Since the mid 1980’s anti-immigrant feelings have occupied an ever more dominant position in Danish politics. (Ryd gren 2004b). During this time local politicians across the political spectrum began to speak of immigrants and immigration as a ‘problem’, and soon this came from the highest national level. The Progress Party and its break-away, the Danish People’s Party (DF), took the initiative in the mid 1990’s and have since then worked the Danish public with an energetic xenophobic agitation supported by media which increasingly have promoted an image of immigrants as a threat to the country and Danish culture. Hence, today the established parties are competing in being toughest in the debate on immigration.²

As a result, in 2001 a Danish government came into power on a bill, saturated with xenophobia to an extent previously unseen in Danish politics. The shift in power was preceded by a raw campaign that warned of the ‘problem’ with ‘foreigners’, with systematic allusions to gang-rape and social-security fraud, all included in a programme promising a more powerful ‘integration policy’. The same tactics also contributed to victory in the succeeding election, assisted by an exhausted Social Democrat Party which, instead of taking up the fight against the stigmatization of immigrants, incorporated this political strategy as its own weapon.

Ever since the Right-Liberal party Venstre formed a government with the Conservatives, with parliamentary support from DF, the government has worked with a fixed purpose to decrease immigration and the influx of refugees. A way of speaking of ‘foreigners’ has been established that is discriminatively problem-oriented and at times clearly racist – and this has been achieved without any really strong resistance from within the political system or from public debate. Before the last election in February 2005 the Social Democrats showed that by then they had accepted all the changes in the politics on foreigners that the Conservative–Liberal government had introduced, and they assured the voters that the party would not touch these laws. Hence, the issue is a matter of how immigrants and immigration are discussed, a discursive change, and a matter of actual political changes and jurisdiction on immigration, refugees, asylum and integration.

This essay focuses on how the political situation can be understood within the framework of the political dynamic during the last decade. For – and that is one of my main points – it is within this dynamic, with our gaze directed on those who sought this development and have entered into alliances with those who made this dynamic possible, that we can reach a more accurate understanding of
what is now transpiring and why xenophobic politics in Denmark have proved to be so strong and durable.

A full understanding of this development must embrace narratives of Danish history, social structure and self-understanding which reach back further in time and are linked to comparative research on the growth of extreme right-wing parties in Europe. However, among the attempts to understand Danish immigrant politics that have been done, the perspective is often too short or too long. Anti-immigrant politics is either sought in ancient cultural and national patterns and mentalities – in the thinking of Grundtvig, in the national feeling resulting from the crushed self-respect of the shrinking empire, or simply in the smallness of the country and its cherishing of ‘hygge’ as a value – or the focus is placed on the Progress Party and the Danish People’s Party, so that the part played by the Social Democrats, Venstre and the Conservatives is neglected (see e.g. Dencik 2005).

To a certain extent I am guilty of the latter form of amnesia. Yet my purpose is to identify what I call a power logic in motion and to show how it is central for understanding the political development and what keeps it going, rather than to give a complete analysis of the social, economic, discursive and ideological factors behind the development. By the notion of power logic I mean a political process that is played out in several areas, by different activists and on different levels of society, locally and centrally, in the media and in public, through law-making as well as discursive changes. In a complex interplay a political line has been introduced; this, in turn has established a political party and political alliances; and, this, in its turn, strengthens the power, extending the political line further – and so on. This is probably the rule for all major political changes, especially in democracies: politics jerks forwards in incremental steps. But I want to underline here the wide scope of what is now taking place and how these changes might be more durable than we might have tended to believe if we could have pointed out one party, one activist, one discourse, as explanation for the changes highlighted here. That this power logic is in motion is self-evident. However, this qualification is intended to underline the process of the many incremental changes in different areas which have occurred and continue to do so. This makes it difficult to assign a single cause and an end. It may also be this incremental quality in the changes in focus here that can explain the difficulties and failures in mobilizing and articulating an efficient resistance to Denmark’s anti-immigrant politics.

The development has been described in terms ranging from ‘toughening immigrant politics’ to ‘xenophobia’, ‘racism’ or, possibly most common, to ‘right-wing populism’. All concepts apply, but none can quite capture the radicalism of what has happened. A term which I suggest is worth trying, in order to deepen our understanding of Danish politics today in general and the politics on foreigners in particular, is ‘fascism’, a concept that I think better describes current developments in Denmark. This does not mean, of course, that Denmark has become a fully fledged fascist state, or that is about to become one;
but it does mean that certain aspects of the current political development can be understood through a modern understanding and view of what fascism can be.\(^3\) A starting point for this discussion, to be developed below, is that I find the concept ‘populism’, or its qualifications ‘right-wing populism’ or ‘radical right-wing populism’, to be insufficient and to some extent misleading.\(^4\) But fascism – with an understanding of the concept that researchers have given it during recent years, where fascism does not necessarily have to mean totalitarian violence and explicitly anti-democratic ambitions – can open up a more interesting and complex understanding of the extreme Right dynamics now in motion in Denmark. This does not mean that the concept of populism must be abandoned and replaced with fascism. But the analysis of right-wing populism and extremism can be made sharper and more accurate if it accounts for the great overlap existing between the concepts and the phenomena they describe rather than making artificial boundaries that, in turn, run the risk of lulling us into a false sense of security about what our democratic systems can accommodate.

**Fascism**

‘Fascism’ is, to most ears, probably too strong a word, yes, even ridiculous. In the West, post-Auschwitz, the concept has come to suggest exaggeration, since nothing can really compare with the European fascist experience. It is difficult to free the term ‘fascism’ from association with the European fascist regimes that, in varying degree, unleashed terror and genocide. There is also the risk that the notion, if used too readily, will be watered down, which might be offensive to millions of victims of fascist regimes of the past. Alternative concepts might be ‘neo-fascism’, or ‘proto-fascism’. But the former is blurry and means mainly fascism after World War II. The latter often connotes a milder form of fascism (Mudde 1996: 240–241), but the prefix ‘proto’ indicates a teleological logic, in which that which comes before (‘proto’) is followed by more developed forms of fascism. To avoid such a determinism I prefer to speak simply of ‘fascism’, but with the important reservation that this does not have to mean totalitarian and violent regimes of the classic pattern. Just as the historian Robert O. Paxton emphasizes in his book *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004), it is unlikely that fascisms of today and tomorrow will look precisely like yesterday’s fascisms. Fascism is too stigmatized in our societies. It will, therefore, dress up in a partly new outfit, it will not wave the swastika and the bundle of twigs, not come marching in polished boots and military gear, and it will probably not aim at the Jew as its first target. One needs, therefore, as Paxton has done, to analyse also what fascism is and has been beyond the immediate fascist cliché (see also Eco 1995; Lapham 2005). Paxton has looked historically at a variety of fascist movements and identified different phases in their respective developmental processes. He shows how the fascisms of Europe were not determined to follow a certain developmental path, but that they exhibited among themselves a great variety of purpose, style, brutality and success – something that is often
forgotten, or even actively denied, as there is a tendency to reserve the concept for Mussolini’s Italy and Nazi Germany. Recently the sociologist Michael Mann also contributed a historically grounded theoretical analysis of the subject, in *Fascism* (2004). Mann, who is trying to bring some order to the concept, posits, as does Paxton, that it is futile to look for a generic definition: fascism is far too varied and complex a concept and phenomenon.

The definition of fascism that has dominated in the postwar years, and that is tied to the catastrophic experiences of the 20th century (Nolte 1984), still has a strong hold, even though it has been largely discarded in the field of research, if not in general public debate (Griffin and Feldman 2004). Already in the 1930s the theorists of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin, suggested an alternative view, influenced by Marxism, Nietzschean perspectivism and Freudian psychoanalysis (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, Horkheimer 1987). Their criticism tried to bring to the surface the links between fascism and modern ‘monopoly capitalism’ and how the individual in high capitalism, as well as in fascist totalitarian systems, structurally and psychologically was pressed to abandon his or her critical faculties. This later influenced a leftist criticism of the established liberal analysis of fascism (e.g. Haug 1977). Horkheimer coined the catchword of this view: ‘Whoever does not want to talk about capitalism should also be quiet about fascism’ (*Häften för kritiska studier* 1990).

Paxton and Mann’s perspective also try to avoid a demonizing understanding: yet without explaining fascism from foremost an anti-capitalist standpoint. However, what links them to Critical Theory, is the insistence that fascism should not be seen as the unfortunate exception in European modernity. On the contrary, and irrespective of how repulsive we find the idea, they emphasize how fascism is a central part of the modern European experience (Mann 2004: 1–3). Hence, they do not regard fascism as the embodiment of evil or irrationality, nor as mass psychological rage, nor grounded in a certain phase of economic development and its ensuing class conflicts. Instead, they emphasize the political dynamic preceding and surrounding fascist interventions—the ideas, the movements, the propaganda and the alliances with other parliamentary groups. In other words, the work and ambitions of the political activists to change society in a fascist direction are given a central role. An immediate question following from this is whether a democracy can also be, even if only to a degree, fascist. Mann and Paxton suggest that this is the case. Although it is in a sense correct to say that fascism is the antithesis of democracy, history reveals that democracy has in no way been a guarantee against fascist political developments. On the contrary, many, perhaps most, fascist movements have grown within the framework of more or less stable democracies, and they have developed their characteristic style in the public arena precisely because they have operated within political systems where power is conditional upon attracting and conquering public opinion. (Paxton goes as far as to make democracy a necessary precondition in his definition of fascism.)
In spite of the rejection of attempts at formulating a generic definition, Mann still suggests five elements central to an understanding of fascism. These are elements that refer to things that fascists have aspired to but only occasionally realized (Mann 2004: 13–17). First, fascism is characterized by an organic nationalism which builds myths about the origins of the nation and nurtures a desire for national rebirth. Secondly, to this a statist ideology has been linked, that is, a worship of strong. Mann is therefore talking of nation-statism as a central feature of fascism. In this a predilection for bureaucracy before democracy is present which fuels dictatorial tendencies. A third ideological element, linked to the others, is transcendence. In opposition to the conservative cherishing of an older social order and to the liberal and social democratic view of politics and society as centred around conflicts between interest groups and classes, fascists long for a transcendence of dominant social conflicts and class distinctions: a rebirth of the nation that makes current lines of conflicts obsolete. Fourth, as an operative strategy, cleansing is often an important element in fascist movements. Since political opponents are defined as ‘the enemy’, they must be cleansed from the nation. The tools here are demogogy, intimidation, violence and, as a last resort, murder. In varying degree the political enemy has been defined in political and/or ethnic terms. Political cleansing has, according to Mann, often been bloody at the beginning, but has weakened after a while as opposition surrenders and is silenced. Ethnic cleansing, however, has tended to increase in fascist regimes, as the ‘problem’ of diversity cannot be ‘solved’ by silencing opposition or forced assimilation. Finally, Mann emphasizes how violence and para-militarism in one form or another has always been both a value and a central method of fascist regimes. The Nazi Brown shirts and Storm troopers or the Italian equivalent, the ‘Fasci de Combattimento’, simultaneously attracted certain people and intimidated others into silence as they showed vitality and power to act while they also performed the ‘dirty work’ of cleansing. Yet another element that Mann holds up, less ideological and more rhetorical but just as important, is the anti-elitist flirtation with the ‘people’ as the essence of the nation, which plays a part within all the aforementioned elements: this is a constant in all fascist movements and also the fundamental idea beneath all forms of populism. Put another way, populism is an essential part of fascism.

There is nowadays a great deal of consensus about these criteria. However, for Mann and Paxton they do not all have to be fulfilled. Rather, the list shall be seen as a sketch by which we can judge whether movements and political dynamics are more or less fascist. Here is, perhaps, the most challenging aspect of their argument. Traditionally, there is a requirement for all these criteria to be fulfilled (and often more), in order to speak of fascism; otherwise other terms are used, from extreme right to populism or chauvinism. Mann’s and Paxton’s approach opens up for an understanding of fascism also in its milder form, within a democratic context. That is, of the political dynamic in which fascism emerges, including the ambitions of political activists and their work.
With Mann’s five criteria before our eyes we see immediately that Denmark has not developed a full-blown fascism. There are neither any storm troopers in sight nor a directly violent regime in office. Likewise, no worship of state power or cult of the leader dominates the political scene. The government is not motivated by a fascist utopian vision and the Danish People’s Party is not a self-declared anti-democratic party. Before I proceed to discuss how aspects of Danish politics today still can be understood with a modern definition of fascism as a tool, I will address the problem with the more commonly used concept, ‘populism’.

**Populism**

Discussion of ‘populism’ is widespread. The concept is notoriously vague, partly because populism as a strategy is part of all political movements and partly because it is used so commonly as a derogatory judgement on opportunistic politicians: at the same time, political scientists have tried, in many ways, to furnish the notion with a more precise definition. Research on populism and radical right wing populism has been steadily growing, as its object grows in importance in European politics (see Mudde 1996; Rydgren 2004b: 18–26; Eatwell and Mudde 2004: 8–23). This research is praiseworthy for describing populist parties, for ordering them in party families, for analysing their ideologies and strategies (Rydgren 2004b: 9–28) and relating them to socio-economic and value-based changes among voters. The causal order applied often assigns attitudes and valuations in the electorates as cause, while the emergence and growth of right-wing populist parties are seen as effect, although most scholars count on a certain degree of interdependency.

The party family to which the Danish People’s Party can be said to belong has been called Radical Right-wing Populism (RRP) (Rydgren 2004b). It is characterized by charismatic leadership, anti-elitism, drastic agitation, power-assuring alliances (sometimes of an unexpected character), and, of course, a radicalized xenophobia and nationalism transmuted into a political programme. Significantly, the definition of RRP and modern definitions of fascism are, from all relevant aspects, almost identical (see Rydgren 2004b, 2004a; Mudde 1996). Yet, the predominant understanding of fascism in these studies are nevertheless strongly coloured by previous European experience. A central issue is thus whether a xenophobic, anti-elitist, nationalist populist party explicitly accepts the democratic rules of the game or wants to abolish them. The former is then classified as ‘populist’, the latter as ‘extremist’ or ‘fascist’ (defending the distinction, see Betz 1998: 3; Rydgren 2004b; Zaslove 2004) Often it is also claimed that RRP:s to be labelled as extreme or fascist must advocate biological racism, and not ‘merely’ cultural racism (Fennema 2005: 2-7).

However, this strong emphasis on the difference in terms of democratic credibility (ideologically and in practice) between right-wing populists and fascists is also called into question. Roger Eatwell suggests that this runs the risk
of giving unfounded legitimacy to populist groups (Eatwell 2004: 12). He exemplifies with the French Front National, which many label as a radical right-wing populist party since they operate within the democratic system. Yet, Eatwell asks rhetorically whether an imagined realization of their political vision, even one that did not entail a Nazi-like dictatorship, would be in harmony with the ideal of liberal democracy. Eatwell erodes the distinction between populists and anti-democratic extremists by granting them all a certain tactical capacity (Eatwell 2004: 8):

…many extremists are willing to work through the parliamentary system to gain power, and their exact desires about democracy can be difficult to discern given the obvious reasons in contemporary West to hide anti-democratic sentiments.

Jens Rydgren indicates a related point when he posits how different variants of racism may not be rooted in ideology but in tactics (Rydgren 2004b: 25, my transl.):

Through using the ethno-pluralist doctrine (cultural racism, my note) it has been possible for RRPs to pursue a xenophobic political message without becoming as stigmatized as ‘old’ racists have been in the postwar period.

Eatwell also suggests that RRPs constitute a threat to democracy irrespective of whether their assurances of democratic credibility are genuine or not as the populist style, the black-and-white outlook and the often crude and vulgar, or alternatively, overzealous moralizing language threaten democracy since this obstructs mutual rational deliberation based on the ideals, at least, of the liberal tradition: tolerance and pluralism (Eatwell 2004:13).

Eatwells criticism is related to what Ernesto Laclau (2005: 33–49) claims, that populists should not be analysed with ideological content as the primary object for the analysis, but with a focus on political practice. This in turn is based on a perspective where political practice is not seen as an authentic expression of the nature of a social agent (for example, ideology, core commitments, values, etc.), but instead as something which constitutes the agent. To Laclau (2005: 33) this means that:

a movement is not populist because in its political ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as populist, but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents – whatever those contents are.

With this turnaround of the analytical perspective more comes into view than the explicit recognition or rejection of democracy, or confession to biological as against cultural racism. Instead priority is placed on style, the power-seeking
logic, i.e. the way politics is articulated, or, as Laclau says, the constituting element.

From this perspective I believe that the established view of right-wing populism becomes insufficient. Because, first, it attaches too much weight to a party’s explicit acceptance of democratic rules. Such a declaration is a precondition for any success in a stable democracy. Second, an analytical idea of change and potential for change in right-wing populist parties is missing in much classification oriented research on populism. This is needed however, because the expressed ‘ideological’ commitments of RRP:s can change fast. Research on right-wing populist parties is thus in need of a more forceful discussion about what happens when such parties obtain power, as in Denmark today (Fieschi 2004).

Even though there is unanimity regarding the radicalization of the Danish People’s Party, few have discussed their politics in terms of ‘fasicism’ (see note 3). But that the party today more and more resembles, for example, the French Front National is beyond doubt (Rydgren 2004a). Catherine Fieschi’s institutional analysis of the Front National in Fascism, Populism and the French Fifth Republic: In the Shadow of Democracy (2004) in this context an eye opener. She shows how the roots of the Front go deep into the French fascist movement, historically as well as ideologically. For Fieschi, today’s Front National is simply a fascist movement which tries to survive and gain success within the institutional framework of French postwar democracy, the Fifth Republic, with all that this implies for limitations and possibilities in terms of institutions, values, rhetoric and so forth. The political system is key here, with its increased ‘presidentialism’, putting a premium on aggressive populist campaigning, charisma and folksiness. From her perspective, ‘populism’ is merely an essential part of fascist strategy (Fieschi 2004: 110):

"Populism is what, in effect, provides a bridge (both in practice and in discourse) between the – seemingly contradictory – elitism and the egalitarian collectivism of much fascist thought. This is essentially because populism allows the people to imagine themselves as elite. What gives this elite its specificity is the belonging to a nation which is itself seen as superior to others by its traditions, folklore, people etc."

In sum then, to see how the concept of fascism can be used for understanding political developments in Denmark one must call into question the idea that racism and xenophobic nationalism are sentiments that are ‘released’, ‘emerge from below’, that thus live, latently, among ordinary people. Through language we can see how diffused and common this idea is. We speak of politicians who ‘trigger’ racism and ‘play on racist sentiments’, as if they were there from the start, in people, just waiting to be played upon. This is a very problematic point of departure, that seems embedded in the connotation of the very word ‘populism’, where an opportunistic populist politician is seen as addressing the
most base sides of an already existing popular conscience rather than being an agent and disseminator of base politics. Such a view forgets that racism does not erupt ab initio like a volcano from the depths of the people, but is rather worked up energetically by purposeful actors who, above all, strive for power by first inventing and spreading a narrative about the people as racist and then mobilize the same people for the racist cause. That is the power logic that today has gained momentum in Denmark. In the following I will therefore treat the Danish People’s Party as an engine in a development that can be described as a power logic in motion (or to use Laclau’s terminology, a logic of articulation), into which gradually many more will be pulled. That is not to say that structural factors are without importance. Economic, labour markets and discursive factors indeed establish an opportunity – the terrain in which discontent thrives and central activists can operate and gain a hearing. As Carl-Ulrik Schierup (1993: 21) notes about Ottar Brox’s concept, Danish social life in the 1980s was characterized by a ‘structural fascism’, that is, a situation where social- and welfare-dismantling, crisis and unemployment created a breeding ground for scapegoating and increasingly crude racist polemics. In the West, to some extent by virtue of the nationalist and colonialist traditions of our societies, we also have a readiness to read the world in Manichean terms, organizing impressions of ‘us’ against ‘them’, good against bad, and so on. But these background factors are, as I have said, not the main focal point of this essay. And in addition, a determinist outlook should be avoided. The articulation of racist demagogy increased and was radicalized in the prosperous economic environment of the 1990s, with low unemployment and relatively low figures in immigration. This indicates that political factors have contributed to and become an engine in the development, although some of the necessary preconditions that contributed to starting the process are no longer present.

To understand this political dynamic one must thus question overly strong and simplistic boundaries between right-wing populists, established parties and even more extreme parties and groups. When, as in Denmark, a (quite) extreme right-wing party not only ‘influences’ but also cooperates directly with established parties in government, it is analytically impossible to sustain any imagined absolute ideological and practical boundaries between them. Hence, ideological classifications disguise the tactical willingness for change among right-wing parties. The Scandinavian Progress Parties, for example, have gone from neo-liberal anti-tax parties to welfare, chauvinistic anti-immigration parties, while the agents of a party like the Swedish Sverigedemokraterna have played down the references to fascism they used to mouth, put on a suit and a tie and are currently (successfully) concentrating on local elections rather than on street rumblings, now aiming for the national parliament (Larsson and Ekman 2001).
Denmark

Since the new Danish Government in 2001 laid out its main intentions and Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen declared that it was time to terminate ‘nice-ism’ in integration policy, a series of laws have been issued that curtail immigrants’ and refugees’ lives. Among the most infamous is the law that restricts family reunions, that is, the conditions under which a person with citizenship or residence permit can be joined by a family member from abroad, a child, a parent, a sibling or a spouse. This law contains a series of restrictions that limit the possibilities for Danish-foreign couples to settle in the country: both have to be above 24 years of age, own their home or have a three-year lease on an apartment or house; the Danish partner must not have received social security during the last year; he or she must have at least the equivalent of 5,300 euros in the bank and show ability to support the other partner. Together they must also have a greater ‘connection’ to Denmark than the country of the other partner, or a third country – a blurry paragraph that thus overrides parts of the previous rights of citizenship and calls for capricious rulings. This law has created a minor deportee and refugee wave of Danish citizens to the southern part of Sweden, people with Danish passports who are no longer allowed to live with their foreign partners in Denmark, although until recently they have done so for years.

The limitations of rights to asylum have also become among the most severe in Europe. For a residence permit a migrant must have been in the country at least seven years before he or she can apply at all. Now the government wants to sharpen these rules even further. A majority in parliament (Venstre, the Conservatives, DF and the Social Democrats) have joined forces and last year placed a motion – ‘A New Chance for All’ (‘En ny chance for alle’) – which says that the (diminishing) numbers that are up for consideration for residence permits, such as refugees reunited with their families, must during the seven-year-long waiting period sign a Contract of Integration (Ministeriet for Flygtninge, Invandrare og Integration (MFII) 2005). This contract entails, to begin with, a three-year introduction programme, in which the residence seeker signs an agreement that he or she respects the basic values of society, will submit to a language test and introductory courses. During the entire seven-year period the migrant must accept any jobs that are offered, will not receive the same social security payments as ethnic Danes, and must not commit any crimes whatsoever. Should the permit seeker for any reason decline a job offer, social security payments are stopped or reduced, and this offence will be held against him or her in making the verdict after seven years.

In summary, the prime objective of the Danish laws on immigration and asylum has been to diminish the numbers that come to the country seeking residence or asylum. The policies have been efficient. In 2001 12,512 persons sought asylum in Denmark: in 2004 this figure had shrunk to 3,235. The number of those actually granted residence permits during this period went from 6,263 to
1,592. The number of family reunions had dropped during this time by close to two-thirds (MFII 2005; Kjaersgaard 2005). Even the leader of DF, the populist politician of discontent par excellence, Pia Kjaersgaard, cannot help but cheer when she looks at these figures – as when, strengthened by success in the election of February 2005, she announced in a leading Danish daily (Politiken) that it was now time to start ‘Phase 2’ of the migration policy and added, in a gratified way, that Denmark had ‘become a forerunner in Europe’. She explained that the country is now making its way away from the ‘abnormal’ towards the ‘normal’, while reminding everybody that the welfare state was still threatened. Hence, according to Kjaersgaard, what is needed in ‘Phase 2’ is, among other things (Kjaersgaard 2005):

- that the concept of a (permanent) *residence permit* should be abolished: there should only be individual exceptions after 10 years
- that exceptions should only apply to family reunions and immigrants, ‘never to refugees...who shall be sent home again when conditions allow for that’
- that refugees with temporary residence permits should lose the right to move within the country during their first five years of stay (DF does not really count on any longer stays)
- that Danida, the Danish Aid and Development Board, should build refugee camps in ‘for example Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Iran and Kenya’ in order to diminish the number of refugees that appears in Denmark.

Add all this together and the ‘foreigner’ is focused in a radically new way in Danish politics. Such laws, once implemented, entail in fact a soft form of ethnic cleansing. Those who stay must face the fact that they are permanent objects of the authorities’ ‘integration’ measures. All migrants, especially those from non-EU and non-OECD countries, will be victims of the stigma that the current political development attaches to them. This is of course intensified as all those without a permanent residence permit must live with a heightened social insecurity because of smaller cash subsidies to start with and also because of the constant risk of having them further diminished or withdrawn altogether. The government and its support party have without doubt been successful in convincing the Danish voters that these measures are necessary and that they have the will power and courage to realize them.

**The engine**

In order to implement such radical changes the road must first have to be paved, that is, the threats must be conjured up and the opposition quelled. If we bear in mind what Paxton and Mann argue then instead of mystifying Danish racism as
something somebody has ‘played on’ – as if it was there from the start like a
waiting piano – we should think of this as something that some have managed
to place at the top of the political agenda. Due attention must, of course, be
given to enabling background factors. But this does not obviate that DF with Pia
Kjaersgaard at the forefront, with their allies in anti-immigration politics, can
be seen as an engine in the political development, rather than as foremost a catalyst
of deep popular sentiments. Kjaersgaard, a political novice, brought an
extraordinary energy and sense of order, to the anarchic Progress Party. In 1995
however she gave up and formed her own Dansk Folkeparti. This party is, she
declared, above all national, to the (far) Right in questions regarding refugees,
immigrants and jurisdiction (‘law and order’) and to the Left when it comes to
issues of health care, welfare and animal rights (Svensson 2002). She situates
herself as an amateur politician, coming from below, with no class identity or
interests, merely fighting for a ‘normalization’ and restoration (rebirth) of the
people and the nation to what it once were. They have now for nearly two
decades worked energetically to reach power: first carrying, and eventually
being carried by, a racist message. Now they are at the centre of the political
discussion in the country.

The most important rhetorical weapons in this struggle are the accusatory
labels ‘political correctness’ and ‘arbiters of taste’ (da: ‘smagsdomere’) which
serves the self-assumed outsidership of DF by constantly drawing up a line
between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’. All criticism of the toughening policy on
foreigners is brushed aside as ‘political correctness’ or as examples of the elitist
outlook of the ‘arbiters of taste’, typically to be found among the Left, in
Amnesty International, in the Institute for Human Rights, among supporters of
multiculturalism, and so on. And when this attitude is, as now, displayed by the
highest office in the nation, it has effect. Sensible persons eventually give up
discussing the policy on immigration with DF, and, as it were, the government.
The consequence is a disquieting silence on these matters.

The energy and the aggressiveness are key. Of course this does not come
only from Pia Kjaersgaard. Two other figures central to the party are the cousins
Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe, two priests that now sit in parliament
for DF. They have long played central roles in the Danish debate on foreigners
and lead the journal-publishing company and think-tank Tidehverve (‘Epoch’).
Tidehverve explicitly resists modernity, progress and ‘cultural radicalism’, with
arguments founded in the gospel. Yet with little Christian love, their publications
mostly consist of racist diatribes, attacking Jews, radicals, Muslims, the left and
others in broad strokes, all for the sake of God and Denmark (Tidehverve,

DF has thus for a couple of decades, in press, in rallies and election
campaigns, and in municipal and parliamentary work, energetically and
aggressively worked with the classic tools of fascism: Church, nation, people
and distrust of elites, modernism, communism, immigrants and internationalism.
We can consequently tick off at least three of Michael Mann’s points in his
definition of fascism: *organic nationalism* including accelerating xenophobia; a clear longing for a class *transcendence* that elevates ‘the people’; and *cleansing*, both political, in aggressive attempts at silencing opposition (see below), and ethnic, through the actual results of the politics against foreigners.

**Critical voices?**

Introductorily I mentioned how a central part of the changes in Denmark are discursive, meaning simply the way that immigrants and foreigners are talked about, how boundaries for what can be addressed, what is seen as a ‘problem’ and of decency are moving. This is to a great extent played out media. The role of the media is not the main focus of this essay, but its importance for the developments discussed here can hardly be exaggerated.\(^6\)

As an activist and a vehicle of criticism, media was one of few institutions, beside established parties, that could have produced a reply and become a site for resistance against DF’s agitation and, later, the politics of the government. But, by and large, it has failed to act thus. Instead, many media organizations have all along contributed to the stigmatization of immigrants and refugees, especially those from Third World and Muslim countries (Schierup 1993; Yilmaz 1999, 2000; Quraishy 2002–4), in both newsreporting and in editorials. There are of course important differences between various media organizations, and there have been som critical voices speaking through the media.

Among the parties, some of the left-wing parties, and especially the social-liberal party ‘Radikal Venstre’, at the centre, have been clear in their criticism of DF and the government’s policies. There have also been a few highly critical parliamentary members from the Social Democratic Party and other parties. Yet, more decisive for the development has been the fact that so many of the big established parties and the major media organizations have done so little to resist the new way of speaking of foreigners and the bills that have been proposed and implemented. The government’s adoption of anti-immigration policies has of course been key for the development, both of discourse and policy. This, together with the backing from the Social Democratic Party in opposition and the leading newspapers, has evidently outflanked the criticism from smaller parties, individual MPs and intellectuals. It is thus not an exaggeration to say that major elements of the establishment have made important parts of DF’s agenda their own.

An indication that something has happened in terms of discourse change is seen in how the aforementioned DF-activist and parliamentarian Sören Krarup has been treated in public. Already in 1986 he had placed a full-page advertisement in *Jyllandsposten*, today the biggest daily paper. In it he called for a boycott of an organization devoted to assisting refugees, Dansk Flyktinghjälp, since, as he put it, their assistance attracted more refugees, especially from Muslim countries, and this represented a threat to Denmark, Danish identity and the Danish people (Yilmaz 2000: 3). The advertisement evoked a storm of
protests. The Danish public, the powerful media and all the established parties condemned Krarup in sharp language for being racist, lacking empathy and breeding xenophobia (Yilmaz 2000). Krarup was not discouraged, but interpreted the criticism as typical of the politically correct mind-police who dominate discussion in Denmark, marginalizing people like himself. In December 2005 however, Krarup can, instead, calmly and accurately position himself as part of the ‘political and cultural power-holders in today’s Denmark’, when in the daily Information, he answers criticism for the latest tightening of policy on immigration and refugees which his party, together with the government, has ruled on (Krarup 2005). Quite remarkable considering how central the position as power-less outsider in opposition to the ‘ruling elite’ has been for him and his party. But, he is, no doubt, correct in his self-positioning (Krarup 2005). Since 1986 he has travelled from the margin to the centre of the political debate. But it is not he who has changed: it is the centre.

Another indication, which speaks to the fact that many in Denmark are unhappy with the development while it simultaneously reveals the unpreparedness and tardy quality of the opposition, is how the critics, when they do finally speak out, often address the lack of criticism and the absence of resistance to anti-immigrant politics. This is commonplace in all political opposition – besides advocating one’s own political message, critics often ask of people to “wake up” – but in this case it has become a topic of its own. Indeed, the silence has surprised and puzzled many in Denmark as well as abroad. In December 2005 twelve Danish intellectuals published an appeal, simultaneously in a major Swedish and a major Danish newspaper, under the somewhat drowsy title ‘It is time to react!’ The group of authors attacked ‘the tendency in politics and the media to look at Muslim citizens exclusively as criminals, antisocial elements and as potential rapists or dropouts’ (Brøgger et. al. 2005). Many of the authors had indeed for a long time spoken out critically about the government and DF:s policies, the media and silent colleagues. The authors returned with another article on 30 January 2006, in which they addressed the lack of loud criticism as a factor in itself in the political development. Under the title ‘Lethal Silence!’ they explained why they had felt a need to speak up (Brøgger et al. 2006):

One reason was the increasing uneasiness over the ongoing dismantling of humanistic values, which we otherwise had considered to be the foundation of Danish democracy. In public debate today, more and more often, words and expressions are heard which are reminiscent of totalitarian movements from previous times in history. There is also the constant hunt for scapegoats among the minorities in the country...Another reason for our letter is the absence of an effective opposition against current immigrant policies. Silence is dangerous for democracy, because he who is silent agrees. Silence is the sympathizer’s first step. The second step is open consent, the third is active participation
in persecution, and by then we have long since left humanistic society behind us.

The headline, message and timing (winter 2005/6) of these articles illustrate that the absence of strong criticism of the anti-immigration agitation and politics seems to have been an important factor in Danish politics, maybe as important as the agitation, propaganda and movements themselves.

**Microscopic Coups d'États**

As important as media discourse has been the concordance in viewing immigration as a problem and a threat, between the new government 2001, their support party DF and also the Social Democrat opposition. The Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his government are now at the forefront of the cleansing mission in migration policy. From the start they focused on the ‘foreigner’ in, for Danish politics, a quite new way. Soon Fogh Rasmussen also launched a ‘cultural struggle’, with Denmark on one side and the so-called cultural radicals on the other. (This is also when he gave anti-intellectualism its special Danish buzzword by popularizing the notion in politics of ‘arbiters of taste’.) The cultural struggle is about power over words, about Danish values, the nation and its youth. In fact in line with this struggle the government has declared that seven expert committees shall decide on what makes up the Danish canon in seven different areas: film, literature, architecture, visual arts, music, dramatic art and crafts (Jonsson 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). The paradox is obvious: DF, the party that has defined itself as popularly rooted and outside the spheres of power and elites, is now setting the agenda and cooperates closely with a government which won the election on challenging the elitist ‘arbiters of taste’ (and bashing immigrants). Together, they now go further than any previous modern political leaders in Denmark in pointing out, in minute detail, what cultural goods, education, traditions, ‘values’ and so forth, is recommendable and belong to Denmark. To maintain the ‘outsidership’ status while in power, DF and Venstre have understood the value of reproducing the divide between elite and people at the highest political level, so as to assure those attracted by this populism that their government and its supporting party are still ‘one of them’. They achieve this through continued attacks on all the ‘wishy-washy leftists’, the human rights-, multicultural-, politically correct- ‘arbiters of taste’ who do not have the guts to be tough on crime and immigrants. This is, in other words, how Catherine Fieschi describes populism, as a bridge between the seemingly contradictory but central elements of fascist thought, elitism and collectivism (Fieschi 2004: 110). On this plank of nationalist and chauvinist populism the people can imagine themselves as the elite, while simultaneously the government can masquerade as folksy.

Even more important is how the government and DF, assisted by the rhetoric and actions of the ‘cultural struggle’, have actually staged what could be labelled
as a series of microscopic coups d’etat. The coup d’état is, to be sure, the fascist strategy par excellence. But here it is not a question of seizing power: this is already secured democratically through elections. The point is to show vitality and resolve and to display a capacity to intimidate opponents. Hence, since the government obtained power a number of institutions have been singled out as ‘arbiters of taste’, been closed down or been threatened (for several examples, see Rothstein 2003). In fact, most parts of the cultural and social sector have been publicly questioned by the government and they work with the threat of being shut down hanging over them; and in the educational sector they are getting used to always taking into account direct signals from the government. This tactic ‘works’ in two ways. It strengthens the bonds to those forces and voters who identify with the (learned) feeling of resentment against the old elites; and it displays how the government is prepared to pull the carpet from under those who go against them. Among those who have had to experience this we find the Centre for Human Rights, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, the Danish Language Board, as well as social authorities, integration officials and researchers who have opposed the policies against immigration.

In the summer of 2003 Pia Kjaersgaard was truly in her element as she performed a series of microscopic coups d’état in the Danish public sphere (Rothstein 2003). When, for example, a political opponent claimed that Kjaersgaards’ views were ‘racist’, she sued this politician for slander. The Danish court called in the Danish Language Board to secure an expert statement on the meaning of the word. The Board found that ‘racism’ today has a wider connotation and also connotes hostility towards groups based on national and cultural ideas, and so forth. The court accordingly dropped the case, as it was quite apparent that Pia Kjaersgaard is hostile to other cultures and that this was not a matter of false accusation or slander. Kjaersgaard and DF then simply showered the judges with accusations of being politicized (‘judges of taste’) and declared that they would work to have the Danish Language Board shut down. Hence, when the legal process used did not produce the right verdict, DF did not hesitate to make direct threats of closing down an institution that was merely called in, in due process, to give a statement in its area of expertise. Another incident occurred the same summer when a researcher from the Holocaust Centre presented an unpublished paper describing a trip to Auschwitz in which a young informant had reflected on the experience and, in a sentence, made a loose parallel between Adolf Hitler and Pia Kjaersgaard. DF got wind of this text and demanded an unreserved apology from the Chairman of the Board of the Holocaust Centre and that the centre’s research should focus more on the crimes of Communism and less on the Holocaust. Both demands were met.

DF has also succeeded in scaring the Institute for Human Rights into silence after they expressed criticism of Danish policy on aliens from a human-rights perspective. As a consequence the institute announced that they would no longer make statements to the media (Rothstein 2003). The criticism has later been confirmed several times by the UN and the Council of Europe. This has led DF
to the conclusion that the whole idea of human rights ought to be scrapped. The MP Sören Krarup argued that the UN Convention on Human Rights in fact was blasphemy, as only God can pass universal laws, and that, therefore, Denmark should withdraw its ratification of the Convention on Human Rights.

In this way, researchers, writers and leaders of institutes have repeatedly been directly harassed by members of the government or, more commonly, by leading DF politicians close to the government. These microscopic coups d’état have been efficient. Those who have lost their jobs have also lost their legitimate platforms from which to speak and criticize, but already the threat of losing one’s job has proved to be an efficient way to silence resistance – a kind of political cleansing, yet without the clumsiness of direct physical repression.

These deviations from traditional norms and conventions in the exercise of power have also left their traces in formal legislation and in political proposals. That Kjaersgaard’s vision of a law on foreigners making it virtually impossible to settle in the country, the so called ‘Phase 2’, does not respect any conventional interpretations of jurisprudence and international law is maybe not too surprising (see MFII 2005). But even the government have openly complained how the principle of equality before the law limits their manoeuvrability in realizing their ambitions. For example, when criticism was raised at the harsh rules on family reunion – which typically came only when it had been discovered that Danes who had lived for some years and formed a family in, for example the US, could no longer move back to the country with their families – the former Minister of Integration admitted, frankly, that this was absolutely a problem: ‘Everybody knows that this [these rules] is not about Americans, but we cannot give anyone special treatment. The rules should, regrettably, be the same for all. And I mean regrettably’ (Persson et al 2004).

Conclusion

If Danish xenophobia, immigration policies and the climate of debate is analysed, as I have tried to do here, as a power logic in motion, I think the links between different but related phenomena in the political–public arena can be perceived: nationalism–racism–xenophobia–concern for culture, heritage and language–populism, and more. Several elements in the current regime and the discourses it produces emerge which, put together, are fascist-like: xenophobia with ethnic and culturally racist overtones; the speedy radicalization of a deportation and assimilation policy; an organic nationalism which emphasizes a class-transcending community of ‘the people’; the primacy of the nation; and the threats against its cultures. All these in turn penetrate more and more areas of politics, immigration, security, culture and education. This is bad enough; but above all it is the orchestrated interplay between these elements, together with the alliances established around these politics, that gives us a reason to speak of a fascist power logic. At the centre of that logic belongs also the evocation of a xenophobic agitation that has disseminated the fictitious image of a major threat.
that the promulgators then promise to eliminate. The Danish People’s Party and the Conservative–Liberal government have in the course of time become very skilled in this opinion-winning and power-establishing work.

Only by identifying these developments within the democratic politics of our times can we reach a better understanding of how xenophobic agitation, political populist style and methods, parliamentary alliances across the spectrum and changes in the laws work in orchestration to change the rules of the societal game in fundamental ways. But when xenophobia and populism are, as often, seen as abstract tendencies, ‘trends’ or attitudes inherent among ordinary people, then fascism has won its first important victory of propaganda. For who wants to argue with the people? I have also emphasized the risk of false securities in the form of ideologically based classifications between different types of right-wing populists and distinctions between democrats and anti-democrats, cultural racists and ‘old’ racists. These boundaries can quickly become irrelevant; and, beyond that, in the analysis of anti-immigrant politics, one must also count on a capacity to change the political message to make it more palatable for a democratic public.

Whether the Danish xenophobic development will be even more radicalized or whether the country will cool down is hard to say. For the changes already established in law and discourse propel other changes in the active parties, in terms of their goals and ambitions, among their allies, and in terms of how the media handles the issues and how voters apprehend them. We can get a pointer if we reflect on the fact that what was twenty years ago virtually impossible to imagine in the politics of immigration is today accepted by most leading parties in Europe. Regarding Denmark, Jörgen Goul Andersen, a leading researcher on DF and populism, suggested three years ago that one can hardly expect any more motions for tougher legislation on immigration and integration, since (Andersen 2004: 170):

It seems likely that the sharpened laws of 2002 will make the immigration issue less prominent. People got, so to speak, what they wanted, and there is not much more in terms of tougher legislation that, on the whole, can be accomplished.

Unfortunately, he was wrong. 2003, 2004 and 2005 saw new laws carried through. It would have been wiser to assume that the radical right-wing populists in Denmark, given the chance, would try to reorganize society in precisely the direction that they in fact have suggested all along.

Notes

1 This is an extended version of a previously published essay (Berggren 2005).
During the 1990s prominent Social Democrats began to use the same language that they had previously banned as racist: for example, the ex-Minister of the Interior Karen Jespersen suggested that criminal asylum-seekers ought to be sent to a ‘desert island’, while Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen complained that the Muslim practice of praying five times a day was ‘foreign to Danish work ethics’ (see Schierup 1993; Yilmaz 2000, 1999 and 2003).

3 Parallels between Danish politics and fascism have been more frequent in critical journalism than in science, e.g. Smith (2006). See also Brøgger (2005, 2006); and Jensen (2006).


5 Cf Tingsten, 1936. He argued that the Nazis succeeded in winning over the otherwise democratic electorate of Germany through superior agitation.

6 Bashy Quraishy, who has ‘shadowed’ the Danish development for many years, stresses the central role played by the media in its work to portion out ‘the daily doses of xenophobia’ (Quraishy 2003: 30).