. As integral part of the fantasmatic narratives, the communication of the elections was heavily built on enemy *Othering.* Through a conspiratorial storytelling pitting

'ordinary Poles' against a single enemy block of liberal and communist elite, elections are reduced into the binaries of the 'victimized people' and the ''undeservedly privileged'' elites (PiS, 2005:7).

In doing this, PiS' storytelling frequently invokes the memory of the communist oppression to frame the present under the same light in a way to crystallize the immediacy of the elections. By providing a linear biographical narrative of Polish victimhood, PiS' instrumentalizes Poland's recent communist past to stimulate sense of victimhood and emotions such as anger, humiliation or injustice in relation to the perceived privileged elites. In justifying the urgency around the elections, PiS' storytelling also commonly resorts to collective shame of Poles in relation to its historically rooted ontological status of liminal Europeanness as well as backwardness. This historical trope is often instrumentalized by PiS in the post-transition process to incite fear and further victimization around Poland's declined status, inferiority and peripherality in relation to ongoing Europeanization. Thus, the fantasmatically articulated narratives not only promise ontological security to the 'anxious' Poles by appealing to the individual shame in failing to 'catch up' with the 'winners' of the neoliberal transformation in Poland, but also appeals to broader historically rooted ontological insecurity about the Pole's long-lasting liminal European identity and sense of backwardness. As such, the stories of victimhood derived from the recent and distant Polish past enable PiS to dramatize the sense of oppression and suffering under the ongoing neoliberal transformation.

In addition, PiS' election agenda was also among the first official manifestation of the developing demographic panic in the country, underpinned by declining fertility rates, negative migration trends facilitated by the EU accession, ageing population as well as the economic and cultural problems of the 'traditional family' (PiS, 2005: 11-12). Ahead of 2005 elections, depopulation emerges as a pronounced source of ontological insecurity in the PiS political discourse, while the imaginary of socio-economically strengthened and morally robust families appears as a long-awaited restoration of Polish ontological security, dignity and collective worth. In particular, the negative demographic trends since the early 2000s have been regularly connected with the perceived ''cultural crisis of the family'', framed as a ''catastrophe for the state and the nation that threatens the very foundations of our collective existence'' (PiS, 2005: 75). Alongside the perceived material deprivations of the Polish families, PiS articulates a moral panic around the

demoralization and degeneration of the traditional family structures in the face of Europeanization. ‘‘There will not be a strong family without a strong Poland. Nor will there be a strong Poland without a strong family’’, as mentioned in the party programme (PiS, 2005: 74). By often building on highly simplified, horrific projections of Poland where it could become ‘‘a deep European province’’ (PiS, 2005: 12), as a deeply shared historical ontological insecurity, party justifies its traditonalist and family-oriented policy stance as the only way to achieve a privileged and dignified future in the face of Europeanization. By often recontextualizing historically-rooted insecurities and emotions of Polish liminality and backwardness, PiS’ storytelling intensifies the sense of urgency around the elections.

Thereby, the party programme not only captures the ongoing anxieties of the Polish subjects in the face of demographic decline, but also channels their desire towards recapturing the authentic Polish ‘family’ including traditional marriage patterns, motherhood and hegemonic masculinity. By doing so, the party assigns an ontological significance to family and collective identification around ‘traditional familyhood’ in governing the depopulation anxiety, implying that Pole’s ontological security could only be achieved if the family is strengthened both morally as well as materially.

The post-2005 political discourse in Poland was largely built around the PiS-led antagonism between the imaginaries of ‘Solidarity-based Poland’ and the ‘Liberal Poland’ (Szczerbiak, 2007). The fantasmatic juxtaposition of these two distinct imaginaries contributed to PiS’ emotional appeal during its governmental term (2005-2007). In particular, the newly acquired self-image as the defender of the ‘ordinary’ Poles’ social welfare in the midst of the demographic decline also contributed to the neo-traditionalist fantasies of Polishness by reaffirming the ontological position of the traditional family in nation’s survival and continuation. Since PiS returned to opposition with the unexpected victory of the Civic Platform (PO) in 2007 elections, the party discourse has also notably shifted towards a more pro-welfare social populistic orientation by deepening the moral antagonism between the visions of ‘Social’ and ‘Liberal Poland’.

In conclusion, this section has explored the evolution of PiS’ emotional governance in the context of the systemic change brought by Europeanization in the post-communist Europe. Under this key emotive context, it has been argued that PiS’ political discourse

was particularly effective in capitalizing on the post-transition anxieties, unfulfilled aspirations and heightened emotions by linking them to broader existential anxieties within the collective historical consciousness of Poles. Especially, by employing the power of fantasmatic narratives, historical/religious myths and past traumas, PiS was able to recontextualize the ambiguities and anxieties surrounding the post-communist transition into the nation's long narrative of historical victimization and suffering and construct newer 'moral panics' around loss of sovereignty, moral unity, Catholic religion as well as the traditional family.

These historical anchors not only served as a linear ontological security discourse to the 'anxious' Poles at time of a systemic change, but also aroused further desires towards neo-traditionalist restoration of Poland as opposed to the 'Liberal Poland' via identifying newer 'objects of anxiety' such as the EU, liberal elites as well as post-communists as 'obstacles' to aspired Polishness. Providing highly antagonistic, clear-cut, black/white visions of Poland, PiS fantasmatic storytelling in the early transition period led to flourishment of a transgressive socio-political space leading to further mainstreaming and normalization of highly racialized, gendered and masculinist imaginations of nationhood and peoplehood. Particularly, since early 2010s the so-called 'gender ideology', non-traditional women, feminists, LGBTQ community as well as the non-Western immigrants have successively become the objects of the Polish 'moral-demographic anxiety'.

5.5 Family Policy as a Promise of Ontological Fulfillment: Policy storytelling, Fantasy and Myths in Recapturing Traditional Poland

As argued, the post-communist transition had created a particular emotive context for the flourishment of a majoritarian nationalist illiberal reaction in the Central and Eastern European region to the perceived monopolization of the Western/EU imposed liberal imperative on national identities and cultures. The 'imitation-anxiety' was particularly evident in the context of Poland given its historical trauma over statelessness, foreign oppression and sense of liminal Europeanness dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries. Shaped under this ontological security framework, the post-1989 Western-led imitation imperative had led further psychological downsides in the 'wounded' Polish *Self* by revitalizing the anxieties over national and cultural extinction, while further triggering

senses of backwardness, inferiority and liminality over the course of neoliberal transformation.

Against the heightened sense of moral panic, the recent instrumentalization of social policy by the Central Eastern populists has yielded significant political and electoral support. In particular, pro-family social policy instruments with their multiple functions on family planning, reproductive behavior, sexuality and parenthood patterns have become powerful mechanisms of ontological reassurance for Central-Eastern right-wing populist actors. Beyond their redistributive functions, pro-family measures such as direct family benefits, child-care policies or family housing programmes serve broader ontological and emotional functions within the illiberal populist nationalist projects. As such, many established right-wing populist governments in Central and Eastern Europe, including, Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Russia have been utilizing pro-family and demographic policy instruments to broaden their illiberal populist projects (Gaweda, 2022; Stubbs and Lendvai- Bainton, 2020) with a promise of 'restoring' heteronormative family, hegemonic masculinity and traditional motherhood. Besides, other than solely appealing to traditionalist anxieties, I argue that populist social policy storytelling, as was also exemplified in the case of Denmark, appeals to multitudes of historically-embedded ontological insecurities and emotions, including promises of restoration of dignity, pride and moral superiority as well as overcoming feelings of collective shame and humiliation.

Similarly, in Poland, a pro-welfare family policy (specifically since 2015) has become a particular anxiety-controlling mechanism for the populist right in governing the ensuing moral-demographic panic around depopulation and liberalization/Westernization of social life. Therefore, PiS' pro-welfare familial turn also reinforced the hegemonic discourse on Polish ontological security regime by redrawing the boundaries of belonging, social citizenship, deservingness and desired peoplehood. As similar to populist anti-immigrant welfare mobilization in Denmark, which gradually reinforced a highly racialized social citizenship regime, Poland's familial policy turn also refashioned the imagined welfare community along highly racialized, gendered and religious lines (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020). The pro-natalist familal policy, in this sense, has helped reinforcing of the fantasized ideal of Polishness as defined by *Polak-Katolik* identity and the myth of *Matka-Polka*, while reinforcing political legitimacy and expediency of the PiS' ongoing illiberal project. In this connection, drawing on

historically embedded insecurities, myths and desires, it is argued the PiS' family policy storytelling was deeply rooted in an affective temporal template underpinned by neo-traditionalist fantasies of Polishness (Melito, 2020).

5.5.1 2008-2015: Post-2008 Economic Anxiety, Poland's 'War on Gender' and Re-Familalisiation of Social Policy

Setting the Crisis Context: Conflation of Socio-Economic and Moral Anxieties

While scholars often underscore immigration crisis of 2015 as the major source of recent populist surge in Europe, the emergence of populist backlash dates back to 2008-9 crisis in CEE region, including Poland (Orestein and Bugaric, 2020). The historically low levels of immigration in the region (Krastev and Holmes, 2019) also made the region distinctive case with respect to salience of socio-economic underpinnings of populism in these countries. Since then, populist actors began to develop political programmes that appeal to the resentment of citizens towards neoliberalism, while linking them with prolonged socio-economic anxieties around the post-communist transition. To begin with, Poland is commonly acknowledged as a 'success story' in the EU with respect to its continued economic growth under the global financial crisis (Szelewa, 2014; 33), enabling then Prime Minister Donald Tusk (PO) to reframe Poland as a ''Green Paradise Island'' referring to an ''austerity-free'' Poland (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020: 566). However, despite this narrative, the crisis led to an even stricter attachment to austerity politics in Poland as part of its long-commitment to liberal orthodoxy rooted in the post-communist transition (Szelewa, 2014). In this context, the global financial crisis provoked a right-wing populist reaction to the ''long-lasting rationalization of permanent austerity'' in Poland since the beginning of the post-communist transition (Szelewa, 2014: 33). In addition, despite Poland's famous 'economic miracle' throughout the post-transition period, the economic growth has been accompanied by growing levels of social inequality, gaps in social security as well as poor public services, especially in healthcare (Kazlauskaitėa and Salmela, 2022: 136).

In fact, Poland's economic growth was going hand in hand with growing levels of inequality, with poverty reaching 43,7% of the population without social transfers and 17% of the population with social transfers in 2014 (Statistics Poland, 2016). Capitalizing on these structural inequalities as well as the post-crisis austerity politics during 2007-

2015, PiS' anti-liberalism and anti-elitism acquired a remarkable social welfarist thrust. Shaking the credibility of the liberal orthodoxy as well as the perceived moral-superiority of the Western developmental model, the global recession accompanied by a 'local politics of austerity' in Poland enabled PiS to capitalize on the prolonged sense of socio-economic deprivations driven by the shock-therapy model of post-transition.

In this sense, the 2008 financial crisis was also a critical moment for the expansion of right-wing populist PiS' illiberal revolt in Poland, enabling the party to further popularize the imagined antagonism between the 'Social Solidaristic' and 'Liberal Poland' (Kim, 2021: 345). Especially, the growing social inequality has bred a deep distrust towards the governing liberal elites, the EU and the Brussels elites as well as the overall dominance of the Western model of capitalism in the region by feeding alternative forms of 'emancipation' based on an illiberal and neo-traditionalist impetus. In this context, despite not being the main trigger of re-traditionalization and re-familialisation of the public sphere, the economic crisis of 2008 and the prolonged context of austerity in Poland have also provided PiS with an emotive justification to reinforce the traditional morality and family as the only path towards recapturing ordinary Poles' ontological security, 'stolen' dignity and self-respect, while ensuring the demographic revival of the nation. The post-2008 economic stress in the region, thus, facilitated PiS' illiberal political agenda against the Western 'imitation-imperative' (Krastev and Holmes, 2019) along with other Central Eastern European right-wing populists, with region eventually becoming repository for traditionalism, nationalism and illiberalism in the post-2008 context.

As argued, the post-2008 landscape has also provided PiS with a fertile emotive context to exploit the rising sense of distrust towards the liberal governing and Western business elites, while reframing itself as the 'true' representator of the 'Solidaristic' Poland and defender of national sovereignty. Accordingly, in the party programme of 2011, PiS generates an overall anti-elitist narrative not only in terms of appealing to emotions of economic shame and injustice of the 'left-behind' by the privileged group of elites in the neo-liberal era, but also restructure them within the prolonged narrative of Polish 'statelessness' in relation to loss of national sovereignty under the 'unaccountable' interference of the EU in the domestic issues of Poland (PiS, Party Programme, 2011: 59). ''The financial crisis has exposed the harmfulness of a certain social myth to which a part of the Polish elite has succumbed''. Accordingly, the party programme points out

that ‘‘fundamental issues of the economy, politics, law and morality lies in the hands of modern "super-savants" or "super-professionals’’, group of ‘‘few’’ and ‘‘narrow’’ elites who are benefiting themselves at the expense of the ‘‘rest’’ (PiS, Party Programme, 2011: 59).

By advancing the antagonism between the ‘ordinary Poles’ and the ‘inauthentic liberal elites’, the narrative also expands the neo-traditionalist fantasy of Polishness, by claiming the ownership of the former with a firm rejection of unfamiliar and extraneous influence of the Western liberal ‘imitative modernity’. ‘‘The idea of a Poland of Solidarity propagated by Law and Justice stands in opposition to social development based on an individual "game of success", which all too often turns out to be a zero- sum game.’’ (PiS, Party Programme, 2011: 59). Against this anxious background, the ‘Solidaristic Poland’ vision is deployed to channel the anger of the ‘left-behind’ towards an all-inclusive and just future as the only path towards an ontologically secure future.

The post-2008 landscape also saw intensified reference to ‘family crisis’ in the context of heightened demographic pressures. As similar to early 2000s, the fear over ‘‘ethnic disappearance” (Krastev & Holmes, 2020: 39) is again stoked by horrific imaginations of Polish families driven by material deprivations, declining fertility and degenerative trends in the traditional family. Especially in the post-2008 crisis context, traditional family has become the main repository of the imagined Polish wholeness within the projection of the PiS-led demographic revival. The analysis of the part programme of 2011 demonstrates that PiS sustains its crisis narrative over the loss of traditional family. According to PiS, ‘‘The Polish family is in crisis. It is ceasing to fulfil its basic functions. It ceases to be a place where we grow up, socialize and become morally sensitive’’ (PiS, 2011:164). Against the horrific projections, the morally robust Polish family ideal is again narrated as the only way to guarantee the survival of the nation at risk of national and cultural extinction. PiS’ narration around the ‘family crisis’ is also often supported by religious references to Christian ethics and morality to reinforce the boundaries of the desired peoplehood and family ideal in the context of the heightened demographic anxiety. ‘‘We see the foundation for a morally strong family in Christian values, which form the axiological basis of our cultural circle’’ (Party Programme, 2011; 174). In this sense, the reference to Christian roots of the family is also reinforcing the neo-traditionalist imagery of Polishness, by reaffirming who the ‘good’ families are and who

are not, while also reshaping the boundaries of social citizenship and national belonging in the post-2008 context.

In sum, in the post-2008 landscape, PiS reaffirmed itself as the only representator of the ordinary Poles' interests, both in terms of reclaiming the social welfare 'stolen' by the privileged group elites as well as strengthening the moral unity of the Poles in the face of demoralizing attacks coming from the West. Namely, despite Poland did not severely affected from to global economic recession, the crisis provided an emotional opportunity for PiS to reinforce its anti-liberal and anti-elitist rhetoric by conflating the prolonged socio-economic and moral anxieties with a promise of traditionalist restoration. At the heart of this revival was strengthening the traditional family, both materially and morally, which was believed to be the only way to overturn the 'extinction' of Poles in the face of demographic challenges as well as Western-led moral 'decay'. In this sense, the renewed emotive context in the post-2008 context strengthening the refusal of Western imitative liberalism also included the cultural and moral front, with right-wing populist actors reorienting the collective anger and frustration from structural roots of socio-economic issues towards moral ones, including gender and family (Graff and Korolozcuk, 2022: 135).

Among the most remarkable manifestation of this shift was realized with the simultaneous unfolding of ''anti-gender mobilization'' in the Polish public domain since the early 2010s initiated by the debates around certain international human rights legislative initiatives to promote gender equality and non-discrimination (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022; Graff, 2014; Grzebalska, 2015). The first public attack on gender was carried out by then Minister of Justice, Jarosław Gowin in 2012, who rejected the ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, which was also known as the Istanbul Convention. Framing the convention as a ''carrier of gender ideology'' and ''an ideological Trojan horse'' undermining the traditional family and national identity, the Minister initiated the Poland's ''***war on gender***'' in 2012 (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 72). Gowin also attacked the convention for disseminating an 'alien' 'feminist ideology' threatening the traditional Polish family and values (Gaweda, 2017). Central to the anti-gender backlash was the wording of 'gender' in the Convention, which was harshly attacked by the right-wing political actors as well as the Catholic Church over rejecting the biological/natural

definition of man and woman, thereby promoting non-normative gender roles, disrupting heteronormative family, marriage and parenthood (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022).

The anti-gender mobilization around Istanbul Convention was particularly significant as part of Poland's illiberal turn, facilitating the consolidation of a particular transgressive political space identifying the so-called ''gender ideology'' or the ''genderists'' including feminists, non-normative women or sexual minorities as the new objects of anxiety impediment to PiS' neo-traditionalist fulfillment. By utilizing a fear-arousing language equating the notion of gender with deviations, pathologies and criminality, the right-wing populist PiS was particularly influential in invoking a sense of moral panic around the loss of traditional family and values. As such, PiS' Kaczyński had attacked the Convention on the grounds that it defined ''masculinity and femininity in cultural rather than biological terms'' (Grzebalska, 2015: 88), while Krystyna Pawłowicz, a member of PiS, further pointed that the gender ideology was "undermining natural principles of life", even calling it ultimately "leading to the relationship between a human being and a monkey" (Grzebalska, 2015: 88).

Accordingly, in her online blog PiS' Isabella Nowak articulates a crisis narrative around the Convention, including the dissolution of the Catholic ethics, traditional family, motherhood, marriage patterns as well as traditional masculinity and femininity. ''We are facing many difficult trials and a fight for identity and morality, because they are in real danger. This is to be or not to be for Poland'', she claimed (Nowak, 29.08.2013, Salon24). By building on a highly simplified, fantasmatic storytelling, Nowak foretells a disastrous future of Poland if the Poles do not unite in fight against the 'gender ideology' at the moment. This horrifically structured narrative captures the collective anxiety by identifying an imaginary enemy of 'gender ideology'. Arguing that ''she [Poland] screams and begs us for help'' Nowak's storytelling around the Convention also invokes desires for masculinist ontological closure by personifying Poland as a vulnerable woman desperately in need of a traditionalist/masculinist protection. Another remarkable communicative strategy reinforcing the emotive appeal of the Polish anti-gender discourse has been the common invocation of Poland's traumatic history, in particular, the totalitarian experiences of the communist and Nazi regimes during the 20th century. ''If gender ideology is adopted by our country… it will lead to a new form of totalitarianism. And what is most terrifying, it will hit the traditional family''(Nowak,

29.08.2013, Salon24). By calling it as a new form of totalitarianism, 'gender ideology' is framed as another form of all-encompassing foreign ideology attacking Polish freedom and sovereignty, as well as a form of 'social-engineering' exerting full control over people's private and family lives as under totalitarian regimes. These temporal anchors not only provide a linear ontological security discourse within the historical narrative of Polish suffering and foreign oppression, thereby establish an emotional link between the past and the present, but also invoke a disastrous future scenario if the 'gender ideology' is not stooped.

In a similar vein, as articulated by PiS' MP Legutko (2016) in his book entitled ''The Demon in Democracy'' liberalism is compared to communism claiming that both intervenes in people's public and private lives in the form of ''social engineering'' and target the ''same ''enemies such as the church and religion, the nation, classical metaphysics, moral conservatism, and the family'' (Legutko, 2016: 138). ''In every sentence from the Leninist and Stalinist catechisms one can replace "proletariat" with "women" or with "homosexuals…and no one will recognize the original source', argued Legutko (Legutko, 2016: 138). Legutko's narrative similarly draws on an anti-communist trope in defense of traditional Polishness against the Western liberal values, including gender rights and sexual freedoms. Accordingly, by framing it another foreign/alien oppression to destroy Poland and its morally superior way of life, Poland's communist past serves as a powerful temporal anchor to incite a sense of continuous victimization and 'stolen' freedoms under the post-1989 Western-liberal imperative. Namely, as in the case of communism, Poland is imagined as a passive victim of another foreign oppression.

Another theme that become the object of Poland's 'moral-demographic anxiety' in 2010s revolved around the issues of 'sexualization of children' as triggered by the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations for sexual and equality education in kindergartens and schools (Graff and Korolozcuk, 2022: 75). The right-wing politicians and organizations were especially successful in narrating the controversy over the WHO standards for sexual education as part of another international plot orchestrated by the West, as represented by the UN, WHO and the EU to attack Polish freedom and demoralize the Polish way of life (Graff, 2014). Calling it as a ''satanic attempt'' to sexualize children, in a parliamentary speech, Marzena Machalek from PiS attacked the WHO recommendations on the grounds that it promotes dangerous ''leftist'' practices in

the form of ‘‘social engineering’’ (Marzena Machalek, Parliamentary Speech, 11.09.2014). By recontextualizing the trauma of communist past, the storytelling seeks to transform the historically-rooted ontological insecurity into righteous anger and resentment in a way to mobilize subjects towards dangers awaiting children, families and especially parents. Accordingly, in addition to family, the right-wing anti-gender mobilization has found new passive victims to be protected from the ‘gender ideology’, which were children and parents. As further articulated by Machalek (PiS) the WHO standards encroach the ‘‘autonomy of the family’’, and the ‘‘right of the family to bring up children’’, which is a constitutional right. (Marzena Machalek, Parliamentary Speech, 11.09.2014). Accordingly, Machalek calls for the defense of children and parents from the ongoing ‘‘aggression’’ that not only demoralizes the children, but also encroaches the parents’ freedom to decide over upbringing of their children. As such, the loss of parental autonomy is narrated as another form of limitation to Polish neo-traditionalist fantasies, namely the ‘‘Polish freedom to be *us*’’ (Melito; 2021: 34).

For Graff and Korolozcuk (2022), other than a mere rhetorical trope, the inclusion of parents into the anti-gender fantasizing was also strategically and emotively mobilizing to broaden the sense of righteous anger and collective victimhood. By claiming the ownership of parents’ rights and freedoms, the right-wing populist actors rediscovered the ‘‘political potential of deeply-felt familial identities’’ (Graff and Korolozcuk, 2022: 115). By harnessing an imagined victimization and ‘stolen’ autonomy of the ‘anxious’ parents, PiS’ anti-gender narrativization not only invokes negative emotions such as shame, humiliation and disempowerment, but also arouses desire towards a neo-traditionalist closure underpinned by promises of patriarchal recapture of the family and parenthood.

Finally, as also articulated in the sexual education debates, the anti-gender mobilization is frequently linked with Poles’ depopulation anxiety on the grounds that it poses a direct threat to family’s procreative functions. ‘‘Why are we talking about sex education in the context of the family, which is primarily called to transmit life, and we are not talking about procreative education, about the protection of human reproductive functions, about preparation to transmit such a value as life?’’, as put by Machalek (2014). Accordingly, in addition to promise of restoration of parental and paternal authority, the storytelling also reaffirms the mythical role of traditional family and motherhood, while reinforcing

their ontological status for the survival and continuity of the Polish nation under the ongoing demographic pressures. Against this anxious demographic situation, a romantically imagined traditional family is proposed as a beatific solution that can only alleviate the anxiety over biological and cultural extinction of the Polish nation.

Social Policy as Fulfillment: 'Social Poland' as a Promise of Redistribution of National Dignity

While the early stages of post-transition period were marked by austerity-based social policy reforms, largely based on principle of 'non-interference' in family issues as belonging to 'private' sphere, since the early 2000s family issues acquired a particular attention within the political debates. (Szelewa, 2014; 2017). Especially after 2003, with fertility rates declining all time low, demographic panic was also starting to be made public. Unlike the social-democratic government of 2001-2004, PiS' minority right-wing government (2005-2007) raised the issues of fertility, demography and family policy. As argued previously, since 2005, the party vocally attacked the shock-therapy model of the transition, which left large groups of ordinary Poles out of enjoying the benefits of the economic growth, while redefining itself as the sole defender of the ordinary people's social welfare (Szczerbiak, 2007). Among the notable policy changes in this direction was the expansion of the ***maternity leave***, introduction of the ***universal birth allowance*** granting 1000 Polish zloty each family having new child as well as a tax credit provided to all taxpayers having children (Szelewa, 2017; Inglot et al., 2011). These developments, according to Szelewa, (2014; 2017) signaled the early transition steps towards an ''explicit familalism'' characterized by increased cash support for families rather than investing in formal care services.

> The difficult situation in which Poland finds itself today has its roots both in the choice of the wrong path for transformation after the systemic change of 1989 and in the political decisions of the elites of the time. The beneficiaries of capitalism built in such conditions were the undeservedly privileged people of the old order (…) Economic growth must benefit all Poles, not just a narrow group of the wealthiest. The new social contract must create a real basis for a fundamental change in social policy which, together with other measures, is intended to eradicate the sphere of poverty and exclusion and to be an important element of the state's pro-family policy (…). A nation can only develop through the family. Therefore, we are committed to increasing the role of the family in transmitting religious values, historical memory, shaping patriotic attitudes and proto-state, instilling a sense of national dignity and the values inherent in civil society (…). We believe that words such as Fatherland, Poland, Poles, neighbor, dignity of the human person are not just empty sounds for most of us. We believe in a revival of the sense of community and the spirit of social

> solidarity and Christian love of neighbor. This is why we hope that Poles will accept our idea of a new social contract, that they will want to preserve the spiritual heritage whose name is Poland. This is why we believe that the Fourth Republic, the Poland of the new social contract, will be a Poland in which we will all be able to live with dignity (PiS, Party Programme, 2005:7).

The above storytelling draws on wide range of populist tropes in legitimization of the pro-family policy framework especially those of 'ordinary/victimized' Poles vs the 'privileged' elites, glorification of the popular will, simplification of the policy context into binary choices as well as activation of emotions. In particular, the proposed pro-family social contract is fantasmatically conditioned on the elimination of the 'undeservedly' privileged elites of the 'old order' (PiS, Party Programme, 2005:7), who are constructed as fundamental 'obstacles/threats' to the imagined Polish fullness. Built around a powerful anti-elitist trope, the policy storytelling particularly captures the collective anxiety of the ordinary Poles who feel betrayed and marginalized under the post-communist neoliberal transformation, while signifying the proposed 'Social Poland' as a long-awaited restoration of Poles' dignity, collective worth and ontological security. The fantasmatically structured narrative activate further emotions through constant temporal references to the 'old order' of the post-1989 systemic change. By reconfiguring the recent past as a source of 'rightful' anger and resentment for the ongoing victimization, the policy moral is reduced into binaries between the 'oppressed vs the corrupt elites' as well as 'dignified and disastrous' futures.

At the same time, the policy narrative also reinforces the boundaries of the desired peoplehood by reaffirming the mythical role of Polish family and motherhood (*Matka Polka)* in transmitting culture, patriotism, religion and values to further generations. Against the anxious 'old order', the revival of the Polish traditional family, underpinned by Catholic ethics and values, is articulated as a beatific future scenario. To sum, other than appealing to unfulfilled socio-economic aspirations and wounded economic pride, an imaginary of a morally strong family is also proposed as a means for ontological reassurance in the imagined national survival. In this way, the family-oriented social policy vision is presented as the only path towards recapturing the enjoyment of a rightfully deserved, dignified and ontologically secure life.

The center-right government led by the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) and PSL (2007-2014) also reinforced the centrality of traditional family and motherhood through

several policy changes by mainly following the refamilialisation efforts undertaken by the PiS' minority government (2005-2007). The main policy changes in this direction were the extended benefits and tax credits for families with children, gradual extension of maternity leave and, most notably, the introduction of new ***parental leave*** system of 26 weeks in 2013, in which fathers could also become eligible for child-care leave as mothers (Szelewa, 2017: 135). Although the parental leave system eventually included the fathers, mothers were still described as the primary caregivers who have the privilege to decide over the parental leave options (Suwada and Plantin, 2014). This stance was also justified by the then Ministry of Labor (2013) by leaving the decision to parents supported by a general rhetoric of "not to intervene in family issues" (Ministry of Labour 2013, cited in Szelewa, 2017: 139).

The general neglect of fatherhood in the parental care debates could also be regarded as a manifestation of the masculinist ontological insecurities and the parental anxieties stoked by the Poland's evolving 'war on gender' as mostly articulated by the right-wing populist actors and organizations. The parliamentary debates around the parental leave reform of 2013 also displays this general unwillingness to interfere in the 'private realm' and parenthood patterns. While the liberal-conservative PO generally justifies its stance underpinned by a liberal necessity of upholding freedom of choice, the right-wing critiques around the parental leave options often largely neglect the role of fatherhood in child-care on the grounds that it encroaches in the private realm and disrupts the traditional parenthood patterns. In this respect, the concept of 'motherhood' was overwhelmingly preferred over the notions of 'parenting' or 'fatherhood' in the parental leave debates during 2012-2013, reinforcing the traditional care-giving functions of the Polish mother.

The neglect of fatherhood in child-care is also commonly emphasized by the right-wing think tank Ordo Iuris Institution, a highly influential organization with close bonds with the Law and Justice Party. For instance, in response to a draft EU directive of 2017 adopting a compulsory parental leave to be used by fathers, the institute experts similarly stoke fears around the loss of traditional family by arguing that the initiative may ''contribute to the destabilization of the family and the bond between mother and child, and deprive parents of their right to freedom of choice regarding family life and paid work'' (Ordo Iuris, May17, 2017). By rejecting the 'Brussel-imposed' directive as an encroachment in the lives of Polish ordinary family, the paternal leave is mainly framed

within a discourse of moral panic that would both destroy the parental authority and survival of the traditional motherhood and familyhood.

The policy changes adopted by the PO-PSL government during 2012-2013 were also in line with refamilialisation of the family policy sphere signaling a transition from implicit familalism towards explicit promotion of families, especially mothers as the principal child-care givers (Szelewa, 2017: 144). The policy changes such as extension of cash benefits, tax credits and maternity leave accompanied by the inadequate development of formal care options also reinforced the ongoing familialisation of the public sphere by reaffirming the autonomy of the family and parenthood over the children, while reemphasizing the centrality of traditional motherhood as the desired social role in the society. However, despite the familal policy changes, the pension reform of 2012 adopted by the liberal-conservative coalition government, raising the ***retirement age*** to 67 for both women and men received harsh critiques from the PiS MPs on the grounds that it destroys the ‘‘dignity of women and old people’’ since women were forced to work and give up their ‘‘grandmotherly role’’, thereby, even leading to ‘‘euthanasia of almost an entire generation’’ as put by PiS MP’s (Józefa Hrynkiewicz, Parliamentary Speech, 30.03. 2012).

As seen from the below parliamentary speeches on the retirement age, both Kaczynski (PiS) and Hrynkiewicz (PiS) invokes moral panics around the loss of oppose the raising of retirement age and instead proposes an extensive pro-familial social policy shift as the only way to reverse the demographic decline. In overcoming the alarming depopulation, both speeches by Hrynkiewicz and Kaczynski seek to capitalize on the perceived anxiety, and humiliation of the ‘ordinary’ Poles, especially the women and old people, while channeling their desire to be ontologically secure under a system of pro-family regime as the guarantee of Polish dignity, social solidarity and cohesion. Framing the policy reform as ‘nation-killing, unjust and anti-national’, PiS’ storytelling around the retirement reform also heavily draw on the populist trope of betrayal by the ‘corrupt elite’ at the expense of the interest of the ‘ordinary’ people. In ontological security terms, both speeches depict the governing elites as ‘self-serving’ agents unwilling to provide a sense of complete and worthy identity to ‘ordinary’ Poles. By drawing on this, PiS constructed itself as the only

trusted entity to convert the feelings of shame and humiliation into sense of dignity, pride and ontological security against the ongoing demographic pressures.

> The most important demographic problem in Poland today is to create conditions for families to raise children, to start and develop a family, i.e. work, housing, income that allows raising children without superhuman sacrifices (…). Power is not taken to humiliate old people, condemning especially old women to misery and mistreatment. Poles are patient, they endure a lot, but they will not forgive you, Prime Minister, that you humiliate their dignity, you humiliate the dignity of women, the dignity of old people. I understand that for you, an outstanding politician of the Civic Platform, Polishness is abnormal, but we will never allow people to be humiliated, to destroy social solidarity, to destroy social bonds and cohesion (Józef Hrynkiewicz, Parliamentary Speech, 30.03.212).

> In Poland, in 2040, many generations born in the 1980s will leave work, and only a few generations will work. This is a thesis that contains a very specific assumption, the assumption that it is impossible to conduct an intensive, multilateral pro-family policy in Poland, which relates to housing construction, to various forms of assistance for families and children. In short, all this can be done, of course, under one condition, provided that the authorities will not be determined by dependence on various powerful capital groups (…) and will be able to make decisions in accordance with the public interest. (…). This is an extremely ineffective, nation-killing social system. It's just an anti-national system. It is a system that benefits a small group, generally from a dark star, and various external factors. You defend this system. But we are against it and this system is reaching its end (…). We are for Poland, which will develop, where labor productivity per hour, today one of the lowest, if not the lowest in the European Union, will be high (…) Well, there will come a Poland in which perhaps your colleagues will be very bad. But people will be incomparably better, and it will be a prosperous, strong and dignified Poland. (Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Parliamentary Speech, 30.03.2012)

As a popular discursive strategy, the speech by Hrynkiewicz (PiS) also recontextualizes the historical narrative of Polish 'unjust' suffering and victimization into the current retirement debate, implying that the Poles are currently suffering another humiliating attack by the liberal governing elites. The invocation of this 'historical victimhood' is not only emotionally-mobilizing as a legitimation strategy to incite fear around the ongoing policy change, but also ontologically-reaffirming depicting Poles as a constantly victimized, suffering but enduring subjectivities who had to consistently fight for its freedom and sovereignty. This mythopoetic articulation is also utilized by another PiS MP, Janusz Śniadek in the same retirement debate, with Śniadek arguing that to change the ''barbaric law'' the Poles had to fight for their ''own state and democratic procedures as in the times of communism'' (Janusz Śniadek, Parliamentary Speech, 30.03. 2012). Namely, as it happened in communism, Polish traditional freedom is again 'stolen' by the

liberal governing elites from the 'ordinary' Poles. By revitalizing the trauma of foreign oppression in the context of the retirement policy, the policy makers disseminate a continuous sense of 'stolen Polish freedom', while mobilizing subjects towards identification with a familal future as the only repository of Polish ontological security.

As a common trope in PiS' populist storytelling since the early 2000s, the notion of the 'privileged elites' enjoying at 'our' expense has also been popularized during the 2010s. This populist trope, which has even been utilized during the periods of high economic growth, has become more pronounced ahead of 2015 elections, with PiS perpetuating the fantasmatic antagonism between the 'Social (Solidaristic) Poland' and 'Liberal Poland'. Accordingly, PiS' 2014 programme entitled the ''Family, Health and Work'' purposefully capitalized on the feelings of shame, humiliation and ontological insecurity of the economically 'left behind', while channeling anxious Poles' desire for a 'privileged' an ontologically secure future in the 'Social Poland'. Alongside the unfulfilled material aspirations of the Poles, the party programme of 2014 also provoked the prolonged moral questions around the Western-liberal 'normality'. This was especially evident with the appearance of the notion of 'gender' within the party programme for the first time, framed as a fundamental 'threat' to the Poland's demographic prospect as well as the survival of the 'traditional' Poland.

Mainly embedded in a beatific future scenario, PiS presents its familialist social policy vision as a solution to the Poland's prolonged 'crises' including depopulation, declining fertility, crisis of the family, parenthood, emigration as well as the middle-income trap. As such, the programme proposes an extensive reorientation of family policy towards pro-family and pro-natalist measures including adoption of a monthly family allowance (500PLN) for each additional child, increasing access to family benefits, extension of maternity leave, promotion of procreative health services and so forth (PiS, 2014: 109-110). Articulated as a beatific scenario, PiS storytelling justifies the proposed familial regime as an overall recapture of the 'stolen' Polish dignity and collective worth, which has long been undermined by the neo-liberal system. With constant references to Christian ethics of justice and equality, the new social vision is justified as a path towards 'privileged future' in which the ordinary Poles no longer be excluded and marginalized from the benefits of the economic growth, being unjustly stolen by the ''strong'' and ''powerful'' elites (PiS, 2014: 8).

> It is worth being a Pole, belonging to our national community, and therefore it is worth it to have its own state. It is worthwhile for Polish families to survive and develop. Such a state is possible if we develop as a nation, a community of free Poles, a community of Polish families, an economic organism, a political entity and a cultural model. It is worthwhile for us to be able to defend ourselves against threats to our freedom. We can achieve all this if we overcome the demographic crisis, the crisis of the family, the crisis of parenthood and the problem of emigration, as well as the so-called middle development trap in the economy (…). Both emigration and the family crisis have their own material and cultural causes, such as the lack of jobs and housing, the lack of family policy, the disastrous health care, very low wages and restriction in terms of labor law, general job insecurity and uncertainty of future fate (PiS, Party Programme, 2014: 17-18).

In continuation of the policy narrative, the 'stolen' sense of economic pride is also connected with moral anxieties around the so-called 'gender ideology'. Accordingly, in addition to 'undeservedly' privileged elites, 'gender ideology' appears as another fundamental 'obstacle' to the realization of beatifically imagined Poland. For the first time in 2014, 'gender ideology' took place in an official party programme as the new culprit of Poland's 'moral-demographic anxiety' threatening the traditional forms of family, parenthood and motherhood. In this sense, the proposed social-welfarist defense is not only to fulfill the 'wounded' socio-economic aspirations of the families, but as part of a broader neo-traditionalist defense of Polishness in the face of 'gender ideology' that threatens the very existence of Polishness. Through a conspiratorial anti-elitist trope, the storytelling projects further ambiguities and uncertainties around the so-called 'gender ideology' onto an imagined web of external/foreign actors who are allegedly threatening the imagined Polish fullness. Against these ontological insecurities, the pro-family welfare stance is proposed as a path towards privileged and an anxiety-free future in which the traditional Polish family, in particular the Polish mother, will regain its 'social respect, prestige and recognition', which have long been neglected by the liberal elites, at the same time, currently being undermined by the 'gender ideology'. In justification of the pro-welfarist familal policy agenda, the policy narrative also reaffirms the heroic, proud and self-sacrificing role of the Polish mother underpinned by the myth of *Matka Polka,* which provides further means for identification and differentiation.

> Another threat to the family and parenthood in Poland is the spread of gender ideology. Its spread is artificial, conditioned primarily by streams of funds, largely external. Nevertheless, its influence is growing, especially among young people, and it contributes to the spread of attitudes that are not favorable to starting families and having children. It is important to put up a barrier against the spread of gender ideology. However, it is more important to work towards strengthening the family, defending parenthood, the special role of the mother and respect for motherhood, which

> should be treated not as a burden, but as a distinction and a privilege (…) Only if all these measures are taken together, we will change the current unfavorable situation. (PiS, Party Programme, 2014: 17-18)

5.5.2 2015-2019: Refugee 'Crisis' and the Transformative 'Familial' Turn in Social Policy

Setting the Crisis Scene: Muslim 'Other' as the New Object of Moral-Demographic Anxiety

Europe's so-called *''**refugee crisis''*** has dramatically altered the Polish political scene at the height of the approaching parliamentary and presidential elections in 2015. While Poland has long been considered as a case of exception with respect to relatively minor appearance of immigration as a core political issue (Krzyżanowski, 2018), the mass immigration wave of 2015-16 has fundamentally altered the political discourse in the country ahead of the twin elections. As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, the so-called refugee panic has triggered a pronounced xenophobic and Islamophobic turn in Poland, although virtually only very few refugees were arriving in the country (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 80). Yet, the Central European populists, including the Law and Justice Party, skillfully instrumentalized the unfolding refugee inflows to Europe to deepen their anti-liberal and Eurosceptic rhetoric and created an overall hostile socio-political space towards Muslim refugees. In the context of Poland, which has been among the fastest shrinking populations in the world over the past decade, the anxiety around Muslim refugees was in large part driven by the ongoing fear of ethnic and cultural disappearance (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 86). Thus, in governing the ensuing moral-demographic anxiety, the immigration crisis has created a renewed fantasmatic space for PiS' populism to enhance its neo-traditional promotion of the nation. As such, in addition to so-called 'genderists' that emerged in the 2010s, a new enemy had emerged that would replace the ethnically and religiously homogenous population, which in this time, came into existence with a figure of young, male, violent, Muslim *Other* (Graff and Korolozcuk, 2022: 89).

On the other hand, there was already an emergent transgressive socio-political space created by the fear-mongering populists about the 'nation-killing' 'gender ideology', non-heteronormative identities and families with a tightening grip on women's reproductive freedoms during the 2010s. (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 78). The increased securitization

of Muslim refugees has also reinforced the party's emotional governance by invoking nativist desires towards ethno-national and ethno-religious restoration of Polishness. Merging the accumulating gendered ontological insecurities with Islamophobia through a reinforced anti-elitist, Eurosceptic discourse, including the governing liberal elites and the conspiring European/international forces, PiS secured a twin electoral victory in 2015, becoming the single-party in the parliament (Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier, 2016). For the first time since 1989, the winning party did not need any other coalition partners to form the government, while no left-wing or social-democratic parties were able to enter to parliament since the country's democratic transition (Szelewa, 2017: 144).

To begin with, similar to Danish People's Party (DF) ahead of Danish elections in 2015, the incoming PiS government also exploited the heightened anxiety and uncertainty around the mass refugee wave, spreading imaginary threat scenarios that the 'unassimilable' Muslim refugees will undermine social cohesion, public safety and eventually the Christian civilization. In a similar vein, the sense of crisis was frequently augmented through the narrative trope of 'theft of enjoyment' depicting immigrants as stealing the Polish freedom to enjoy its secure and superior way of life. As different from Danish anti-immigrant imaginations, the 'theft of enjoyment' in relation to Muslim *Other* has a remarkable religious dimension, which has been mostly perpetuated by moral panics around losing the superior Christian civilization referring to another 'obstacle' to the Polish traditionalist freedom. While in the case of Denmark, it was largely about a freedom premised upon the enjoying the Danish welfare society that was 'at stake' in the face of Muslim immigration, in the case of Poland it was the Christian way of life that was currently being 'stolen' and threatened by the Islamic *Other*.

In an interview on the mass refugee flows to Europe in 2015, PiS MP Krystyna Pawłowicz articulates moral panic around the death of Christian civilization in the face of Muslim immigration to Europe. Similar to Danish right-wing populist crisis storytelling in the post-9/11 landscape, Pawlowicz's anti-immigrant narrative also commonly invokes notions of criminality, aggression and terrorism to incite a sense of everyday safety and morally superior way of life, by further associating ''Islam only with cruel, ruthless terrorism, beheadings, burning people alive, etc.'' (Wandas, 13.09. 2015). Articulated as a horrific scenario, Pawłowicz (PiS) argued that ''Muslims declared a ruthless war on the Cross, putting Europeans in the role of "it's either us or them", life or death. The war

between Muslims and the rest of the world results in the destruction of monuments of the material culture of Christian civilization and humanity in general, and the death of Christians ruthlessly slaughtered in front of the eyes of the whole world'' (Wandas, 13.09. 2015). Simplifying the ambiguities and uncertainty around the refugee inflows into a civilizational antagonism between the 'good' and the 'evil', the crises narrative ignites further fear in relation to the loss of Christianity, including both its material and spiritual heritage.

''There is a huge stir on the part of Poles living all over the world. It seems that many people feel great concern and even fear, the more so that they are subject to various pressures and intimidation from the media and the government'' Pawłowicz claimed. (Wandas, 13.09. 2015). Arguing that the 'ordinary' Poles as Catholics are subject to ''moral pressures'' by the media, PO government as well as the leftist authorities, Pawłowicz seek to mobilize a sense of anger and frustration towards a unified *Them*, while presenting herself and her party as the true voice of the ''intimidated''*Us.* Finally, by framing the refugee figure as a 'young Muslim man of military age looking for a better life' (Wandas, 13.09. 2015), the storytelling also downgrades the perceived suffering and victimization of the refugees, while positioning the Polish *Self* as the 'real' victims of the ongoing Muslim immigration.

In opposition to government's immigration policy under the guises of the EU's relocation programme, PiS' Jaroslaw Kaczyński similarly projects a horrific scenario around the dissolution of the Polish way of life including its everyday security, public life, freedom and most notably the Christian way of life. Largely building on topos of example referring to several European countries in which the incoming-Muslim immigrants have allegedly caused deep public unrest and insecurity, Kaczyński (PiS) similarly cultivates a deep sense of ontological insecurity in relation to loss of *Polak-Katolik* identity, as a core signifier of Polishness. Kaczyński states that: ''Look around Europe, look at Sweden for example. There are 54 zones where Sharia is in force and there is no state control. There are fears about flying the Swedish flag at school…because there's a cross on the flag. It turns out that Swedish schoolgirls are no longer allowed to wear short clothes, because they don't like it either. What is happening in Italy? Occupied churches sometimes treated as toilets'' (Jaroslaw Kaczyński, Parliamentary Speech, 16.09.2015). By articulating a horrific future through images such as occupied churches, burning Christian symbols or

stories like 'churches that converted to toilets', Kaczyński seek to mobilize sense of anger and humiliation around religious sensivities which has deep resonance within the collective consciousness of Poles. The invocation of a stolen/ruined Christian heritage is also emotionally-mobilizing from which Polish *Self* derives particular sense of national pride, distinction and ontological completeness. Against these horrific imaginations, Kaczyński offers his beatific alternative future informed by Christian theological ethics of hierarchy which inscribes prioritizing the Polish 'family' and 'nation' before the others. ''We must look for another principle, a principle that would moderate this radicalism. Such a principle does exist, it is the ordo caritatis, the order of mercy, the order of love. Within this principle, it is first those closest to us, the family, then the nation, then others'' (Jaroslaw Kaczyński, Parliamentary Speech,16.09.2015). Accordingly, the narrative implies that Poles could only reach wholeness if they prioritize their 'survival' before the *Others*, namely chose to strengthen the 'family', which lies at the core of Polish ontological fulfillment more than anything else. The refugee panic, in this sense, has created an additional legitimate emotive context for PiS to reinvest in neo-traditional premises of strong family, alongside the fantasies around ethno-national and ethno-religious homogeneity of Polishness.

The stolen 'sense of freedom' also emerges as a common populist trope in PiS' anti-immigrant fantasizing to legitimize its opposition to EU's relocation programme. As such, the EU is once more narrated as 'stealing' the Polish enjoyment of freedom and sovereignty through another foreign/imposed directive over the popular will of the Polish people. Thus, the refugee crisis has enabled the party to reinvoke this prolonged narrative of victimization in relation to the EU, in which Poland once more sacrificed its sovereignty and self-determination in the name of 'imposition' of a Western liberal normality (Melito, 2022; 35). The sense of Polish victimization under the refugee ''crisis'' is also supported by heavy use of mythopoesis with respect to Poland's messianic martyrdom rooted in nation's romantic mythology.

In a parliamentary debate, Prime Minister Beata Szydło (PiS) argued: ''This love of freedom probably stems from our difficult history. Let me remind you that Poland was not always on the map of Europe…Poles died in all wars. They died for the freedom of Poland, but they also died for the freedom of Europe'' (Beata Szydło, 20.05.2016). With reference to an idealized messianic *Self,* PiS' Prime Minister Beata Szydło reasserts the

moral superiority of Polishness over the EU by reminding the Polish proud and sacred victimization for the salvation of the European continent. Drawing on this mythical past inciting both pride and suffering, the speech appeals to sense of agency, self-esteem and uniqueness through which the anxious Poles could reclaim ontological security at the height of immigration 'crisis'. In this way, the speech invokes desires for recapturing a 'traditionalist freedom', a hardly-won, proud entity that should be rightfully enjoyed by the Poles. In her opposition to EU's relocation programme, a similar mythopoetic fantasizing is also invoked by PiS' Pawłowicz who likens the Muslim asylum seekers to ''Bolshevik invaders'' in 1920, arguing that Poland is obliged to save Europe once again from the evil oppressors by defending Christianity in the European continent against the ''Islamic warriors'' (Wandas, 13.09. 2015).

Another popular narrative trope underpinning the emotive appeal of the Polish anti-immigrant fantasizing included the 'excessive enjoyment' of the immigrant *Other* as well as the EU elites at the expense of the ordinary Poles. As argued by PiS MP Legutko in his book entitled the ''Demon in Democracy''; ''In liberal democracy, as under communism, there are those who deserve special protection and are therefore honored with special privileges…Today, for example, homosexual groups have gained enormous privileges precisely because they have been identified as an oppressed group. Muslims are also privileged to some extent…because granting them privileged status is believed to be the living proof of the viability of multiculturalist ideology'' (Legutko, 2016: 98). Against the imagined privileges enjoyed by the Muslims and homosexuals, Legutko (2016) further claims that ''there are also less-fortunate groups, not privileged and often treated harshly, such as Christians, whom the liberal-democratic legislatures and courts clearly dislike (Legutko ,2016: 98). By building on this fantasmatic trope, the narrative cultivates a sense of moral panic and victimhood, framing the 'undeservedly' privileged groups such as Muslims or homosexuals benefiting at the expense of the Christians.

Loss of Christendom is once more fantasized as a 'stolen freedom' by the Western liberal 'oppressors', while depicting, for instance the Christians as continuously victimized subjectivities under the dictates of the West. Additionally, similar to populist anti-gender storytelling, the traumatic notion of communist past is also recontextualized in the debates around immigration and multiculturalism in the post-2015 context. Similar to framing of 'gender ideology', multiculturalism is narrated as another form of foreign-imposed, all-

encompassing doctrine that victimizes the Polish *Self*. As such, temporal references to communist past again serves as a morally legitimate background to uphold the desired sense of victimization in the context of the refugee ‘‘crisis’’ of 2015, while reaffirming Poles’ ontological status as a morally-superior but suffering subjectivities.

Poland’s right-wing politicians also commonly instrumentalized this fantasmatic trope to invoke fear around immigrants’ ‘unjust’ enjoyment of welfare and security at the expense of the native Poles. Denmark’s DF, for instance, commonly articulates this fantasy by framing non-Western immigrants as abusing, dependent and non-contributing subjects, who are unjustly living on Danish generous welfare benefits. Although not as prominently as in Danish politics, the trope of ‘excessive enjoyment’ was also raised in the Polish anti-immigrant debates to differentiate the Polish *Self* from the Muslim *Other,* while ascribing the moral superiority of the former. For instance, by framing refugees though the images of ‘‘young healthy men’’ who ‘‘selfishly leave their children and families behind just to improve their lives’’, PiS’ Beata Szydło likewise downgrades the potential suffering and victimization of the refugees, while depicting them as ‘underserving’ *Others* ‘‘who choose to escape rather than fight for their country’’ (Beata Szydlo, January14, 2016 cited in Cap, 2018: 295). This storytelling not only downgrades refugees’ potential suffering and victimization on their way to Europe, but also reinforces their ‘undeserving’ status as potentially selfish, exploitative and coward subjectivities. In another parliamentary debate, PiS’ Witold Waszczykowski similarly reinforces the civilizational moral antagonism between the West and Islam by blaming the EU for allowing ‘horrible exploitation’ of the ‘‘hard-working Europeans’’ by the Muslim immigrants (Witold Waszczykowski, 23.04. 2016 cited in Cap, 2022: 130).

In a similar vein, in opposition to EU’s relocation agreement, Jaroslaw Kaczyński frequently juxtaposes the natives’ welfare as against the immigrants’ perceived ‘excessive enjoyment’. In a parliamentary debate Kaczyński argues that: ‘‘Our main responsibility is to uphold the well-being of Polish people. This has been our election promise and we will keep it. We will not trade our hard-won freedom and independence for political correctness’’ (Kaczyński, 05.09.2016 cited in Cap, 2017: 293). For Kaczyński, the relocation programme which implies a loss of ‘‘millions of euros’’ that could otherwise be enjoyed by the native societies, which would also ‘‘abolish the sovereignty of the EU member states’’. In another speech, Kaczyński’s anti-immigrant storytelling is heavily

built around welfare chauvinist claims prioritizing the safety of the Polish families over immigrants. As put by Kaczyński: ‘‘The safety of Polish families is this government’s priority. Polish people deserve it. They deserve equal rights and social justice. They deserve to feel masters of their own house. They deserve to feel secure…This is the true meaning of freedom and independence. We derive it from our Christian heritage, the values to which our nation has been committed for centuries and to which we are committed today’’ (Kaczyński, 09.05.2016 cited in Cap, 2018: 293).

Accordingly, Kaczyński’s both speeches expose the coexistence of beatific (prosperous Polish families) and horrific future projections of Poland (lost sovereignty/independence) in justification of his party’s anti-immigrant stance. Besides, both narratives heavily draw instrumentalize temporal identity signifiers such as ‘hardly-won’ freedom or notions such as independence and sovereignty, referring to Poland’s historically-rooted traumas of statelessness and limited freedom. The imagined traumatic past again appears as a powerful enterprise in PiS’ anti-immigrant and anti-EU storytelling. Stories of suffering and victimhood derived from the turbulent Polish history enable party to frame the present under the same anxious light, while challenging subjects’ ontological insecurity into an imagined nativist mobilization to defend the nation. In particular, against this anxious background, both narratives mobilize subjects’ desire towards an alternative beatific future as a promise of ontological security. In this sense, the second narrative directly evokes an imaginary of a strengthened Polish family with a promise of an anxiety-free, safe, materially prosperous and a superior future, which could only be achieved if the Poles recapture their stolen freedom and independence from the EU. Namely, the recapture of freedom and sovereignty from the EU would also mean the recapture of the stolen dignity of the Polish families, who long lost under the neoliberal transformation. In justifying his nativist and pro-familal stance in the face of immigration, Poles’ Christian heritage also emerges as a powerful historical anchor rooted in nation’s distant past to stimulate feelings of pride, superiority and ontological security.

In this sense, both speeches underscore that Polish families’ welfare and dignity is also strictly linked with the prospect of the immigration policy. Hence, it can be argued that the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 provided Jarosław Kaczyński and his party additional emotive instruments to deepen the neo-traditionalist fantasies of Polishness by reaffirming the centrality of traditional family in the imagined Polish wholeness, while further

demarcating the 'deserving' *Pole-Katolik* identity from the 'undeserving' immigrant *Other*. To sum, in the absence of real refugees arriving Poland, the figure of the Muslim *Other* has become the new imaginary stranger in the face of Polish moral-demographic anxiety against which the 'Polish family' should be safeguarded.

Finally, another remarkable feature of the anti-immigrant fantasizing in Poland in the post-2015 context concerns the highly gendered nature of the imagining the nation and the *Other*. Similar to Denmark, demographic anxieties displayed through the refugee flow from the Middle East in 2015 was often justified through highly gendered and racial imaginaries, juxtaposing the morally superior, 'gender-progressive' West against the barbaric and criminal Muslim *Other* (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 87). This was particularly made evident by a right-wing newspaper cover entitled the ''Islamic Rape of Europe: what are the media and Brussels' elites hiding from EU citizens?", depicting a white, blonde, screaming woman covered with the EU flag and attacked by dark-skinned male hands (Sherwood, 2016)[9]. As similar to Danish right-wing populist discourse following the 9/11, Polish anti-immigrant storytelling also often resorts to such stereotypical racial and gendered imaginaries to seek national differentiation and distinction from Islam and Muslim immigrants. Yet, unlike in Denmark, in the absence of actual Muslim refugees arriving in the country, Polish right-wing media and politicians often instrumentalize this ethno-sexist imagery to legitimize their anti-EU stance by reframing the refugees as part of an international plot organized by the EU elites targeting the ordinary, vulnerable Poles, especially the women (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022:89). By depicting the Polish *Self* as the savior of the native women from the oppressive Muslim *Other*, the instrumentalization of gender is paradoxically to legitimize both the imagined victimization of the Polish *Self* as well as its self-proclaimed messianic role to save the Western civilization.

Unlike Denmark, the gendered imaginaries often appeal to socially conservative and patriarchal desires to forge a masculinist protection of Poland in the face of Muslim immigration. In this sense, the anti-immigrant narratives are also deeply rooted in Polish imaginaries of femininity supported by the myth of *Matka Polka*. In this context, a non-attached member of the parliament Armand Kamil Ryfiński articulates a highly gendered

[9] See the cover of the magazine through the link https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/18/polish-magazines-islamic-of-europe-cover-sparks-outrage

crisis narrative over the mass migration to Europe by invoking an imaginary of a vulnerable, but dutiful mother under attack by an armed man. ‘‘Poland should behave like a sensible Polish woman. Our security, our country, our home, our children. That is the most important thing’’ (Ryfinski, Parliamentary Speech, 16.09.2015). As such, Poland is imagined as a self-sacrificing, heroic and dutiful mother figure, who should protect the security of her home, family and children in the face of aggressors. The instrumentalization of this myth within the immigration debate not only serves as a means for seeking differentiation and moral superiority from the aggressive Muslim *Other,* thereby promising ontological security to the native majorities, but also reactivates masculinist/patriarchal desires to protect the ‘weakened’ nation in the face of the immigration threat. The remainder of the narrative further augments the sense of weakness and vulnerability around immigration by also invoking the trope of ‘stolen enjoyment’. ‘‘There are over 30,000 homeless people. There is no housing for them. They wait months or years for social housing. Immigrants, meanwhile, are supposed to get housing immediately’’, Ryfinski claims (Ryfinski, Parliamentry Speech, 16.09.2015). Accordingly, the gendered imaginaries around Muslim immigrants also connects to a highly simplified trope of zero-sum choice over the national welfare, framing immigrants as unjustly benefiting at the expense of the native Poles.

The alarmist and conspiratorial Eurosceptic rhetoric around immigration also soon connected to the anti-gender mobilization that has been simultaneously unfolding in the public and political sphere in Poland in the 2010s (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022). Linking the anti-immigrant discourse with the ongoing threat of ‘gender ideology’, PiS has found fertile emotive context to expand its opposition to governing liberal elites and re-securitize issues such as family planning and reproductive rights under the ensuing anxiety around the Muslim immigration. For instance, in legitimization of a civic bill around the admissibility of abortion in 2015, PiS MP Patrick Jaki juxtaposes the life of the ‘disabled children’ against the ‘Islamic immigrant’ arguing that ‘‘Poland must take care of their lives’’ first which is an ‘‘expression of morality and the highest culture’’ (Jaki, Parliamentary Speech, 10.09. 2015). The storytelling fosters further moral antagonism between the governing liberal elites and the people by accusing the former of distributing the state’s welfare to ‘undeserving’ Muslim immigrants at the expense of the ‘deserving’ disabled child/unborn, who could otherwise be survived the abortion and lived. Jaki states: ‘‘You say that there are no funds, but we read that for Islamic

immigrants, Poland has about PLN 1,500 per month for one person…Is there money or not?...The life of people from the Middle East, as you can see, is more valuable than the life of a Polish sick'' (Jaki, Parliamentary Speech, 10.09. 2015). Through building on the trope of 'theft of enjoyment' as well as articulating a highly clear-cut, emotionally loaded, antagonistic narrative, Jaki reduces the complex policy framework over abortion into a morally-charged simplified choice. By confronting the imagery of a suffering, helpless native child/unborn with the figure of Muslim immigrant who unjustly benefits herself/himself, the policy storytelling also fosters a morally-charged hierarchization of different 'forms' of life among the members of the biopolitical community, while reinforcing the moral superiority of the life of the unborn child over the Muslim *Other*. This morally charged hierarchization also helps feeding the sentiment of victimization around the immigrants' alleged 'theft of enjoyment', which appeals to nativist desires for neo-traditionalist restoration of Polishness by overcoming the threat of immigration and multiculturalism.

In conclusion, while the fear over immigration has not featured as the main focus of the PiS' populist repertoire after 2015, the moral-demographic panic over the ''unassimilable foreigners'' enabled Polish right-wing populists to incite anti-EU anxieties by further moralizing the conflict between the national liberal/global elites and the ordinary Poles. Alongside the 'genderists', feminists or sexual educators, the fantasmatic figure of the Muslim *Other* has also become the new object of the depopulation anxiety after 2015 by awakening the historically-rooted fears over national extinction and cultural displacement. In this sense, the refugee 'crisis' enabled PiS to expand its illiberal political agenda by reinforcing the 'deserving' members of the biopolitical community in the face of Muslim refugees, while repositioning itself as the sole defender of the interest of the 'deserving' and biopolitical insiders. Against the fantasmatic/horrific figure of the Muslim *Other*, traditional family and motherhood again emerges as the main guarantee of Poles' ontological security and destined 'privileged future'.

Social Policy as Ontological Fulfillment: Family Policy as a Promise of Recapturing Dignity of Family and Motherhood

The electoral victory of PiS in 2015 marked a turning point in Poland's ongoing illiberal transformation. First, the single-party majority government enacted revolutionary changes to democratic institutions of Poland including dismantling the independence of judiciary, constitutional checks and balances, constraining constitutional freedoms as

well as monopolizing public media, among many others (Markowski, 2016). Second, since 2015, anti-gender familalism has become the key tenet of Poland's illiberal transformation against the looming background of the demographic anxiety, accompanied by subsequent restrictions and attacks on women's reproductive freedoms, non-normative sexualities and family configurations (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022). However, the most remarkable change was realized in the domain of family policy in 2016 with PiS adopting ''by far the most expensive social policy programme in Poland, including the period state of state-socialism'' (Szelewa, 2017; 145). As discussed previously, since 2005 PiS had positioned itself as the guardian of ordinary Poles' social welfare as against the ''undeservedly privileged'' post-communist/liberal elites (Kim, 2021:342), underpinned by a strong commitment to improve the conditions of the traditional family to overcome the demographic downfall. Although the party undertook several policy reforms in this direction under the right-wing coalition government (2005-2007), including launching of the largest direct family benefits since the beginning of the post-communist transition, it was not until 2015 that the party eventually transformed the Polish family policy into an explicitly familial direction (Szelewa, 2017: 144).

Assuming full power in 2015, PiS embraced an increasingly familalist, pro-natalist and conservative rhetoric in the context of the unfolding 'war on gender' and the refugee ''crisis''. As argued, against this anxious background, PiS revitalized the ontological role of traditional familal identity in bringing about the aspired demographic revival, so the continuity of the nation. The post-2015 familal policy turn, as will be discussed below, reinforced the ongoing refamilialisation and retraditionalization of the Polish public sphere by reshaping the boundaries of the 'deserving' familyhood and motherhood. At the same time, by reinterpreting the meanings of human rights, women's rights, gender and equality, the explicitly familial policy orientation has reinforced an ontological security regime that is reliant on the survival of the traditional Polish family, while projecting the existing demographic anxieties onto the non-normative familial, sexual, racial and religious identities. As such, the explicit familial policy turn in the post-2015 context also paved a shift away from universally and right-based conception of social citizenship towards an increasingly selective, targeted and narrow conception of welfare deservingness in Poland based on a desired ideal of a white, heterosexual, conservative, Catholic, patriotic, 'large' families with at least three children (Lendvai-Baiton and Szelewa, 2020: 11).

To begin with, promising to make "family" a priority ahead of 2015 elections, the PiS government launched its signature electoral promise, the family allowance scheme entitled the Family 500+ programme. The programme guaranteed 500 PLN/month (approx. 120€) for the second and each subsequent child under 18 years in low-income families (800 PLN per family member), which was made universal in 2019 for all children aged 0-17 regardless of the income criterion (Szelewa, 2017:144). For families meeting the income criterion, the allowance was also offered the first child of the family. As officially stated, the programme intended to boost the low fertility rates, reduce child poverty and overall to lower the cost of childbearing by improving the conditions of the family (Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2016). With an annual average cost of 22 billion zlotys (around 5.54 billion euros) intended to cover almost 3 million families in Poland, corresponding to the half of all families in the country, the policy scheme marked the most expensive social policy measure ever adopted in Poland (Szelewa, 2017: 145).

In addition to Family 500+ programme, several other pro-natalist benefit schemes were enacted to encourage childbearing such as direct cash allowance to large families, support for pregnant women and granting of state pensions for mothers who have raised at least four children (PiS Party Programme, 2014). In addition to cash benefits, the government also enacted tax deductions for families with at least three children, while further reinforcing the 'deservingness' of the large families over the 'undeserving' (Lendvai-Baiton and Szelewa, 2020). The Conservative NGO, ''Families Three Plus," one of the key advisees of the drafting of 500+ programme, had even recommended separating the policy from the overall social policy framework so that parents ''don't feel like the applicants for social welfare" promoting a distinction between the 'deserving families' and those who depends on regular income-tested social assistance (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020: 10).

Evaluating the pro-family policy reforms at the National Debate on Family in 2018, Elzbieta Rafalska (PiS), the Minister of Family, Social and Labor reemphasizes the central role of traditional family in Polish collective consciousness. In legitimization of the policy reforms including the 500+ and large family benefits, Polish family is imagined as a beatific future ideal imbued with a promise of ontological security, if it can be fully attained. As such, the realization of the imagined fullness is again conditioned upon overcoming several threatening *Others*. The emotive appeal of the narrative is further

strengthened by mythopoesis invoking Polish historical suffering and the mythical role of Polish family and motherhood. By recontextualizing the Polish traumatic history referring to long period of foreign oppression and lost sovereignty in which the very existence of Polishness was at stake, family is imagined as the only guarantee of the national existence by transmitting life, culture and a spirit of patriotism to the further generations. The narrative also reactivates the mythical role of Polish Mother (*Matka Polka*) in the context of new contemporary challenges. As such, family and especially women are once more expected to make sacrifice for the nation as in stateless/partitioned Poland. Thereby, the invocation of this mythical temporality reinforces homogenous collective identity around the traditional patterns of family and motherhood by signifying the procreative and nation-building functions of the family. At the same time, the use of past appeals to subjects' sense of distinction and agency by reaffirming a status of victimized, but self-sacrificing and heroic familial/feminine subjectivity. By doing so, the policy narrative completes Polish autobiographical narratives, while mobilizing ontological and emotional attachment towards the idealized familial identity in the face of new challenges.

> It was families that had nurtured patriotism and the spirit of Polishness for years. The invaders failed to destroy our national identity, language, art, religion, literature, science, music, memory of the past (…). In difficult situations, families paid the greatest sacrifices. They lost their property, confiscated for their participation in the uprisings. They said goodbye to their fathers, those leaving to join the armed forces or those deported (...), were forced to emigrate. However, Poland survived these difficult experiences thanks to the strong spirit of patriotism, shaped in families and a strong faith in God. Without this bulwark, there would be little left of our nation and culture. Today you face new tasks. But one thing is certain, we will not survive as a nation without a strong family (Elzbieta Rafalska, 11.10.2018, Dziennik Gazeta Prawna).

As similar to other familial welfare regimes ruled by illiberal governing elites such as in Hungary, the promotion of conservative, pro-natalist familalism in Poland is also accompanied by a particular anti-gender and anti-feminist discourse (Grzebalska and Peto, 2018) framed as 'enemy-figures' blocking the neo-traditionalist restoration of identity. As exemplified below, in legitimization of the pro-family policy stance, 'gender ideology' is once more constructed as an 'object of anxiety' in realization of the aspired wholeness in the form of an identity of authentic, traditional and Catholic-Pole. Accordingly, the 2019 party programme projects a disaster scenario pertaining to spread of 'gender ideology' into the traditional family and parenthood patterns, disrupting reproductive behavior thereby leading to death of the nation. Against this ontological

insecurity, the policy narrative promulgates that only family, understood traditionally as marriage ‘‘between the man and woman’’ could realize the imaginary fullness, while constructing other relationships unrecognized. Articulated as a beatific fantasmatic scenario, the policy narrative cultivates an imaginary of a morally, spiritually and materially strengthened family as a promise of ontological security once the ‘gender ideology’ is overcome. In doing this, the policy narrative also draws on temporal references including a nostalgia for the sacred role of family and Polish Mother (*Matka Polka*) as well as conflicting representations of the mythical past and the crisis-ridden present. Accordingly, the instrumentalization of the mythical past not only serves as a narrative of national pride that subjects can identify with, thereby, reinforce collective identities, at the same time, mobilizes subjects towards a beatific/utopian future conditioned upon recapturing traditional family, parenthood and motherhood. In this sense, the beatific future is constructed as an extension of the mythical past, framed as an anxiety-free, dignified and morally superior way of enjoyment in which the family and motherhood will again be rewarded as the highest values in the society. Structured in this way, the temporally and fantasmatically structured storytelling increases the emotive appeal of the proposed family policy framework, while reaffirming the boundaries of the desired Polish peoplehood, especially the feminine/familial identity in the form of a self-sacrificing, devoted and patriotic ideal.

> The family, based on the permanent union of a man and a woman, is the basis of social life. (…) Children are born in the family, and so the basic condition for the continuity of humanity - the continuity of generations - is realized. Today, however, family has become an object of political struggle. Attempts are being made to radically change its nature, all the more dangerous because they are also linked to technological developments that make ever more far-reaching biological engineering possible (…). Also dangerous for the family and parenthood in Poland is the spread of gender ideology. Its spread is artificial, conditioned primarily by streams of funding, largely external. Nevertheless, its influence is growing, especially among some young people, and it contributes to the growth of attitudes that are not favorable to starting a family and having children. Putting up barriers to the spread of gender ideology is important. More important, however, is action to strengthen the family, to defend parenthood, the special role of the mother and respect for motherhood, which should be treated not as a burden, but as a distinction and a privilege. (PiS, Party Programme, 2019)

Another key adviser of the Law and Justice in the making of the post-2015 family policy context, the ultraconservative, Catholic, Ordo Iuris Institute also routinely invokes the myth of *Matka Polka* in justification of the pro-natalist family policy instruments. In a

report published by the institution in 2015 entitled ‘‘What Family Policy Poland Needs?’’gender and feminism resurface as ‘objects of anxiety’ that steal the fuller enjoyment of Polish motherhood, by undermining its morally superior and sacred way of enjoyment. Contrasted with an alternative ‘feminist identity’ in the form of an independent, self-oriented, liberal subjectivity, the below narrative establishes that women could only find fulfillment and self-realization in traditional motherhood. By rejecting an alternative feminist identity, framed as an oppositional, anxiety-inducing horrific alternative vision, the policy storytelling appeals to neo-traditionalist desires by reaffirming the idealized motherhood in the form of a self-sacrificing, devoted feminine identity who would naturally put her family’s and children’s interest first. In this way, the narrative also reinforces the hegemonic gender norms and traditional forms of femininity as a desired ideal by perpetuating a hierarchical imagery of femininity. As such, by rejecting the perceived ‘liberal way of enjoyment’ the policy storytelling reinforces the moral antagonism between the ‘feminists’ and the ‘ordinary women’ by reframing the former as the deviant *Other* who rejects the traditional motherhood, thereby threatens the Polish way of life.

> Today, the issue of gender discrimination is receiving a great deal of attention. Numerous international documents call for making the situation of women and men equal. The demands adopted do not necessarily have anything to do with the real aspirations of women. By promoting certain role models for women to adopt, it is arbitrarily assumed that the only path to their self-fulfillment and liberation is professional work, while denying the value of women's other choices, including motherhood (…) Such an approach to the issue of motherhood and work has its origins in the demands of the propagators of radical feminism, whose proposals very quickly permeated the forums of these institutions (…) The feminists were also very hostile to motherhood, pointing out that the fulfilment resulting from being a mother is a "patriarchal myth" (…). These claims echo the theses of Simone de Bauvoir - a forerunner of modern feminism - who pointed out that being a mother limits to a great extent a woman's possibility of self-realization. She wrote: "Motherhood is the most dangerous trap for those women who want to be free and independent, who want to earn a living, who want to think for themselves and who want to have a life of their own. These highly controversial theses undermining the value of motherhood and stigmatizing women who choose to be mother and care for their children (Ordo Iuris Report: What family policy Poland needs, 2015:93-94).

Finally, both narratives instrumentalize the mythical heroism of the *Matka Polka* to legitimize the familial policy regime as an ontological and emotional fulfillment, once the obstacles such as ‘gender ideology’ and feminism are tackled. Accordingly, the communication of the new family policy framework is often grounded in emotionally-

charged temporal templates, including a longing for the *Matka Polka* as well as the oppositional/fantasmatic constructions of the past and the future. As such, the temporal representations are often loaded with emotions rooted in Poland's mythical past, including frequent references to 'dignity, social-respect, prestige or sense of distinction' in family policy narration. Framed as a beatific future scenario rooted in the distant Polish past, the mythical roles of mother and families are frequently invoked to legitimize the newly adopted family policy regime in the post-2015 context, as a promise of destined dignity and long-awaited restoration of Poles' ontological fullness.

In this context, the main mobilizing discourse around the ***Family 500+*** primarily embraces a promise of 'redistribution of dignity', with PiS claiming the ownership of the ordinary Polish families' social welfare in contrast to the co-called 'Liberal Poland', which has long stolen the dignity and self-respect of the Polish families. Since 2005, PiS has repeatedly articulated a sharp cleavage between the 'Social' and 'Liberal' Poland, with simultaneously associating the latter with anxiety and chaos in realization of the neo-traditionalist Poland. As seen from the official party storytelling below, the story presented by PiS representatives on Family 500+ programme often draws on temporal registers juxtaposing the conflicting visions of Liberal and the Social Poland. Accordingly, 'Liberal Poland' is constructed as a recent past in which Polish families, parents and children are suffering and humiliated by the 'self-serving' governing liberal elites. The stories of victimhood derived from this imagined past frequently stimulates feelings of shame, humiliation, inferiority and victimhood. As against this horrific past, the main story of the government on the 500+ programme is filled with emotional commitments and utopian promises of safe, prosperous and dignified life in which the family, especially the large families, are finally recognized, respected and valorized.

> We are introducing a program that is a comprehensive, systemic program to support Polish families. The element of financial support for those families that are in a difficult financial situation today is important, but I do not know if it is not more important or not the element that you do not want to talk about, because you have not done anything about it for 8 years. (…) If we don't take up this challenge, if we're not so brave to implement such projects, Poland will be dying all the time. Do you want it? (…) We are introducing a program that gives Polish families the opportunity to live a truly dignified life. We do not hide the fact that family is important to us, and we will do everything to ensure that the Polish family has a sense of a dignified and safe life. (Beata Szydlo, Parliamentary Speech, 11.02.2016).

> Apart from these aspects of reducing poverty, we already know about this, a significant reduction in extreme poverty (...) Families do not talk about this material aspect, they simply feel this effect, but a lot of families talk about this aspect of dignity. They say that it is important for them, that they stood on their own feet, that they raised their foreheads, that we stopped stigmatizing, that we unlabeled looking at and assessing a large family, that it is of great value to them. (Elżbieta Rafalska, 11.10. 2018 cited in Dziennik Gazeta Prawna)

The government's family policy storytelling shows that the notion of dignity appears as an 'object of desire' presented as a promise of ontological security that can only be recaptured through preserving large, traditional families, especially traditional patterns of motherhood under the new familial regime. As such, by often linking the anxiety of the past with the desire for a bright future, the temporal conflation of the 'Liberal vs Social Poland' mobilizes subjects' emotions and affects towards a new future vision imagining Poles as finally safe, dignified and ontologically secure. As such, other than its redistributive functions, the policy narration around 500+ often plays on historically-rooted emotions, ontological insecurities and unfulfilled desires, while transforming them into promises of ontological security.

> With "Family 500+" and other programs this government has taken a historic step to protect economic safety of Polish families. Polish people deserve it; they deserve safety, equal rights and social justice. They deserve to feel masters of their own house. (Elżbieta Rafalska, November 4, 2017, cited in Cap, 2022: 72).

> The position of the family has changed. It is appreciated, noticed, the family is perceived as a very important element of building Polish identity. Thanks to the "Family 500 plus" program, the position of large families has also changed. A large family has become a symbol of a family that is happy and gives a sense of security to its children (Beata Szydło, PiS, 11.10.2018, Dziennik cited in Gazeta Prawna).

As exemplified below, the pro-family policy narratives in the post-2015 context also frequently invokes fear around a possible return to the horrific past represented by the 'Old Poland'. In this context, in justifying governments' pro-family stance in a parliamentary debate in 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydlo articulate a horrific vision of 'Old Poland' governed by ''ultra-liberal'' elites (Cap, 2022) who led to pervasive injustice, social inequality as well as morally/religiously ruthless and family-hostile way of life. Against this insecure past vision, Szydlo justifies the government's pro-family social policy activism as the only path towards recapturing the Poles' right-fully deserved safe, secure, just and dignified future. Accordingly, the 'New Poland' is fantasmatically

imagined as an ontologically secure, beatific ideal reliant upon dismantling of various 'obstacles' such as the old, liberal order or the 'gender ideology'. Accordingly, structured around these excessively simplified, oppositional temporal registers, the policy context is also reduced into a binary choice between the horrifically imagined morally 'Old Poland' as well as safe and dignified 'New Poland' underpinned by morally strong, familial and faithful Pole-Catholic identity. In doing this, the fantasmatically structured policy narrative not only keeps the subjects alert about a possible return to 'Old Poland', but also arouses desire towards neo-traditionalist restoration of Polishness, a sense of ontological completeness that can only be fulfilled in the 'New/Social Poland'.

> We have to redouble our efforts in the face of a threat that persists. We draw strength from the values that we hold dear: our families, our homes, our Christian faith. We must keep our eye fixed on the Poland we want to build—one that defeats our adversaries by promoting dignity, equal opportunity and justice. We must remain alert—lest we wake up, one day, in the old Poland. (Beata Szydło, 2017, Parliamentary Speech, cited in Cap, 2022: 74).

> After 8 years of government, when the Civic Platform limited the rights to baby, when children were taken away from parents only because of poverty, when parents of disabled children, they were forced to occupy the Sejm during your rule, when in a rude and humiliating way for Polish families, your MPs offered sorrel and mirabelles to a Polish family. Today, February 11, is a great Polish holiday of Polish families. (Pawel Szefernaker, Parliamentary Speech, 11.02. 2016).

The same temporal antagonism is also activated in the discussions around the adoption of the ***Large Family Card***, a pro-family policy instrument providing discounts and additional rights for families with three or more children (Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2019). Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's storytelling around the large families similarly perpetuates a fantasmatic antagonism between the 'Old' liberal Poland and the 'New' social Poland in construction. The antagonism is again supported by a historical flashback to Poland's post-communist transition led by the so-called 'ultra-liberal' anti-familial ideology. In this populist articulation, the socially and morally ruthless, 'Old Poland' is again signified as a horrific alternative vision rooted in the recent past, that not only deprived large families of socio-economic privileges of the neo-liberal transformation, but also exposed them to constant stigmatization and humiliation by calling them as ''pathologies''. Against this imagined shame and inferiority, the large-family policy instruments are presented as a promise of ontological fulfillment to the 'stigmatized' large families by restoring their dignity, self-respect and well-deserved

value. Accordingly, the legitimizing discourse around the large family measures often pit the Poland's recent past against an imagined PiS-led 'New' Poland envisaging an utopian future based on morally and materially robust large families.

> When we enjoyed regaining independence 29 years ago, it was with great sadness and amazement that all of you, but also many of our compatriots, listened and observed this strange ostracism around large families, or even calling our large families pathological families (…) This is a measure of the moral and intellectual decline of the Third Republic - unfortunately, it was so - fortunately, part of those elites, part of the media, who were not ashamed of such words. Against such injustice, against such harm - because it is these children here in front of me and all children in Poland who are building this great Poland of the future, the Poland of our dreams, which is exactly the opposite of what some media and some of the elites of the Third Republic of Poland tried to say - a completely different policy has grown, a policy of supporting families (Polsatnews, 02.06.2018).

Another policy reform in the direction of refamilialisation of social policy in the post-2015 context was realized in the realm of ***pensions*** in 2017. The Law and Justice party fully reversed the pensions reform adopted by the previous PO-PSL liberal-conservative coalition in 2012 and restored the retirement age for women from 67 and 60. Despite not being directly related with the family policy sphere; the retirement policy also reinforced the ongoing refamilialisation of the public sphere by reinforcing the traditional caregiving function of the women as mothers and grandmothers as well as careers of the elderly and the disabled. A lower retirement age for women, in this sense, reassures the ''natural'' social roles of men and women by ''releasing the women's caring capital'' in the family, as put by Minister of Family Elzbieta Rafalska (Ambroziak, 09.09.2017). On the other hand, for Piotr Duda, the chairman of the Solidarity trade union, the lower retirement age represents a ''privilege'' for women ''due to the unique role of women for the functioning of society, especially demographics'' (Ambroziak, 30.08. 2017). Similarly, according to Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, rather than a discrimination as stressed by the European Commission, the lowering of women's retirement age should be regarded as a ''reward and appreciation'' for women's self-sacrifice and devotion to caregiving (Ambroziak, 08.08.2017). As seen from these brief statements, the storytelling around the pension reform commonly invokes the mythical role of Polish mother as a self-sacrificing, devoted and patriotic ideal, while reassigning an ontological meaning to the caring functions of the women in the imagined national survival, especially in the context of the

ongoing demographic decline. Besides, embedded in this mythical role, decreasing women's retirement age is presented as a means for seeking recognition, differentiation and uniqueness which would once again ensure women's ''proud participation in Polish national community'' as in the turbulent historical periods (Walczewska 1999: 53).

The legitimizing discourse around the family policy was also simultaneously shaped under the Poland's ongoing 'war on gender' as well as the growing political alliance of the governing PiS with the Catholic Church and the ultraconservative networks such as the Ordo Iuris Institute since 2015 (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 78). During 2016-2018, women's reproductive freedoms were further limited (i.e., the banning of in vitro fertilization, limiting access to emergency contraception) in the name of securing the ''normative demand of the reproduction of the nation'' (Grzebalska and Peto, 2018: 4). The most notable change in this direction was the acceleration of the legislative process on outlawing abortion, which was already the strictest in the EU since the 1993 (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 140). Led by ultra-conservative 'anti-choice' groups, the Catholic Church as well as the right-wing political circles, a civic bill called the ''Stop Abortion'' was submitted to the parliament in 2016 which promulgated total ban on abortions, accompanied by criminal penalties for the doctors as well as the women who practice abortion (Yatsyk, 2020:157). Due to massive public resistance against the ban (i.e., the Black Protests and the Polish Women's Strike) during 2016, PiS suspended the ban to be revisited ahead of subsequent elections in 2019 and 2020 (Graff, 2019).

Accordingly, in 2018 another civic bill entitled the ''Stop Abortion'' was presented to the Polish parliament by the representative of the legislative initiative committee Kaja Urszula Godek. As similar to previous PiS' narrativization around gender equality or sexual education, the abortion issue is also frequently embedded within an alarmist, emotionally-charged Manichean storytelling pitting ordinary Poles against an imagined dark elite force including leftist or liberal lobbies. This conspiratorial rhetoric finds especially fertile ground in anti-abortion fantasizing to render the policy context into an existential struggle of the 'good' and the 'evil', while depicting Poland as under attack by a unified *Them* of national or international 'pro-abortionists' orchestrated by Western liberal or extreme leftist lobbies. Likewise, the storytelling around abortion is also routinely nourished by historical registers to render the present and future disastrous, if the abortion is not stopped at the moment. Accordingly, abortion is likened to practices

of ‘left-wing totalitarianism’, which is a common traumatic temporal trope used in Polish right-wing populist storytelling. As such, with this historical analogy, the abortion is denoted as the extension of Polish historical suffering and oppression under totalitarian regimes, which once more infringes in Polish sovereignty, traditional freedom and morality.

> By adopting the "Stop Abortion" bill, you will make a really good change in our homeland. This is a great step towards the moral repair of Polish society - and that is why it will be attacked by the extreme left and liberals who want to take away the right to live from innocent people and destroy Poland. Their sponsors from abroad, who would like to introduce a Western-style abortion law, will also protest. (…). The goal of abortionists is always the same: total domination in public space, manipulation and censorship of thoughts. Scary as it is, efforts are being made in Poland to introduce left-wing totalitarianism. Don't be afraid of the noisy left-wing minority or transnational institutions full of lobbyists on abortion companies' salaries. Stand on the side of sick children, their families and friends, stand on the side of citizens. Save us from people who falsely claim to be our defenders, but in fact are our enemies. Save women from abortion, daughters from death, and mothers from becoming murderers. Save us. (Kaja Ursula Godek, Parliamentary Speech, 10.01.2018).

The sense of victimization is further augmented by reinforcing a moral antagonism between the ‘innocent, victim’ child as against the ‘oppressive’ *Others* infringing in his/her dignity and right to life. The speech is also full of religious references to Christian ethics, by framing the unborn as a ‘‘moral and political subject’’ with a full ‘‘personhood and citizenship’’ (Grzebalska and Peto, 2018: 4). As such, the anti-abortion storytelling the Polish anti-abortion fantasizing often frame women as passive victims of oppressive, pro-abortion lobbies that need to be saved (Koralewska and Zielinska, 2022:679). This vulnerable and passive positioning of women is also in line with the historical narratives of *Polish Mother* underpinned by a suffering, self-sacrificing but dignified ideal. Repositioning Polish women as victims of the contemporary external lobbies lacking agency and individual will, the narrative appeals to neo-traditionalist desires in defense of women’s natural roles as well as right to a dignified life. Against this anxious background, the complete abortion ban is justified as an imaginary fullness that would not only save the dignity of the unborn, but also recapture the dignity of motherhood from being destroyed by external *Others.* In other words, with the banning of abortion, the narrative appeals to an alternative neo-traditionalist emancipation through which Polish women will liberate itself from the chains of Western modernity and its totalitarian remodeling of society and regain the dignity of motherhood. Finally, the analysis reveals that post-2015 anti-abortion agenda reveals the increasingly selective and exclusionary

understanding of biopolitical community by excluding the rights of the 'non-traditional' women in the name of protecting those who are deemed as 'ours' and deserving (Yatsyk, 2020:156).

Finally, in response to the withdrawal of the total ban of abortion in 2016 due to mass public protest, the government proposed a 'pro-life/non-abortion' benefit entitled ***For Life*** in 2017, which provide families with financial and care support on the occasion of birth of a child with incurable, life-threatening disease that is diagnosed in the prenatal period (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2017). The most debated provision of the benefit scheme is that it grants pregnant women with one-time cash benefit of PLN 4,000, who decide to give birth on the occasion of a life-threatening disease in the prenatal period (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2017). As articulated in the party's main policy document of 2019 entitled the 'Polish Model of Welfare State', the pro-life policy agenda is often supported by religious and historical references to Christianity, Polish messianic martyrdom and the trauma of Nazi totalitarianism. First, through references to Catholic ethics of 'right to life' and 'dignity of the human', the party reaffirms itself as the guardian of 'life' as against the human-killing practices such as abortion and euthanasia, reminiscent of the totalitarian practices. As argued, the equation of abortion with totalitarianism or notions such as 'killing' and 'murder' emerges as a common temporal/emotional trope utilized in right-wing anti-abortion storytelling. Yet, PiS' policy legitimation resorts to further mythopoesis by invoking the *Matka Polka* as well as Poland's messianic imagery in defense of the life of the unborn. As such, mothers are expected to sacrifice themselves in the same way as Poland has sacrificed itself in history itself for European civilization. As such, by drawing on the mythical imageries of Matka Polka as well as the Poland's messianic martyrdom, the policy narrative justifies the pro-life/anti-abortion stance as a sacred and heroic act that should also guide the women's current decisions on abortion. In this context, this mythopoetic construction not only complements Polish autobiographic narratives, but also transform them into promises of ontological security underpinned by the messianic agency.

> At the ideological core of the Law and Justice programme is respect for the dignity of every human being (…). Human life is a paramount value for us. We believe in a state that guarantees the safety of its citizens (…). To the Judeo-Christian tradition, the second tradition after the Greek tradition that underpins Western civilization, we owe the conviction that it is man's duty to be responsible for the world around us. However, we remember the horrific totalitarian experiments. Euthanasia,

> eugenics, experiments on the human genome, abortion on demand - the modern world has almost unlimited possibilities to interfere with human nature. We are convinced that the limit of our freedom is human dignity. Our respect for life extends to its entire duration. That is why we resolutely defend life and oppose any form of violence that threatens it, whether physical or ideological. History has taught us that giving one's life in defense of others is the most heroic of acts (PiS, Party Programme, 2019: 6-7).

In conclusion, this section has argued that since 2015 Polish family policy has radically moved towards an explicit familalism and pro-natalism, yet at the same time, the policy regime has increasingly adopted a selective and hierarchical understanding of social citizenship. The most remarkable policy instrument in this direction was the flagship 500+ programme, which directly reinforced the childbearing functions of the women within a large, Catholic, patriotic, heterosexual family unit. Accompanied by lowering women's retirement age, limited incentives for women to return to job market after maternity leave and no significant infrastructural development in the formal care support (Szelewa, 2017; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020), the newly adopted policy regime reaffirmed women's status in society as primary care givers as mothers and grandmothers. In addition, the main legitimizing discourse around the pro-family cash benefits, including the pensions and the 'non-abortion' benefit, was the restoration of dignity and privilege of the large families and motherhood which have long been neglected in the 'Old/Liberal' Poland. In contrast, the pro-family/natalist policy instruments were presented as a future path towards a 'New/Social' Poland underpinned by an ontologically secure, beatific imaginary in which previously neglected/stigmatized groups would regain their dignity and recognition. However, despite the seemingly inclusive and universal character of the proposed familal regime, large groups were excluded from the imagined biopolitical community. As such the new social policy regime laid the foundation for a selective social investment in the 'deserving' biopolitical communities such as large, heterosexual, Catholic-Pole families or pregnant women at the expense of single parents, non-traditional women, non-normative family configurations and sexual minorities (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2020).

5.5.3 2019-Present: Covid-19 Pandemic and the 'Polish' Model of the Welfare State

Setting the Crisis Scene: LGBTQ+ as the new Object of Moral-Demographic Anxiety

In the run-up to European Parliament elections of 2019 as well as the subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections in the years 2019 and 2020, the threat of 'gender

ideology' has been largely replaced by an equally 'alien' enemy called the ''LGBTQ+ ideology'' (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 79). The securitization of homosexuality and sexual minorities that has been ongoing for several years has transformed into a full-fledged moral panic in February 2019 by the signing of the so-called 'LGBT+ Charter' by Civic Coalition's Warsaw Mayor, Rafal Trzaskowski. The Charter promised basic legal protections to sexual minorities, commitment to combat violence and hatred against LGBT+ people as well as introduction of sex and anti-discriminatory education in public schools in accordance with the WHO standards (Graff and Korolzcuk, 2022: 79). The adoption of the Charter by the Warsaw Mayor was met with intense criticism by PiS representatives alongside the ultraconservative groups and the Catholic Church, which framed the LGBTQ+ as another form of 'foreign ideology' that intends to sexualize children, demoralize traditional family and ultimately depopulate Poland. In addition to European and national election cycles in 2019, the simultaneous occurrence of the presidential election of 2020 as well as the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic have provided further emotive and strategic opportunity for PiS to hegemonize neo-traditionalist fantasies in exchange for promises of ontological security from various existential threats, including the LGBTQ+ community, 'genderists', 'pro-abortionists', feminists as well as the EU/Western liberalism.

To begin with, during the European Parliament election campaign in 2019, the anti-LGBT sentiment has been vocally instrumentalized by PiS to frame the elections as an existential choice between the beatifically articulated 'traditional morality' and the darkly portrayed Western 'modernism'. ''The stake of these elections is a dispute over the world of values… whether to build modernity on the foundation of tradition, family warmth…or to build on shocking moral revolutions, where the traditional family is ridiculed, and children subjected to aggressive indoctrination against the will of their parents'' Mateusz Morawiecki states (PiS, Press Release, 24.05.2019). Reducing the election into an irreconcilable moral choice over tradition and modernity, Morawiecki articulates a horrific scenario around dangers-awaiting traditional family, parenthood as well as children under the dictates of Western liberalism, if the election is lost to his counterparts. Embedded in this horrific imagination, Morawiecki caters further moral panic around his 'modernist' competitors in the European coalition, blaming them of ruining the respect for the Polish past, history and valued traditions, while ''scattering across different factions in Europe- from red to green to rainbow'' (PiS, Press Release, 24.05.2019).

Embedded in a discourse of moral panic, Morawiecki draws on wide range of historically-resonant emotional tropes, imageries, symbols and moral antagonisms containing heroes and enemies in justification of his traditionalist defense.

Other than inciting fear around the loss of a superior, secure past moral order in the face of modernist 'attacks', the storytelling also instrumentalize several historically resonant fears concerning the communist past to further moralize the antagonism between the PiS and its liberal opponents, by reinforcing the status of the latter as an extension of the oppressive 'communist' *Other*. By conflating the trauma of communist oppression with the ongoing moral panic around LGBTQ+, Morawiecki demonizes his rivals for weakening traditional Polishness by spreading dangerous and alien ideologies ranging from communism to LGBTQ+ 'ideology'. As in the case of war against gender, the rights of sexual minorities are also routinely connected with the trauma of communist oppression in the LGBTQ+ debate by framing it as an all-unifying ideological regime similar to communism that is able to penetrate and alter the traditional norms and practices of society. ''The elections will decide whether we want a strong or a submissive Poland'' Morawiecki claims (PiS, Press Release, 24.05.2019). Shaped under the ongoing 'war on LGBTQ+', PiS' European electoral discourse was also highly gendered, rooted in masculinist ontological insecurities around the weakening of the nation by exposition to liberal values such as feminism and the LGBTQ movement. The latter was especially ushered by the PiS ahead of elections as a source of ontological insecurity, often fueled by horrific fantasmatic narratives of a strong nation that has been rendered weaker, effeminate, thereby, vulnerable to external threats. Contrasted with an imagined 'strong' Poland rooted in a secure, stable and virtuous mythical past, Morawiecki's narrative appeals to desires for masculinist restoration of Polishness as the only way towards an anxiety-free future.

In the presidential election in 2020, PiS Candidate Andrej Duda also recontextualizes the Polish communist past to further moralize the elections as a binary choice between the 'traditional/strong' and the 'modern/submissive' Poland. Accordingly, Duda states that: ''During the entire period of communism, communist ideology was forced on children in schools. It was Bolshevism. Today, they are also trying to force an ideology on us and our children, but a different, completely new one. This is neo-Bolshevism'' (Barejka, 13.06. 2020). Drawing on this historical parallel, Duda's narrative reactivates the Poles'

historically-rooted ontological insecurities around foreign oppression, lost sovereignty and freedom, while framing the present as a continuation of the traumatic/oppressive Polish past. As such, similar to frequent use of Polish communist past in PiS' anti-gender storytelling, foreign domination/oppression once more appear as a continuous traumatic experience and persistent condition of Polishness. By doing so, the mythopoetic narrative both promises a continuous and stable *Self*, at the same time, provides a morally-legitimate base for reactionary/exclusionary political action against the sexual minorities. ''My parents' generation did not fight for 40 years to expel communist ideology from schools for the sake of another ideology, even more destructive to mankind'' Duda further states (Barejka, 13.06. 2020). Through an imagined past generation of Poles who fought against communism, Duda's storytelling stir further feelings of loss, shame and humiliation in relation to ongoing anxiety around the LGBTQ+ movement. Finally, similar to framing of gender or feminism, the storytelling also rejects the 'peoplehood' of sexual minorities, and rather define them as 'ideology' by taking a radical form of rejection of belonging and dehumanization of the sexual minorities.

Similar to right-wing populist framing of Muslim refugees, the Polish anti-LGBTQ+ fantasizing is also commonly structured around the trope of ''theft of enjoyment'' to stoke fear around the 'unjust' enjoyment of the LGBTQ+ community at the expense of the deserving/traditional Polish people. On multiple occasions, PiS representatives has narrated European elections as an existential antagonism between promotion of the LGBTQ+ 'ideology'' and the welfare of the traditional Poles. Against this fantasmatic antagonism, ontological closure is again premised upon a neo-traditionalist claim for upholding Polish way of life and prioritizing the welfare of the deserving Ordinary Poles, especially the families. For instance, PiS Deputy Minister of Justice, Patryk Jaki proposes a highly simplified, black/white reading of elections by stating that: ''Poles have a choice. Either they will choose the European Coalition and money for LGBT, or the United Right. If they choose the United Right, then the resources will be directed to the traditional Polish family'' (wPolityce, 10.03.2019). The story presented by Jaki builds on a conspiratorial logic by blaming his competitors as distributing the Polish well-deserved welfare to the 'undeserving' 'immoral' Others. Against this conspiratorial imagination which also includes horrific imageries of future such as ''where boys are dressed up as girls'' (wPolityce, 10.03.2019), the elections are ascribed with ontological significance embedded with masculinist and traditionalist claims for protection. In so doing, the

narrative also seeks to stimulate sense of humiliation and pride in relation to loss of traditional masculinity and gender roles, whose recapture could only be guaranteed by the PiS' electoral victory.

PiS MEP Ryszard Czarnecki similarly advances a fantasmatic antagonism between the Poles' rightful but 'threatened' welfare and the perceived 'excessive enjoyment' of the LGBT ideology. ''These are millions of zlotys spent from the money of Warsaw and Polish taxpayers to promote LGBT ideology. This money is lacking, for example, to help veterans, people who fought for Poland and free Warsaw, the Warsaw Insurgents'' claims Czarnecki (DoRzeczy, 27.02.2019). In doing this, other than the traditional family, as a historically-rooted repository of Polish moral unity and national pride, ''Warsaw insurgents'' appear as another signifier of deservingness and belonging in the imagined community, that should be defended against the LGBTQ+ community and its promoters. In this sense, the memory of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which stands for a significant historical symbol for Polish independence resistance during the WWII, also appears as a powerful affective register to reinforce collective identities during the electoral rally. Accordingly, other than stirring fear in relation to loss of national welfare, the narrative also demarcates the 'morally superior/deserving' Poles from the un-Polish *Others*, by directly excluding sexual minorities from the Polish historical narrative of proud resistance.

As similar to PiS' mythopoetic fantasizing around immigration and gender, PiS also routinely revitalizes Poland's idealized messianic martyrdom in defense of 'traditional Poland' ahead of parliamentary elections in 2019. Accordingly, Jaroslaw Kaczynski warns against sexualization of children by saying: ''We must defend the Polish family with full determination, and even with ferocity, because it is a civilizational threat, not only for Poland, for the whole of Europe, for the whole civilization that was created on the basis of Christianity'' (Zawistowski, 23.03. 2019). According to this narrative, Poland is imagined as a messianic hero whose defense of traditional morality, family and culture would also save the entire Christian and European civilization from demise. By assuming the mythical messianic role of Poland, Kaczynski positions his party as the only savior of Poland and the ultimate frontier of Christianity in the European continent against the LGBTQ+ threat. This missionary language not only reinforces a stable, secure and unique *Self*-identity rooted in Polish historical narrative of 'proud suffering', but also helps

moralizing the fantasmatic antagonism between the PiS and its rivals in the electoral rally. As such, by framing itself as a messianic hero in defense of Christian civilization against the spread of LGBT 'ideology', Jaroslaw Kaczynski reaffirms a morally superior *Self*-image in contrast to his rivals who are allegedly serving to the interest of the LGBTQ+ ideology, so the destruction of the Christian civilization.

During the elections period in 2019, this missionary articulation has also regularly connected to the patriarchal/masculinist projections of the nation as part of the Polish romantic mythology. Probably, this has become most evident with the election advertisement depicting an umbrella with the PiS party logo protecting a 'traditional family' from a 'rainbow storm' (Strezelcki and Bartyzel, 2019)[10]. Structured fantasmatically, the visual juxtaposes two antagonistic imageries pitting an idyllic ideal of smiling, secure, heterosexual family with children sheltered under the umbrella from a horrifically depicted 'rainbow storm' coming from above. Accordingly, through this visualization PiS presented itself as the only protector of the traditional families, while reframing the LGBTQ+ movement as a foreign-imposed, alien threat to the safe and meaningful existence of the traditional Polish families.

Furthermore, the outbreak of the ***Covid-19 Pandemic*** has led to heightening of demographic anxieties in Poland with the death rates reaching unprecedented levels since the World War II, accompanied by the ongoing decline in birth rates[11]. In this specific anxious context, the governing PiS seized the opportunity presented by the exceptional pandemic measures as well as the emergency powers to further criminalize sexual minorities and women's reproductive rights as the culprits of the moral-demographic anxiety. The previous literature has argued that Covid-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for authoritarian populist leaders to consolidate their power through emergency legislations as well as politics of blame and xenophobia towards the perceived out-groups (Gover et al., 2020; Dionne and Turkmen, 2020). It has been observed that ethnic minorities, foreigners, immigrants as well as sexual minorities are especially likely to be stigmatized during the outbreaks of pandemics as 'sources of contamination' or

[10] See the visual through the link https://oko.press/karczewski-obronimy-polskie-rodziny-prawdziwym-zagrozeniem-jest-homofobiczna-i-agresywna-wladza

[11] ''Demographic crisis: Poland population shrinking under pandemic'' https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/26/demographic-crisis-poland-population-shrinking-under-pandemic

deviants that are not following 'our' rules. Similar to Denmark, which the threat of contamination was directly linked with Muslim immigrants by the right-wing populist actors, in Poland the pandemic has also created a fertile emotive setting for the right-wing government and organizations to further securitize the 'non-normative' *Others* including the feminists, pro-abortion and human rights activists as well as the LGBTQ+ community as the culprits of the contamination either directly or metaphorically.

The metaphors of virus and contamination have long characterized Polish right-wing populist narratives to delegitimize perceived outgroups, especially the sexual minorities and feminist activists (Graff and Korolczuk, 2018: 811). While the object of the ongoing moral-demographic anxiety was the 'infectious' Middle Eastern refugees who would bring ''parasites and protozoa'' to Poland in 2015[12], it was mainly the LGBT+ community and the woman activists who were metaphorically constructed as 'contagious' during the global health emergency. Accordingly, Polish anti-gender fantasizing is commonly built on narratives of victimization as if the 'pure and healthy' body of Poland is threatened by the 'uncontrollable spread' of immoral practices (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; 2022:102). One popular example of this discourse has been the equation of 'gender ideology' with the Ebola virus during the protests against the Istanbul Convention in 2015 (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018). The metaphors of contamination and virus were also quickly instrumentalized by the right-wing politicians as well as the Catholic Church in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, some government or local officials framed the ''LGBT virus'' as more deadly than the Covid-19 pandemic[13], while some other Church representatives even framed the pandemic as a ''sign of God's wrath, a punishment for homosexuality and gender transgression'' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 71). In a similar vein, the proponents of the anti-abortion bill prepared in the midst of the pandemic in April 2020 called the 'abortions' as 'more deadly' than the Covid-19 pandemic (Godek, 15.04.2020).

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[12]''Polish opposition warns refugees could spread infectious diseases''
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-poland-idUSKCN0S918B20151015

[13]''Education minister defends official who warned "LGBT virus" threatens Polish schools''
https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/08/25/education-minister-defends-official-who-warned-lgbt-virus-threatens-polish-schools/

In parallel to rise of discriminatory and offensive rhetoric towards sexual minorities and women's reproductive freedoms, the Polish pandemic governance was also illustrative of wider ''illiberal pragmatism'' of the Eastern and Central European populists (Gaweda, 2022: 52). As in Hungary, Polish right-wing populists instrumentalized the state of emergency and lockdown measures to expand their illiberal political agenda, including the adoption of substantial institutional changes weakening the judiciary, parliamentary oversight as well as the constitutional checks and balances (Hajnal et al. 2021). By taking advantage of the newly invented emergency powers as well as the pandemic restrictions disabling organized political gatherings, illiberal governments pushed their neo-traditionalist agenda further under the Covid-19 induced emergency by reasserting their familalist, pro-natalist and nativist political imaginations. In Poland, the most remarkable legislative change in this direction was the adoption of near-total ban on right to abortion in October 2020, which was already the strictest in Europe (Stanley, 2023: 111). Capitalizing on the restrictions on public assembly as well as the disproportional emergency powers, PiS-led Constitutional Court ruled that the abortions with fatal abnormalities are unconstitutional which outlawed abortion in Poland in practice. At the same time, another bill introduced three-year jail sentence for sexual educators teaching non-heterosexual sexuality (Guasti, 2020:53), followed by a proposal of civic bill called the 'Stop LGBT+ Pride' outlawing the LGBTQ+ marches and public gatherings during the pandemic on the grounds that they disseminate ''non-heterosexual sexual orientations'' (Sullivan, 12.11. 2020).

In defense of the anti-abortion bill proposed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in April 2020, parliamentarian and representative of Legislative Initiative Committee Kaja Urszula Godek projects an excessively simplified, fantasmatic narrative on the policy outlawing the 'eugenic abortions', referring to pregnancy terminations in the case of fatal fetus defects. Structured around excessively beatific and horrific projections of the future, Godek reduces the anti-abortion policy into a binary moral choice by stating that: ''There is a simple choice: you are for killing or you are against killing'' (Godek, Parliamentary Speech, 15.04.2020). Such framing reduces the complexity of the policy scheme into an existential struggle between the 'good' and the 'evil', thereby, increases the emotional and ontological appeal of the anti-abortion discourse. The affective pull of the narrative is further secured by invocation of past traumas pertaining to Nazi totalitarianism with specific references to 'eugenic' practices of Nazi regime. Godek states that: ''Before the

German Nazis began mass murdering Jews, Poles, Gypsies and other "races" they considered inferior, they practiced it on people with disabilities (…). 20 thousand people lost their lives during this action, because someone subjectively recognized that they were a burden for the state'' (Godek, Parliamentary Speech, 15.04.2015). By comparing this 'specified type' of abortion with the eugenic practices of German Nazis on the disabled people during the Second World War, the narrative extends the trope of historical suffering and victimization to the present, enabling her to frame the present as a decisive moment within a linear continuum of Polish 'totalitarian oppression'. To stimulate emotional attachment around the anti-abortion policy, the narrative also conveys images of shame, inferiority and humiliation around people with disabilities who are often been unjustly discriminated by the so-called 'pro-abortionists' (Koralewska and Zielinska, 2022:678). Against these horrific projections filled with historically-rooted feelings of shame and discrimination, the anti-abortion policy is presented as a constitutional guarantee of the human dignity, respect, equality and 'right to life', which stand for inalienable and inherent universal rights that should be protected.

Finally, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic provides an additional emotive context for securitization of the abortion with policy makers often linking the abortion with metaphors such as dangerous illness, virus, contamination, pathogens or death. For instance, as Godek further emphasizes: ''We are experiencing an unprecedented time of national quarantine, when we are trying to reduce the risk of illness and death for ourselves and our loved ones in a special way. And abortion is a pandemic much worse than coronavirus. It brings more victims and all of them are fatal'' (Godek, Parliamentary Speech, 15.04.2020). As similar to Danish right-wing fantasizing framing Islam and Muslim 'oppression' as ''worse than pandemic'' that would destroy Danish freedom (Pia Kjærsgaard, 05.06. 2021), abortion has also been narrated by the right-wing and ultraconservative groups in Poland as form of a pandemic-like danger that would threaten the survival of the nation for the upcoming generations. By framing abortion as analogous to a deadly virus, Godek's storytelling further incites fear by transforming the abstractness of the virus into an identifiable object of fear, which aims to destroy the very essence of Polish existence. This juxtaposition has become an affective mobilizing trope during the pandemic through which the right-wing populist actors constantly reinforce the biopolitical *Otherness* of the 'abortionists' from the ordinary/traditional Polish women and families.

Similar practices of pandemic *Othering* also took place with the outbreak of the massive protests following the adoption of a near-total ban of abortion in October 2020. Despite the restrictions on the public assembly due to pandemic measures, tens of thousands of women, men as well as the opponents of PiS' recent breaches on the rule of law took the streets on 22 October 2022, which was commonly called as the ''Women Strike''. In opposition to public protests, Kaczynski identified new 'criminal' *Others* aiming to destroy the moral unity of the Polish nation, particularly declaring the public demonstrators, including the feminist activists and LGBTQ as the new culprits of the pandemic-induced demographic anxiety. ''We have a severe stage of the COVID epidemic…Those who call for them, but also those who participate in them, bring about a general danger, that is, they commit a crime, a serious crime. The authorities have not only the right, but also the duty to oppose such events.'' Kaczynski states (Zygiel, 27.10.2020). Especially, under the pandemic restrictions, the massive protests enabled Kaczynski to redefine his opponents as irresponsible, deviant ''pathogens'' responsible from the growth of the pandemic and lost lives, while legitimizing the use of force upon the protestors.

In addition to *Otherness* informed by a biological conception, in the same speech, Kaczynski also framed the 'pro-abortion' demonstrators as the 'enemies' of the Catholic religion, given the unprecedented scale of public confrontation with the Church during the demonstrations. For instance, by referring to the incidents in which Churches are 'attacked', Kaczynski's narrative seeks to stimulate feelings of anger and frustration towards the so-called 'abortionist', who not only desecrates religion, but also threatens the survival of the nation as the moral core of Polish meaningful existence. ''Churches are being attacked. This is a fatal event. This moral deposit, which is held by the Church, is the only moral system that is widely known in Poland. Its rejection is nihilism. We must defend Polish churches. We must protect them at all costs'' (Zygiel, 27.10.2020). As such, other than being a biological threat in the context of the pandemic, the horrifically structured storytelling invokes a moral panic towards the pro-abortion supporters whose triumph would ''destroy Poland'' as well as ''end the history of the Polish nation'' (Zygiel, 27.10.2020). Reinforcing the neo-traditionalist desires around preserving the ethno-religious unity of Poland, the Catholic Church is constructed as a fantasmatic object that need to be saved from destruction by the 'un-Polish', 'un-patriotic'

Others. Particularly, the narrative foregrounds a horrific projection of Poland surrounded by enemies that are ready to destroy Catholic Church, thereby end Poles' meaningful existence. Defined as the only 'moral deposit' Church is ascribed with fundamental ontological significance during the pandemic, whose defense would not only promise an ontologically secure future free from nihilism, but also recapture the 'history of the nation' (Zygiel, 27.10.2020).

In sum, the year 2019 marked a pivotal moment in Poland's intensifying illiberal transformation, which manifested through substantial institutional changes as well as conflation of deeply gendered, exclusionist and familalist discourses. The election cycles of 2019-2020 as well as the emergence of the global pandemic have led to particular blend of instability and crisis against which the party reinforced itself as the protector of the traditional Polish families against several antagonistic *Others* including the liberal political opposition, LGBT+ community, feminists, and pro-abortion public protestors. Despite not being directly linked with the Covid-19 led mortality rates, the LGBTQ community and the pro-abortion groups have become the main object of moral-demographic anxiety during the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic, in this sense, contributed to PiS' illiberal, conservative and biopolitical agenda by further demarcating the imagined biopolitical community among the 'good/deserving' Poles and immoral/undeserving *Others*.

Social Policy an Ontological Fulfillment: The Welfare State as the Guarantee of 'Revolution of Dignity' and Back to 'Normality'

After returning to power in 2019, PiS government declared a 'revolution of dignity' through expanding its pro-family and pro-social policy agenda in response to 'moral revolution' undertaken by party's opponents, as argued by Mateusz Morawiecki (wPolityce, 10.08.2021). Promising to defend the traditional institution of family and the need for restoring social equality, the party has revitalized the antagonism between the 'Old/Liberal' and 'New/Solidaristic' Poland, according to which PiS has positioned itself as the guarantee of the family-oriented social welfare regime. However, this time, the party leaders and the official party documents have done this through a novel concept that has not previously featured in the existing part discourse: ''the welfare state''. As argued by Jarosław Kaczyński during the election cycles in 2019, the Polish model of welfare state is to ''serve the entire society, the development of the national community and its strengthening, but above all it is to serve the family'' (Business Insider Polska, 14.09.

2019). By specifically emphasizing its ‘‘Polish’’ nature, Jarosław Kaczyński has also argued that the Polish welfare model would also be centered around the defense of human dignity with a firm rejection of ‘‘Social Darwinism of neo-liberalism’’ (Business Insider Polska, 14.09.2019). In this way, PiS representatives have distinguished the newly presented welfare model from Western social democratic welfare state, in particular by emphasizing its traditional, communitarian and family-oriented nature.

In the most recent policy document entitled ‘‘A Polish Welfare State Model’’, the party has specified the ‘Polish’ features of the model envisioning a system and set of mechanisms based on strengthening of the traditional family institution as well as ‘fair’ redistribution of national capital. The key policy promises in this direction were the universalization of the 500+ programme for all children, free medication for pregnant women and seniors, tax exemption for young people, lowering the retirement age, distributing annual cash bonuses to pensioners, increasing large family benefits, doubling of the minimum wage as well as the overall extension of the existing family/child benefit schemes (PiS, Party Programme 2019: 54-57).

What is more remarkable beyond the redistributive aspects of the newly-launched policy instruments were the description of the Polish welfare state as a fundamental instrument of securing national identity, culture, patriotism and traditional morality in the face of perceived internal and external enemies. As articulated by in the most recent policy document (PiS, Party Programme 2019), Polish welfare state is fantasized as a core defense mechanism against the so-called ‘axiological threats’ to Polishness from Western liberal ideas of gender, sexuality, reproductive freedoms as well as alternative family models. Against these horrific projections, the Polish welfare state is beatifically imagined as a mechanism for realizing the aspired ontological completeness built upon neo-traditionalist fantasies of Polishness. In this sense, welfare state is imagined as a neo-traditionalist tool for recapturing Polish way of life and the ‘stolen’ freedom from the blocking *Others*, yet, at the same time constructed as a fantasmatic entity that could only realize the imaginary societal wholeness if the current threats are overcome. Structured in this way, the fantasmatic narrative calls subjects with emotional identification around a neo-traditionalist defense of the nation, whose defense would also be the guarantee and continuation of the Polish welfare state ideal. In constructing the imaginary fullness around the welfare state, notions such as freedom, culture, solidarity and patriotism

appear as fundamental signifiers of 'Polish way of life' around which Polish subject commonly organizes its enjoyment. Finally, as in the previous discussions around the post-2015 family policy, the narration of the Polish welfare state ideal in the post-2019 period is also filled with various emotions and desires, seeking to transform the deeply-rooted feelings of shame and inferiority into promises of ontological security, collective worth as well as dignity.

> We put it most briefly as a programme to build a Polish version of a welfare state (…) At the center remains credibility, the main verification of which is to be a social policy aimed at the fastest possible increase in living standards, with particular emphasis on wage growth. However, we must also emphasize another aspect of our policy, which is still relevant today and will probably remain relevant in the next term. It will be the firm rejection of offensives aimed at undermining the foundations of our culture, our identity and, ultimately, our freedom. We shall pursue this objective primarily through positive action, addressing the problem both directly and indirectly, or in some cases even very indirectly, and aiming above all to build a strong community of free Poles. A community that is to develop and last. Because it is worthwhile for Poland to last and it is worth being a Pole (PiS, Party Programme 2019: 42).

> The implementation of this model [The Welfare State] takes place in a specific environment of axiological threats. In the modern world, in particular, such fundamental values for us as freedom, solidarity and identity are weakened, disavowed and attacked in various ways. Therefore, in order to be able to efficiently and effectively realize the Polish welfare state model, we cannot be indifferent to these axiological threats. We treat them as fundamental challenges to be overcome. We must therefore systematically and programmatically oppose threats to such values as freedom, solidarity and identity (…). Law and Justice considers a wise identity policy to be one of the fundamental duties of the Polish state, an important element of the Polish welfare state model (…). The Polish model of a well- functioning political community and welfare state simply cannot be realized without a kind of shield against the crisis of contemporary global culture and the aggression of various external and internal ideologies, axiologies and systems of interests that threaten the foundations of social life. (PiS, Party Programme, 2019).

The family-oriented nature of the newly invented welfare models is also regularly legitimized through reinforcing the ontological significance of the family for the survival of Polishness throughout the history. As such, Prime Minister Morawiecki legitimizes the governments' new pro-social policy activism under the Polish welfare state by reactivating the myth of *Matka Polka* in the context of the ongoing demographic pressures. By recontextualizing the heroic role of motherhood and traditional families in transmitting Polish culture, religion, language and patriotism over the course of Polish traumatic history, including the partitions and the communist oppression, the beatifically

structured narrative reaffirms the ontological role of traditional familyhood in the imaginary fullness to come.

> We Poles have located in the family everything that we lacked during the centuries of partitions, occupations and totalitarian rule. It is thanks to the Polish family that our language, customs and culture have survived; it is here that we have been taught religion, the truth about 'forbidden' history by the authorities, and patriotism propagated from generation to generation. The family replaced for us many of the institutions of the state, which either did not exist or was its enemy. When men died in battle, the role of mothers and women in shaping the family and in the survival of Polishness became fundamental. And finally - if it had not been for Polish families and the strength of their internal bonds, a movement such as Solidarity would not have had a solid enough foundation to enable it to defy the oppressive machinery of the People's Republic of Poland and win (Mateusz Morawiecki, 08.08.2021, Facebook).

Other than beatific/romantic articulations of the mythical role of the family and the Polish mother, the remainder of the narrative is also heavily informed by temporal registers pitting Polish recent 'liberal' past against the PiS-led 'Social Poland' in construction. By recontextualizing the imageries of shame and inferiority associated with the 'Old/Liberal Poland' within the longer historical narrative of Polish suffering, the new pro-social politics is offered as a ''revolution of dignity'' with a promise of long-awaited and well-deserved reward to ordinary Polish families. In this way, by instrumentalizing an imagined shame rooted in a horrific recent past order, Morawiecki ignites ontological insecurity around a possible return to past, while positioning the government and its new pro-welfare vision as the only path towards a privileged and dignified Polish future. In so doing, the fantasmatic/mythopoetic narrative serves to hegemonize the proposed Polish welfare state ideal as the new Polish 'normality' based on traditional morality, Catholicism, familial identities and pro-family culture. In this way, this mythopoetic legitimization helps justifying further use of exclusionary and punitive policy instruments in the name of securing the imagined Polish normality.

> Today, more than 30 years after the transformation, the time has come when an independent, prosperous Poland is paying its debt to Polish families. We have waited too long for his ''revolution of dignity'', which came with the victory of PiS and the introduction of our flagship support programmes. After all, it is not just the already symbolic 500+, but the whole philosophy behind the government's pro-social policy. This policy should be based on the pillars of financial support, services, family-friendly labor market, education and cultivation of culture of pro-family values. The biggest slaughter and "glamour" of families from the times of the III Republic of Poland and the governments of our predecessors was very high unemployment or work for 4 or 5 PLN per hour. Thanks to the policy of the Government of Law and Justice - attracting investment, creating new jobs and fighting for a fairer economic system, one of the biggest shames of the III

> Republic of Poland - hungry children, is becoming a history we do not want to return to. Further threats and challenges are ahead of us related to the protection and support of Polish families. I am skipping cultural and ideological issues here today, but I would like to state clearly that the threats associated with the progressive pursuits of some countries and organizations and the usurpation of the right to interfere in the internal relations between parents and children is something that unsettles my inner anxiety. I have repeatedly expressed this at the Union forum and have taken and will continue to take actions that are intended to protect the institution of the family and the Christian roots of Europe. I'm happy about all the changes and pro-social politics. But I am most pleased that ordinary Poles are gaining back their confidence thanks to them (Mateusz Morawiecki, 08.08. 2021, Facebook).

In legitimation of the social programmes underpinning the newly cultivated Polish welfare state model, another speech made by Prime Minister Morawiecki in the Polish parliament also revitalizes the historical narrative of Polish suffering and the trauma of statelessness in the. By extending historically-rooted ontological insecurities into the Poland's recent post-communist past, the policy storytelling seeks to stoke post-transition anxieties and capture the feelings of shame, humiliation and disappointment of the 'left-behind'. By reframing it as a 'hardly-won', but poorly utilized historical opportunity, the post-1989 context is again narrated within the trope of 'failed transformation' that benefited only a few and privileged group of elites in the country leaving the ordinary Poles behind. The invocation of this imagery of 'Old Poland' once again appears as an emotionally-appealing rhetorical motif to reinforce the moral boundaries with the heroes and enemies, while crystallizing the PiS as the true voice of the ordinary people. In this sense, against the socially ruthless, abnormal 'Liberal Poland', the new Polish social contract promises rebuilding the long-awaited 'normality' as an imaginary fullness. In this sense, structured around beatific projections of 'Solidaristic Poland', the policy narrative seeks to mobilize the subjects towards a new, secure, dignified and privileged future by recapturing values such as social solidarity, equality and freedom.

> Poles entrusted Law and Justice with the task of building a Polish welfare state. A safe and modern state. A country about which everyone can proudly say: Poland is my home (…). For the last 300 years of Polish history, we have faced great challenges: defending sovereignty, regaining independence, maintaining it and rebuilding it from the ashes, building modernity, building a normal country. There are few nations that have had as difficult a road to modernity as we have, but we too had our historical moments that were only partially used. Such a moment was undoubtedly the year 1989. But, of course, not everything has been successful in this 30-year period (…) Have we used all opportunities in accordance with our best interests? Have we acted in the best interest of society as a whole? Was Polish society a subject or an object of transformation? (Mateusz Morawiecki, Parliamentary Speech, 19.11.2019).

The remainder of the speech further specifies the emotional and ontological premises underpinning the proposed social programmes under the newly launched Polish welfare model. As such, other than promising advancement of living conditions and material well-being of the ordinary Poles, the overall function of the welfare state is defined as a specific mechanism of ontological reassurance, a shield against the so-called 'axiological' threats. In this sense, the policy narrative establishes a new moral antagonism between the beatifically articulated 'Poland of normality' and the horrifically imagined 'Poland of extremes', according to which the realization of the former is dependent upon overcoming the ideological extremes, the so-called 'moral revolutions' and 'social experiments' of Western liberalism. In this sense, the idealized welfare state-led normality is not only about restoration of social equality and individual economic shame of failing to catch up with the 'winners' of the neoliberal transformation but stands for a broader promise of restoring a neo-traditionalist normality, so the recapture of Polish full enjoyment.

> Many of us have Solidarity in our biography. But for us, solidarity is not history, it is above all the goal and principle of governance, the cornerstone of our policy. Solidarity is government social programs whose beneficiaries are all families. Younger children receive 500+, and older ones who go to work are completely exempt from tax (…). This is the basis of our social contract. The future is a modern Polish welfare state. The Polish welfare state is a state of families and entrepreneurs, a state for the weak and the strong - a normal state. It is a country that respects the values of Poles, does not accept extremes, does not accept utopian ideologies, ideological revolutions, or chauvinism (…) Poland of equality and freedom, Poland of normality, not Poland of extremes. We want to create the conditions for the growth of the middle class, wide and equal to the European one, as has been the case in recent years, but we want more than just the advancement of individuals. We want the promotion of the entire Polish community. We don't want to be a rich country of poor people or a poor country of rich people. We want to be a rich community (Mateusz Morawiecki, Parliamentary Speech, 19.11.2019).

In this context, the pro-family social programmes are proposed as the only guarantee of the imagined path towards normality, which is not only signified as important for the individual Poles, but as a foundational guarantee of the nation's survival and continued existence. As such, traditional family is again ascribed with a foundational purpose and ontological significance in achieving the imaginary normality. The narrativization around the Polish welfare model, therefore, contributes to PiS' ongoing neo-traditionalist attempts to reshape Polish common sense, ontological security and normality around the signifiers such as traditional family, parenthood/motherhood and *Polak-Katolik* identity.

In this way, the policy narrative on Polish welfare model implicitly excludes certain biopolitical communities and ideas from the imagined Polish community such as the non-normative individuals/parenthood/family configurations such as the feminists, LGBTQ+ community, abortion 'supporters' or those who support the so-called 'Western-imposed' gender norms and sexual freedoms. In particular, these non-traditional/perverse 'ways of enjoyments' are framed as exceptions/deviations that threaten the very existence of Polishness.

> The family is and must remain the foundation of society. I know that today the family is considered by some people as a relic. The louder the new models of the family are talked about, the more certain they are about minority experiments and minority experimental solutions. We do not agree that exceptions determine what is the norm. We believe that the future of our children should be built on a stable family foundation (…). The family, as Primate Stefan Wyszyński said, is also a bastion of the whole of Poland (…) Various programs to support and protect the family will be the axis of my government's policy, not only in the name of tradition and identity, but also in the name of the future, freedom and normality. Where someone tries to play freedom against tradition, we will guard the reconciliation of these two values. We do not agree to social experiments and ideological revolutions. The future of our children is at stake and this future should rest in the hands of parents, because this is normal (…). Whoever wants to poison children with ideology, separate them from their parents, who wants to break up family ties, who wants to enter schools and write ideological textbooks uninvited, puts an explosive charge under Poland, wants to cause a culture war in Poland (…). And if there are those who will cause it, we will win it. The family will win it, because the family is an arch-Polish value (Mateusz Morawiecki, Parliamentary Speech, 19.11.2019).

Towards the end of the policy narrative, it can be argued that the beatifically articulated Polish welfare model points to another historically rooted ontological security under the current demographic pressures. Namely, the proposed Polish welfare model is also justified as a remedy to overcome the deep-seated Polish sense of collective inferiority and backwardness in relation to the West. In this sense, the overall narrative of the welfare state is deployed to mobilize subjects towards a desired utopian future in which Poland is imagined as a safe, harmonious and prosperous country where the former emigrants would proudly return to their 'home'. As stressed by Morawiecki at the very beginning of his speech, the Polish welfare state is fantasized as a 'home'; a safe, secure, familiar place from which Poles should drive ontological security, sense of rootedness and national belonging. Structured in this way, the beatific fantasy of Polish welfare state promises sense of ontological security, moral superiority and self-esteem to the

'wounded' Polish *Self* to finally overcome the ''shameful backwardness'' visa-vis the West (Kazlauskaitėa and Salmela, 2022: 143) both materially and in terms of morality.

> Poles in the country finally unpack suitcases, not pack suitcases (…). Our program is based on the culture that builds national identity, on family and marriage subject to special protection, on the values enshrined in the constitution. We believe in these values and we will bring our beloved homeland where it belongs. Poles are a great nation with a great past. Time for a great future (…). Generations of Poles grew up on Sienkiewicz's "Lighthouse Keeper", a short story about the bitter fate of an emigrant and love for the homeland. Constant flow of blood, migration waves, one after the other, is the drama of Poland. Today, Poles are returning to their homeland again. Finally, today, Poland can be a hope and a future for generations of emigrants, a place of return. (Mateusz Morawiecki, Party Programme, 19.11.2019).

A final policy speech by PiS MP Marcin Horala in the Polish parliament likewise emphasizes the broader ontological functions of the Polish 'model' of welfare state in preserving national identity, traditional morality and the ethno-religious homogeneity of Poland Articulated horrifically, the policy narrative conveys several images of threat including internal and external enemies that intend to destroy the traditional 'Polish way of life', its identity, religion and patriotic tradition. Externally, Western modernity and liberalism again appear as alien, non-Polish enemy imageries that should be overcome in defense of traditional freedom. On the other hand, the narrative also articulates a sharp moral antagonism between the liberal opponent Civic Platform and the governing PiS, through which Horola seeks to construct the former as an object of anxiety in realization of the neo-traditionalist Poland. Most notably, through a conspiratorial rhetoric, the narrative demonizes PiS' liberal counterparts by accusing them of spreading the so-called 'LGBT ideology', thereby, threatening Poland's Catholic traditionalism. In doing this, the policy narrative also relies on several mythopoetic registers such as the 'baptism of Poland', which is commonly considered as the birth of Polish-Christian statehood in 966. By revitalizing this core religious narrative in the context of contemporary challenges such as the 'LGBT ideology', the Horala articulates a narrative of 'lost enjoyment' in which the liberal elites are depicted as blocking the nation's rightfully deserved national pride, so the destined Polish wholeness. By further feeding an emotionally-charged moral antagonism between the 'aggressor' and 'defender', traditional Poles are imagined as the 'real victims' of the liberal aggressors who are allegedly attacking Christian roots of Poland. Against this horrific imaginations, government's new welfare policy vision is

presented as a beatific solution, as a core defense mechanism against the perceived threats.

> The most important accent at the beginning is the roots from which we grow, the source of our identity (…) We have seen a multidimensional attack on this identity in recent years. We observe, of course, an intellectual current coming to us from abroad, which strives to create a man without qualities, to destroy what roots a man, what builds his identity, what determines his place in the world: faith, religion, family, patriotism, attachment to the homeland (…) It is a very important statement that the government of Law and Justice, the government of the United Right will unequivocally oppose this attack, that it will unequivocally stand up for our family, our faith, our identity. Defense is the key word here. Because who is the aggressive side here? Who is the attacker here? Were it the politicians of Law and Justice who wanted, I don't know, to introduce a Catholic Pole card in schools? No, it is the politicians of the Civic Platform who introduce the LGBT card in schools. Do Law and Justice politicians go to any marches of heterosexuals where rainbows or other symbols of this environment are profaned? No, it's politicians of the Left, politicians of the Platform who go to LGBT marches where religious symbols are profaned. It is clear who is the attacker and who is the defender here (…) This great identity, this great history of Poland, after all, begins with the baptism of Poland. Without the baptism of Poland, we would not be here, there would be no Poland at all (…) Think about whether you really want to erase all this from our identity. And if you erase it, what will be left in it? What will we build on? (…). We observe that this attack on the roots of our identity is also an attack on freedom. It is the government of the United Right that guarantees this majority in the Sejm, this strength, this social support that will make this defense effective (Marcin Horala, Parliamentary Speech, 19.11.2019).

Having established the defensive function of the welfare state in the face of alleged threats to *Polak-Katolik* identity, the remainder of Horala's (PiS) policy narrative builds on activation of oppositional futures symbolized by the 'Old/liberal' and 'Social Solidaristic' visions of Poland. By triggering ontological insecurities around the liberal past moral order, characterized by anti-familal, unjust socio-economic system, the narrative channels desire towards attachment with the new familal/social solidaristic welfare system in which the ordinary Poles, especially large families, will regain collective worth, dignity and social-prestige. In this way, against the horrific background of the past liberal order as well as the contemporary liberal 'aggressors', the pro-family and social solidaristic Polish welfare state is once more narrated as a path towards neo-traditionalist normality promising an ontologically secure future free of stigmatization, humiliation as well as 'axiological threats'.

> Our tradition, our identity, apart from freedom, is also a tradition of solidarity (…). For many years in this Polish community, many Poles, millions of Poles, were left on the margins. Millions of Poles have heard that they are unnecessary, that they are some kind of by-products of transformation, that they actually harm Poland by being alive, they are only a nuisance. It was the Law and Justice government that broke with this approach (…) We have translated these words

> into concrete actions (…) Millions of Poles were lifted out of poverty, Polish poverty finally stopped having a child's face, which was the greatest disgrace of all the years after the political transformation. If we collected features that predestinate a person to be in poverty, then of course it was sometimes poor education, lack of work, but above all it was having a large family, a large number of children. This guaranteed that one lived in poverty, such was the anti-family socio-economic system in Poland. Only Law and Justice was the formation that broke with this state of affairs (Marcin Horala, Parliamentary Speech, 19.11.2019).

In conclusion, the legitimizing discourse around the 'Polish' version of welfare state exposes the illiberal tendencies of the imagined welfare community, curtailing the prospects for universal social citizenship in Poland. Rather the proposed welfare society is increasingly reliant on the demarcation between the biopolitical insiders and outsiders. The policy discourses also reflect the heightened moral anxiety around sexual minorities and reproductive freedoms since the electoral cycles of 2019/2020 as well as the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the demographic anxieties exposed through the pandemic was directly projected onto sexual minorities or the so-called 'abortionists' who are blamed for depopulation by disrupting traditional, reproductive patterns of the family.

This was especially evident with the launch of the governments' new demographic policy in the midst of the pandemic in 2021 entitled the ''Demography 2040 strategy''[14]. As such, rather than offering an all-encompassing demographic vision including improving life expectancy, decreasing mortality rates or seeking migration-related solutions (Theus, 2021; Gaweda, 2022) the proposed demographic policy was structured as an extension of pro-natalist family policy with excessive focus on increasing fertility rates and maintaining a pro-family culture. Despite the highest number of deaths recorded in the country since the Second World War, the government lacked a profound policy on Covid-related mortality (Gaweda, 2022: 53). At the same time, the 2040 strategy discriminates against 'other' forms of family such as single-motherhood, while completely rejecting non-marital and same-sex relationships. ''Boys raised without fathers are more likely to substance abuse, alcohol, drugs, frequent sexual activity, aggression and juvenile delinquency'' puts the Polish Demographic Strategy (2021:37). On the other hand, the

[14] ''Poland launches new strategy to boost one of EU's lowest birth rates'' Jun 18, 2021. Notes From Poland. https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/06/18/poland-launches-new-strategy-to-boost-one-of-eus-lowest-birth-rates/

strategy points out that for young girls, father's absence would promote ''early sexual initiation, promiscuous sexual activity, low body self-esteem, self-aggression and other mental disorders, including eating disorders'' (Demographic Strategy 2040, 2021:37). Accordingly, the dominant demographic strategy adopted during the pandemic proposed a highly selective and exclusionary demographic vision by vilifying single motherhood through highly gendered and sexist imaginaries, while completely ignoring independent parents' needs, parents with disabled children as well as women's reproductive health (Theus, 2021).

The post-Covid demographic strategy was also incorporated into the newly launched welfare model. The welfare state, in this context, has also become a demographic instrument through improving the welfare of the families through cash and infrastructural investments, encouraging women's procreative trends as well as creating a pro-family culture through promoting traditional marriage, parenthood and gender roles. As such, the post-2019 policy discourse around the welfare state exposes the illiberal, pro-natalist and biopolitical commitment of the governing PiS by further replacing the idea of individual or people with the concept of 'traditional family'. Most notably, with the launch of the new welfare model, the exclusionary and discriminatory genre of the policy rhetoric has been strengthened with directly excluding the large groups of society from the expanded welfare benefits. As such, the welfare state has been framed as inclusive only for those who conform to the idealized Polish normality, in the form of white, heterosexual, Catholic, preferably large families with many children. In contrast, people who do not fit into this idealized community, such as single mothers, unmarried/childless couples or sexual minorities saw their social and civil rights significantly reduced, which has also been accompanied by the ongoing democratic erosion in the country.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The main research motivation behind this study was to account for the ongoing transformation of the welfare state and social policy into a populist instrument of reassurance and ontological security. As such, it has been argued that rather than a traditional left-right divide, a new form of moralized redistributive logic was developing in the agendas of right-wing populist parties, forging a highly moralistic and exclusionary form of deservingness along the lines of race, culture, ethnicity, religion or gender, among many others. This exclusionary turn is not specific to Europe, rather, the right-wing populist and authoritarian movements across the world, including the established and emerging welfare state contexts from US, India, Turkey or Brazil have also been advancing a moralized welfare redistribution, radically expanding for the 'deserving' and retrenching for the 'undeserving'. Most notably, an increasing number of welfare states across the world has been adopting to this moralized conception of deservingness, with mainstream parties from the conservative-right or left increasingly accommodating this selective welfare logic to broaden their electoral base. Accordingly, although social policy has long been recognized as a politically salient issue area for the electoral agendas of the populist-right, the ongoing moralization of the welfare state globally provoked this research to reconsider social policy as a potentially powerful populistic space for identity-building and mobilizing emotions, rather than a mere rational/technical policy area and institutional configuration for social sharing. In this context, this study asked the following questions: *What are the common characteristics of communicative strategies employed by populist right in different types of welfare states? Why and how do these communicative strategies enjoy wider emotive appeal and resonance in mainstream policy debates?*

In this connection, this study suggested a novel theoretical link between social policy and ontological security, arguing that social policy has increasingly become a populist instrument of reassurance in the hands of the populist actors. As mentioned in the introduction and the theoretical chapter, this was a novel theoretical approach developed by this study to understand the ongoing moralistic transformation of the welfare state, and in particular the communicative agency of right-wing populism in forging this transformation. As such, it has been argued that social policy has been globally transforming into a moral entity with a growing demarcation between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' subjectivities. In this context, this study invited broader consideration of populist surge in social policy, not only due to its redistributive goals, but because its broader emotive and ontological functions in providing potentially powerful mechanisms of identification and differentiation in times of heightened uncertainty and insecurity.

In establishing this theoretical link, the main departure point, in this connection, was that social policy, by nature, inherently prone to produce demarcations and subordinated inclusions in societies given the centeredness of deservingness constructions in the policy designs. In this way, the study offered a natural pathway towards understanding social policy as potentially an affective and Manichean populistic space as it directly deals with the categorization and regulation of populations. Secondly, this study suggested to adopt a narrative-centered approach to understand the discursive strategies employed by right-wing populist actors in legitimation of social policy. Accordingly, it was argued that populism was not about the ideological content as promoted by the ideational scholars such as Mudde (2004) nor it should be understood as an empty, ahistorical rhetorical logic as conceptualized in Laclau's (2005) populism (Ungureanu and Popartan, 2020). Rather, this study conceptualized populism as form of a context-dependent, specific narrative pattern; a form of highly-simplified, affective storytelling following a particular plotline, heroes and villains, emotions, moral antagonisms as well as promise of change (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021; Ungureanu and Popartan, 2020).

Narrative approach was particularly useful for analyzing the policy performativity of populism in the 'era of ontological insecurity' (Kinnvall, 2018; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2022) as it provided new analytical perspectives to understand how often complex and abstract global problems are made meaningful in a culturally acceptable manner in different national contexts (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021). To advance the existing

narrative approaches, this study also offered a Lacanian psycho-analytical corrective to the study of populism, enabling us to operationalize the often-overlooked dimensions of populist discursive agency including the role of unconscious affective desires such as desire, fantasy, imageries and emotions. Relatedly, another benefit of the Lacanian-inspired inquiry into the populist narratives was foregrounding the role of affective temporality in populist communication agency, as an under-emphasized dimension of populist narrative performativity. By incorporating Lacanian psychoanalytical contributions to the study of populism and ontological security, particularly drawing on the notions of *fantasy*, *desire*, *lack* and *enjoyment,* this study aimed to advance a more holistic conceptualization of use of historical temporality in populist narratives. As such, by often linking the past, present and future into an emotionally-loaded, clear-cut, desire-infused narratives, it was argued that populist temporal template could serve as a powerful emotive engine in policy legitimation, promising a higher degree of ontological and emotional closure.

To sum, the main argument of this study was that populist policy makers oftentimes instrumentalize an affective temporality complemented by historical myths as well as fantasies of nationhood in the realm of social policy in a way to stimulate emotions and affects around the proposed policy solution. Namely, other than Manichean ontological assumptions about the society, anti-elitism or crisis-driven articulatory logic, it was argued that temporality also stands for a powerful narrative element that could increase the cognitive, emotive and ontological appeals around the policy action. Accordingly, it was argued that by providing an illusionary biographical continuity, linking the imagined (mythical or traumatic) past with the (anxiety-ridden) present as well as the (utopian or dystopian) futures, temporally-informed policy narratives tend to offer a higher degree of ontological closure. Namely, by promising a continuous and fuller *Self* in the face of heightened anxiety and uncertainty, temporally-structured narratives of nationhood could stimulate emotions such as collective pride, worth or shame, thereby could generate wider public acceptance and mainstream resonance.

6.1 Summary of the Findings

In the light of this theoretical framework, *Chapter 4* sought to account for how the universal Danish welfare state has radically moved towards an exclusionary and

assimilationist path in relation to immigrants' access to welfare and social citizenship. Given the exceptional normalization of populistic welfare agendas in Danish political mainstream, Denmark was selected as an illuminating case for developing theory to understand the communicative agency of populism in local contexts. Namely, by going beyond the ideology-centered approaches exploring the Danish right-wing populist social policy agenda as shaped by nativism, racism, authoritarianism or populism, this study adopted a contextual, narrative-centered approach to Danish case to account for how populist policy makers operationalize broad policy ideas or complex policy issues into nationally-resonant policy emergencies to wide and heterogenous audiences. This contextualized lens was necessary to uncover the emotive workings of DF's communicative agency, which is insufficiently explored in the existing literature. Accordingly, by taking the right-wing populist Danish People's Party (DF) as the main engine of the exclusionary welfare turn, this chapter undertook a critical narrative analysis of policy speeches, official/public statements as well as policy documents produced by DF representatives concerning major policy changes in the realm of immigrants' access to welfare under the recent crises of globalization.

By offering a performative lens to the exploration of populist policy narrativity between the politics of crisis and reassurance, this chapter offered a three-staged periodization to understand the transformation of the welfare state during the global dislocations between 2008 and 2022. In the first period (2008-2015), during which the global and regional economic shocks come to the fore of Danish politics, DF representatives cultivated a welfare state of emergency in relation to immigration. Although Denmark was less affected by the global financial and the subsequent Eurozone crises as compared to its European counterparts, the heightened economic insecurity and anxiety in the post-2008 context provided a renewed emotive impetus for Danish right-wing populist actors to advance a welfare chauvinistic agenda across the political spectrum. During this period, the DF, which was a critical support party of the right-wing government until 2011 had a profound policy influence around the adoption of austerity agenda, which disproportionally affected the immigrants' access to welfare. In legitimation of the reform agenda, the policy narratives particularly drew on wide range of populist tropes such as the frequent use of crisis rhetoric around the dissolution of the welfare state, simplification of the policy context into a binary choice between 'welfare or immigration'

as well as the 'elites vs. people' dichotomy framing the Left and Social Democrats as serving to the interest of immigrants at the expense of the natives.

In addition to these, the analysis also revealed that the policy narratives remarkably relied on an affectively structured temporal template invoking an utopian/distinctive Danish peoplehood and nationhood as a means for identification and differentiation from the immigrant *Other*. Embedded in the Danish myth of welfare society encompassing historically-rooted progressive *folk* values such as solidarity, responsibility and reciprocal trust, policy narratives frequently invoked a lost or stolen sense of Danish enjoyment by the 'undeserving', immigrant *Other*. In addition to austerity politics, elderly care and health policy were also communicated along similar mythopoetic constructions in the post-2008 context. In such areas, policy moral was oftentimes justified through highly-simplified, fantasmatic future projections, juxtaposing the 'dignity of the elderly' (beatific) against the 'immigrant's welfare' (horrific), while securing the enjoyment of the Danish welfare state only to those who have contributed to it in the past. To sum, although the global economic dislocations of the mid 2010s did not lead to an overarching securitization of immigration in Denmark, it did lead populist policy makers to repackage the already existing immigration 'anxiety' over the survival of the welfare state. As a core signifier of Danish ontological security, the mythical welfare society emerged as a powerful affective anchor in justification of the exclusionary policy changes in the post-2008 context, especially paving the way for a morally-legitimate discursive space in Danish political mainstream around the necessity of 'defending' the welfare society from the non-Western immigrants, as the only way towards a safe, dignified and ontologically secure future.

Under the second period of investigation (2015-2019), which was primarily marked by the post-2015 refugee 'panic' in Europe, the universal character of the Danish welfare state undergone major shifts both in terms political discourse as well as the policy context. Despite receiving relatively few asylum seekers compared to other EU states, the mass Syrian immigration into Europe in Autumn 2015 marked the beginning of a 'demographic panic' in Denmark, led by far-right and right-wing populist politicians. Unlike previous periods, the post-2015 policy discourse saw a remarkable ethno-nationalist and culturalist turn around the necessity of preserving the Danish welfare society, not only from immigrants' alleged lack of contribution to the welfare state, but also their perceived

threats to the idealized Danish identity, culture, everyday sociality and core liberal values such as freedom, democracy and gender egalitarianism. Accordingly, in comparison to post-2008 policy context, populist social policy storytelling in the aftermath of the refugee 'crisis' also relied more heavily on invocation of historical myths, collective memory as well as historically-rooted signifiers of identity. Embedded in a discourse of crisis, the mythical welfare society resurfaced as a core temporal register to justify the restrictive, assimilationist and punitive policy measures. In addition to mythical welfare society, the Danish myth of *hygge* as well as the collective memory of Nazi occupation in the WWII were also frequently recontextualized in the anti-immigration debates. In so doing, the populist narratives not only ignited a sense of collective victimhood, fear and loss around a unique and morally superior Danish *Self,* but also justified the policy action as the only way towards recapturing the 'stolen' enjoyment of Danish freedom and way of life. In addition to fantasmatic mythopoesis, the analysis also revealed that the post-2015 policy narratives, also including the mainstream political discourse, relied heavily on affective construction of characters as heroes, enemies and victims, 'elites versus people' dichotomy pitting the EU and the global elite against the ordinary Danes as well as the simplification of the policy context as black/white choices, which increased their affective hold in policy legitimation.

Finally, the last period of investigation (2019-Present) particularly focused on social policy narration in the aftermath of Denmark's 'paradigm change' in 2019 as well as the policy discourse in the context of Global Pandemic. First of all, with the paradigm change, which introduced radical policy measures such as deportation, detention and 'prison islands', Danish welfare state undergone a radical assimilationist and punitive turn. In a similar vein, the analysis demonstrated that the Danish welfare society and its progressive values were commonly instrumentalized as core temporal national anchors in justification of the newly adopted deportation-centered welfare regime. Accordingly, in the post-2019 context, it was argued that the mythopoetic justifications, involving the myths of welfare, *hygge* as well as the memory of Danish resistance in the WWII, played particular affective roles in justification of the deportation regime. In doing so, populist narratives also heavily relied on 'elite versus people' dichotomy framing the EU and the global elites as stealing the distinctive Danish way of life. Secondly, the emergence of Covid-19 in 2020 also significantly affected the ongoing securitization of immigration. Although Denmark weathered the pandemic with a relatively low rate of death and infection, the global

pandemic had also created a renewed emotive context for furthering the restrictive welfare agenda in Denmark. As a widely-shared national anchor tracing back to the post-WWII construction of the welfare state, Danish myth of *Samfundssind* was particularly instrumentalized by both populist and governing Social Democrats to reinforce Danish collective identity around a unique community spirit premised upon values such as cohesion, solidarity and responsibility. While this mythopoetic frame promised means for differentiation and ontological security to the anxious Danes, it soon embraced a more exclusionary thrust by directly excluding the Muslim immigrants from the imagined Danishness. These mythopoetic constructions were also supported by very clear-cut depictions of 'heroes' and 'villains' of the pandemic, reframing the immigrants as fraudulent, criminal, reckless subjectivities impediment to collective struggle against the pandemic in contrast to the morally superior and responsible community spirit shared by the Ordinary Danes.

In the case of Poland, the main research question was to understand how the Poland's welfare regime, which was historically characterized by an underdeveloped system of welfare and family policy, has remarkably moved towards a pro-social and pro-family welfare regime since 2015. Similar to Denmark, Poland was selected as a theory-developing case study to uncover the nuances of populist social policy narrativity, given the lack of discourse-analytical perspectives in the existing scholarship on the Polish welfare transformation. A similar three-staged periodization was offered to understand the Polish welfare state path in the context of recent global crises. Accordingly, the first period covered the post-2008 context until 2015 and analyzed the social policy narratives produced by the representatives of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), when the party served as the major opposition to the Liberal/Conservative government in the parliament. In the first period, policy narratives were primarily analyzed against the increased economic insecurity in the aftermath of the 2008 and 2010 crises as well as the Poland's evolving 'war on gender' during the mid 2010s. Given that Poland was the only country in Europe who was able to grow during the Global Financial crisis of 2008, the analysis of policy narratives revealed that the heightened global economic insecurity did not play a vital role in social policy justifications. Yet, as in the case of Denmark, it did lead to creation of a certain legitimate populistic space for advancing PiS' anti-elitist, anti-liberal and antagonistic narrative tropes. In particular, the post-2008 context enabled party to revitalize the moral antagonism between the post-communist division of Poland among

the Social (Solidaristic) and Liberal Poland. By reframing itself as the only true representor of the 'people' as against the corrupt, self-serving, liberal elites, PiS' policy narratives also commonly relied on the idea of popular will with clear plotlines containing heroes, enemies and victims. The imagined dichotomy between 'Social vs Liberal Poland' was also frequently supported by temporal and fantasmatic registers rooted in Polish historical suffering, trauma of statelessness, foreign oppression as well as its recent communist past. By often recontextualizing these historically-rooted ontological insecurities and myths, policy narratives mainly sought to appeal to sense of collective shame and humiliation in relation to recent and distant Polish history, while framing its pro-social and pro-family policy stance as the only way towards achieving a dignified and ontologically secure future.

The analysis of the post-2008 political discourse also reflected the increased salience of demographic pressures in the country since the late 1990s due to low birth rates and emigration. Against this anxious background, PiS' social policy promises in the identified period also frequently centered on emotional and ontological commitments premised upon overcoming the Poles' historical fear of 'extinction'. The simultaneous unfolding of Poland's anti-gender mobilization during the early 2010s also enabled party to capitalize on the moral 'anxieties' of the post-transition including liberalization and Westernization of social life. Accordingly, 'gender ideology' emerged as the new object of anxiety responsible from the alleged destruction and extinction of Polishness in the face of depopulation. Particularly framed within a discourse of crisis, PiS' anti-gender narrativity also drew heavily on Polish historical victimhood, religious and historical myths of traditional family and motherhood (*Matka Polka*). In return, the proposed pro-social familial regime was narrated as the only option for recapturing a traditional Polish enjoyment, which had long been 'stolen' by the liberal elites and recently undermined by the 'gender ideology'.

The second stage (2015-2019) of investigation covered the evolution of family policy discourse in the context of the European refugee 'crisis' of 2015 as well as the pro-familial policy turn following the PiS' twin electoral victories in 2015. Accordingly, similar to Danish case, the refugee panic was instrumentalized by the right-wing populist politicians to forge nationalist fantasies of homogeneity in contrast to immigrant *Others*. Yet, in contrast to Denmark, immigration had never been a core political issue in Poland until

2015, likewise, the country only received very few refugees after the European reception crisis. However, despite the absence of 'real' refugees arriving in Poland, the refugee 'crisis' had provided a fertile emotive context for policy actors to reactivate sense of fear and loss around an imagined Muslim *Other*, framed as the new object of moral-demographic anxiety. Most particularly, the empirical evidence revealed that in the post-2015 policy narratives, there has been a noticeable reliance on populist tropes of crisis, anti-elitism as well as popular sovereignty with identifiable heroes, victims and enemies. Besides, unlike Denmark, the analysis of Polish policy narratives revealed a particular surge in anti-EU rhetoric in justification of the pro-family regime, framing the EU as once again 'stealing' the Polish 'hardly-won' freedom, independence and sovereignty, including its authentic culture and Christian Catholic heritage. The anti-immigrant fantasizing commonly relied on mythopoetic registers evoking historical traumas of foreign oppression, victimhood, lack of sovereignty and liminality in relation to Europe, which had historically informed the Polish ontological insecurity. Another remarkable difference from Danish populist narrativity around the refugee 'crisis', was the heavy use of religious myths and references to Catholic heritage in Polish policy articulations, which had long served as one of the key sources of Polish ontological security during the turbulent historical episodes. As such, in contrast to Danish post-2015 anti-immigrant storytelling that mainly revolved around the promotion of cultural authenticity and distinctiveness of Danish welfare society to reaffirm superiority, in Poland, populist actors commonly instrumentalized Polish historical victimhood and religious myths, especially its messianic agency, by way of differentiation as well as distinction.

The refugee panic also helped the newly elected PiS to forge its pro-social family policy vision as the only way towards an ontologically secure future in the face of interrelated 'crises' of immigration and gender. Accordingly, similar to Danish policy narratives that were premised upon on a fantasmatic closure around 'welfare or immigration', immigrants' welfare was also juxtaposed against the Polish families' welfare in Polish political discourse, framed as a long-awaited restoration of dignity and ontological security. Furthermore, the policy narratives around the newly launched familal policy tools were particularly centered on a fantasmatic temporality embedded in 'Old versus New Poland' dichotomy. As similar to post-2008 policy discourse revolving around the oppositional imaginaries of Social and Liberal Poland, in the post-2015 context policy narratives were also heavily built on a similar affective temporal template informed by

the Polish communist past, totalitarian Nazi experiences as well as Polish myths of traditional family and motherhood. It was argued that in addition to populist tropes of anti-elitism, crisis, simplification, 'Us/Them' dichotomy as well as the emphasis on popular will, policy actors oftentimes instrumentalized a historical and fantasmatic temporality in justification of policy changes. As in the case of Danish social policy narrativity, the use of history and fantasies commonly served as an emotionally and politically mobilizing discursive strategy in legitimizing the pro-familial policy regime.

Finally, the third period (2019 to Present) traced the nuances of Polish family policy narrativity under the intense election cycles during 2019/2020 as well as the heightened demographic anxiety around the Covid-19 pandemic. To begin with, the analysis of PiS' political discourse in the context of European and national elections in 2019 and 2020 demonstrated that the party framed the elections as a black/white choice between the 'foreign ideologies' such as gender and LGBTQ+ and the welfare of the traditional Poles. Similar to Danish and Polish anti-immigrant fantasizing, the issues around gender and sexual freedoms were narrated around the trope of 'theft of enjoyment' to stoke sense of fear, loss and disempowerment. Fantasies of 'lost' freedom, the historical trauma of foreign domination including its communist and Nazi experiences as well as the Polish messianic narratives once again served as powerful temporal tropes to incite feelings of 'proud victimhood' around the perceived rise of gender and LGBTQ+ 'ideologies'. In contrast to Denmark which was able to weather the pandemic in a better shape, Poland was more severely hit in terms of case and death numbers, further exacerbating the demographic anxiety in Poland. Similar to populist securitization of immigrants during the pandemic in Denmark, Polish populist actors also resorted to similar politics of blame, further securitizing the non-normative *Others* including feminists, pro-abortion activists and the LGBTQ+ community as the culprits of the contamination either directly or metaphorically.

Shaped under this emotive context, pro-family policy narratives relied on a clear demarcation of heroes and enemies. Most notably, the main legitimizing narrative around the new 'Polish welfare model' launched in 2019 primarily drew on plotlines depicting the Polish familial welfare state as the best 'defense' against several internal and external enemies. Accordingly, in contrast to earlier periods, the pro-family welfare regime was more firmly narrated through the plotlines pitching the 'hero' and 'enemy' characters

against each other, while policy morals were often justified through the fantasmatic/temporal antagonism of the 'Old versus New Poland'. This fantasmatic trope once again served as a powerful discursive strategy to incite emotions and affects around the proposed familial regime in the post-2019 context. By often instrumentalizing Poland's recent and distant past, characterized by feelings of loss, humiliation and ontological insecurity, Policy actors sought to incite fear around a possible return to 'Old Poland', while the 'New Poland' underpinned by a socially and morally robust familial regime, was narrated as the only path towards restoring the Poles' long-awaited normality, dignity, status and agency.

To sum, the empirical cases revealed that despite dissimilar historical trajectories, ontological security regimes, welfare legacies as well as exposures to globalization, electorally successful right-wing parties in both cases remarkably affected the shape of the welfare state in the post-2008 context. In Denmark, social citizenship has undergone a significant ethno-culturalization under the investigated period, while in the case of Poland, social citizenship has more remarkably acquired a particular exclusionary thrust along the lines of culture, religion, gender and sexuality. Secondly, the empirical investigation also revealed that despite dissimilar policy mediums, welfare traditions and target audiences, social policy has been instrumentalized by right-wing populist actors in both settings to forge nationalist fantasies around recapturing a homogenous, authentic, morally superior *Self* and a 'way of life' as against the fantasmatic *Others*. While in Denmark it was mostly the non-Western immigrants, in particular, the Muslim subjectivity that was framed as the central object of anxiety, in Poland, it was the EU, liberal elites, post-communists as well as the so-called 'genderists' and sexual minorities threatening the aspired Polish wholeness. Relatedly, the empirical findings from the Danish and Polish cases also highlighted the importance of the proposed historical lens to account for the context-specific nuances of populist social policy narrativity under the similar impulses of globalization and demographic pressures. For instance, in Denmark, historically characterized by a progressive, distinctive and superior ideal, the exclusionary and assimilationist policy turn has often been justified as the only way to secure the highly-valued welfare society from being 'stolen' by the Muslim immigrants. On the other hand, in Poland, characterized by a historical trauma of statelessness, backwardness and inferiority in relation to West, a pro-social familial family agenda has been narrated as Poles' long-awaited restoration of dignity, normality and status. Finally, the analysis

of social policy discourse in the cases of Denmark and Poland showed that, despite the aforementioned differences, populist social policy narration in both settings built on similar populist tropes; particularly those of crisis, emotions, 'people vs the elites', popular will, simplification of the policy context into binary choices as well as the antagonistic construction of characters. In addition to these, the empirical exploration of two distinct welfare transformations revealed that policy actors oftentimes invoke an emotionally-charged and fantasmatically articulated temporality, imbued with historical references, fantasies and desires linking the past, present and the future. This temporal aspect, as it was shown through the empirical cases, constituted an important aspect of the emotive and ontological workings of populist storytelling in relation transformative policy shifts in the welfare regimes of Denmark and Poland.

6.2 Contributions of the Study

This section presents some of the expected theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis. To begin with, this study contributes to three distinct, yet interrelated literatures of social policy, populism and ontological security. First of all, this study offers a novel interpretation of social policy as an instrument of reassurance and ontological security. Accordingly, this thesis offers the first systematic theorization and analysis of social policy from the theoretical lens of ontological security. In doing this, this study contributes to the social policy literature by foregrounding the role of emotions and ontological security dynamics in understanding the social policy-making process, which has yet to be developed in the existing literature. Accordingly, this study aims to advance the conventional social policy approaches treating social policy as a merely technical/rational policy area free of emotions and affects. Especially, in the context of global rise of right-wing populism and the growing mainstreaming of populistic welfare agendas, the study suggests broader engagement with its purposive and instrumental uses by offering an alternative reading of social policy as a broader instrument of identity building, social ordering, while mobilizing emotions, affects and feelings of ontological security. In this way, through the adoption of OS lens, this study also seeks to advance the social policy-populism nexus by foregrounding the exploration of mobilizing dynamics and policy legitimation effects of affective and ontological appeals to welfare policy formulation.

Secondly, another expected theoretical contribution of this study lies in the conceptualization of populism as a specific, linguistic narrative pattern in the domain of social policy research, rather than an empty vessel or thin-ideology. As has been discussed in the introduction and the literature review chapters, narratives are rarely recognized as central analytical tools in the existing social policy literature as well as within the social policy-populism nexus. The narrative approach particularly adds value to the existing literature on populism and social policy by developing a framework for analyzing the psycho-linguistic and emotive agency of populist stories in policy, which is rarely used as an analytical unit in the exiting scholarship. Especially, in understanding the resilience and normalization of certain social policy ideas over others, a narrative inquiry adds valuable insights into the ways complex and abstract policy issues are made meaningful and appealing to local audiences in diverse welfare traditions. Thirdly, to address the limitations of existing ontological security-populism approaches in explaining how and why subjects are drawn towards certain identity narratives over others, this study offers the incorporation of Lacanian psychoanalytical insights. Lacanian insights, as argued, provide important additions to the understanding of populism as a narrative pattern, enabling researchers further analytical tools to explore the often-neglected unconscious registers underpinning the populist sense-making. Thus, it is argued that Lacanian OS could particularly add to the contemporary analyses of populism and social policy, in particular to understand the normalization and mainstreaming of populist welfare agendas in an increasing number of societies.

Furthermore, through the proposed historical lens, this study also aims to facilitate a more engagement with use of history and temporality in social policy research, which are rarely used as analytical categories in understanding welfare state transformations, beyond the welfare-nostalgia approaches. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to social policy as well as populism literatures by crystallizing the additional affective hold provided by historical registers and use of temporality in policy legitimation. Similarly, the proposed historical lens is also rarely used as an analytical category in contemporary analyses of OS-populism scholarship. As argued, a contextualized, historical lens is similarly crucial to any analysis of ontological (in)security and populism in the age of international challenges, in particular, to understand how globalization is experienced differently across societies, and in particular how populist actors translate global impulses into

nationally resonant emergencies and make them emotionally and symbolically appealing to their public.

Finally, by linking the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) into the backbone of Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), this study offers its own methodological framework for tracing the psycho-linguistic agency of right-wing populism with respect to exclusionary welfare state transformations in the cases of Denmark and Poland. Through this hybrid analytical approach combining DHA's critical, historical and context-dependent impetus with NPF's detailed and systematized inquiry of narrative elements, this study offers a more robust methodological and analytical framework for uncovering the discursive strategies used by populist actors in social policy legitimation. Accordingly, it is argued that by wedding narrative research and insights from CDS studies, especially the DHA scholarship, the proposed critical narrative analytical perspective allows us to better understand how policy narratives contribute to and are shaped by broader socio-political and historical context. Similarly, narrative analysis and DHA offers a more enhanced framework for the analysis of normalization and mainstreaming of populistic ideas in diverse settings.

6.3 Limitations of the Study and Further Avenues for Research

In this section, I would like to discuss some of the possible limitations of the research in terms of methodology and research design as well suggestions for future research. To begin with, despite its merits, the proposed critical narrative analysis also comes with couple of limitations. Given that narrative analysis typically involves interpreting and deconstructing narratives, it may be subject to researchers' bias, subjective interpretation and assumptions when selecting and analyzing data. Thus, this study may also subject to similar biases during the selection of cases as well as the interpretation of the data. While triangulation of different methodological frameworks, such as the NPF and DHA possibly increased the validity of my findings and helped overcoming some aspect of subjectivity, as with the majority of interpretative studies, this study is also open to unintentional subjectivity bias. Similar 'triangulatory' approach has also been adopted to minimize the problem of subjectivity by incorporating variety of different empirical data into the analysis of populist discursive strategies. Secondly, another limitation of this research concerns the language barrier. Since I am not a native speaker in both Danish and Polish

languages, I have translated the selected texts through using an online academic translator, then, have them checked by native translators in Danish and Polish languages. Accordingly, since narrative analysis often require an in-depth understanding of the cultural context, the data collection process may subject to unintentional biases or misunderstandings, potentially introducing selection bias. Although feedback from the native translators as well as the triangulation of the data possibly minimized misinterpretations and subjectivity bias in my research, as a non-native speaker, I may still have missed some culture-specific nuances such as idiomatic expressions, metaphors, cultural or historical references, which may have affected research findings and conclusions. This is also valid for the translation process by the native speakers, which may intentionally and unintentionally introduce their own biases to the translations, likewise, some cultural nuances may still be missed. Therefore, the findings of this research should be considered in the light of these limitations.

Finally, generalizability is another potential limitation of the research design rooted in case studies of theory-developing, thus, the empirical and theoretical findings developed through the cases of Denmark and Poland may not be immediately generalizable to other populations or settings. However, theory-developing case studies often aim to generate theoretical insights from context-specific findings that can be transferable across other settings, rather than seeking strict generalizability in an orthodox sense. Accordingly, while theory-developing case studies may subject to limited generalizability, they may play crucial role in developing novel theoretical insights in research areas where there is limited or inadequate prior knowledge.

While this study provided important insights into the relationship between social policy, populism and ontological security, there are several avenues for research that could further enlighten our understanding. First of all, it is argued that there is a need for continued research on the relationship between social policy and right-wing populism, given the growing mainstreaming and normalization of exclusionary and moralistic welfare contracts across wide range of welfare regimes. Accordingly, future studies could benefit from the OS scholarship to account for the growing resilience of populist policy narratives. While this study particularly highlighted the role of historical temporality in the emotive and ontological workings of populist policy legitimization, future studies could explore other important discursive strategies underpinning the success of populist

narratives from the perspective of ontological security. Accordingly, OS lens could provide further analytical and theoretical insights into understanding how populist actors appeal to specific emotional and ontological needs of subjects via the design of social policy, in particular through the construction of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' subjectivities. Researchers, for instance, could more closely explore the role of crisis narratives, anxiety, emotions, affects or fantasies in the domain of welfare policy communication, with a particular focus on how populist storytelling around welfare resonates with people's ontological needs for security, belonging or recognition in an age of increased ontological insecurity.

Secondly, although this study investigated the cases of Denmark and Poland, as representative of two distinct welfare regimes, further studies could also build upon the theoretical and empirical findings of this study and extend the research into other settings. Multiple cases or comparative case studies would enhance the transferability of the proposed theoretical framework across different country settings and policy areas. For instance, Central and Eastern Europe can be paradigmatic cases for studying the link between social policy and ontological security in the context of contemporary rise illiberal welfare regimes. In cases like Poland, Hungary, Latvia or Russia, family and demographic policies, for instance, can be studied with more scrutiny in relation to their broader emotional and identity-related resonance in the public and mainstream politics. Similarly, in the Scandinavian context, comparison of Sweden and Denmark could also reveal the importance of capturing the role historical differences as well as the evolution of meanings of ontological security in understanding the dissimilar social policy choices adopted by policy makers in the age of mass immigration, in a seemingly similar cultural, historical and welfare settings.

Furthermore, the proposed temporal lens is unlikely to be unique to the populist right, while the mainstream politics, including center-right and center-left challengers may equally build on a temporally-informed and emotionally-charged narrative plotlines in times of increased anxiety and uncertainty. In this connection, future research could draw on comparisons or in-depth examinations of mainstream storytelling or left-wing variants of populism in relation to use of affective temporality as a discursive strategy in policy legitimation. In addition, although this study mainly explored the supply-side of populism with a focus on its narrative performativity in the realm of welfare policies, the demand-

side of populism is also equally insightful. In particular, further studies could more closely consider the public reception of populist policy narratives, with a focus on how the temporally/historically structured policy narratives resonate with various sections of the population and how audiences interpret or react to historical/fantasmatic narratives in policy communication deployed by both populist and anti-populist politics.

Finally, since this study does not cover the ongoing period from 2022 onwards, future studies could also extend the cases of Denmark and Poland in the face of recent domestic and external developments. In Denmark, for instance, the post-2019 'paradigm change' requires a further inquiry in the context of authoritarian turn of the universal welfare state, especially with respect to notable Social Democratic right-wing turn on immigration. Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has also been likely to further shape the foreign and domestic politics in Denmark, including the welfare and immigration politics. The most remarkable manifestation of this has been the reversal of 'zero asylum' policy for the Ukrainian refugees and adoption of a special law accepting 30.000 refugees along with employment and social assistance[15]. In addition, Danish Social Democratic government also declared that the infamous 'jewelry-bill' would not apply to Ukrainian refugees in contrast to Syrian refugees during the 2015 refugee inflow.[16] In this context, further research could explore the contrasting constructions of welfare deservingness in relation to Muslim and Ukrainian subjectivities in Denmark from the analytical lens of ontological security.

The war in Ukraine also significantly affected Poland, with around 3.5 million arriving in Poland during the first months of the invasion in 2022 (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk, 2022:164). Similar to Denmark, Poland has also adopted a radically different approach as compared to Syrian refugee 'crisis' of 2015, accompanied by a recent law granting substantial social benefits to the Ukrainian refugees including its generous 500+ family cash benefit[17]. Yet, despite this welcoming approach, the recent rise of 'anti-Ukrainian'

[15] 'Denmark's 'zero asylum' policy reversed for Ukraine.'(22.05.2023) https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/denmarks-zero-asylum-policy-reversed-for-ukraine
[16] 'Denmark opens its arms to Ukrainians, while trying to send Syrian refugees home.' (22.03.2022) https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/10/europe/denmark-refugees-ukraine-syrian-intl/index.html
[17] 'Poland: Parliament adopts law on assistance to Ukrainian refugees.'(18.03.2022) https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/poland-parliament-adopts-law-assistance-ukrainian-refugees_en

sentiments due to rising public insecurity around domestic agriculture and welfare politics is likely to prompt anti-immigrant, populist and nativist policy stances in Poland. Therefore, the Ukrainian crisis invites further research to explore the changing contours of Poland's security, demographic and welfare politics in the context of country's prolonged 'demographic anxiety'. Especially, the cases of Denmark and Poland could offer further avenues for research in accounting for the growing demarcation between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugee subjectivities in European societies. Considering these recent developments, there is a pressing need to energize the scholarly links between the literatures of social policy, populism and ontological security. I hope this thesis would provide a valuable base for the upcoming studies exploring these links.

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Appendix

Denmark: Links to Empirical Data

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