

# Who Belongs in Anti-Racist Denmark? Government Initiatives, National Identity, and Racialised Citizens

Master's Thesis

Culture, Communication and Globalization



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## Abstract

This thesis examines how recent Danish government policy initiatives addressing racism (re)construct Danish national identity and analyses the implications of these constructions for racialised and minoritised citizens in Denmark. The study takes as its empirical point of departure two central policy texts produced by the same government within a short time frame: the *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism* (2024) and the *Action Plan Against Racism* (2025). While both initiatives are formally presented as commitments to combating racism and discrimination, this thesis approaches them not as neutral responses to pre-existing social problems, but as constitutive policy interventions that actively shape how racism, belonging, and national identity are understood and governed.

Methodologically, the thesis employs a qualitative, comparative poststructural policy analysis inspired by Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) approach. The analysis works backwards from proposed measures to identify the implicit problem representations embedded in the policy texts. This makes it possible to examine how racism is defined, which actors are positioned as responsible, which forms of harm are rendered visible or invisible, and what forms of governance are legitimised through these representations. The comparative design allows for an analysis of how different forms of racism are problematised within the same political and national context, highlighting variations in urgency, framing, and political investment.

The analysis is theoretically grounded in three complementary perspectives: intersectionality, critical race theory and critical racism studies, and theories of belonging and boundary-making. Together, these frameworks enable a critical examination of how racism is governed by the state, how national identity is reproduced through policy discourse, and how the effects of these processes are unevenly distributed across racialised and minoritised populations. Intersectionality is used to analyse how policy representations obscure or collapse differentiated experiences of racism, while critical race and racism scholarship foregrounds the role of the state in managing, narrowing, and depoliticising racism. Theories of belonging and boundary-making provide the conceptual tools to analyse how distinctions between "us" and "them" are reproduced through policy, often implicitly and administratively rather than explicitly.

The thesis finds that Danish national identity is (re)constructed through both policy initiatives as fundamentally anti-racist, democratic, and morally coherent, while racism is positioned as an external, exceptional, or deviant phenomenon. Racism is primarily framed as

a matter of individual hostility, hate crime, or extremist behaviour, rather than as a structural condition embedded in institutions. This framing allows the state to position itself as a neutral protector and manager of racism, rather than as an actor implicated in its reproduction.

While both policy texts contribute to this construction, the comparative analysis reveals significant differences. Antisemitism is framed as an acute and exceptional threat to democratic society, demanding urgent and protective state intervention, whereas racism more broadly is treated as a diffuse, long-term challenge addressed through education, dialogue, and behavioural change. These differences produce a hierarchy of racial harms within policy discourse, where some forms of racism are recognised as urgent and politically destabilising, while others are rendered less visible and less actionable.

The implications for racialised and minoritised citizens are substantial. The narrowing of racism limits the political intelligibility of structural and everyday forms of racialisation, constrains possibilities for contestation, and produces differentiated subject positions ranging from protected victims to objects of regulation or behavioural correction. As a result, inclusion within the Danish national community emerges as conditional and unevenly distributed.

Overall, the thesis argues that while recent Danish anti-racism initiatives signal commitment and concern, they simultaneously function as technologies of national self-affirmation that stabilise dominant narratives of Danishness. Addressing racism in more transformative ways would therefore require not only additional policy measures, but a fundamental re-politicisation of how racism, national identity, and state responsibility are understood within Danish governance.

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# Introduction

In recent years, racism and discrimination have re-emerged as central yet deeply contested political issues in Denmark. While Danish self-understandings have long been anchored in narratives of equality, social cohesion, and universal welfare, these narratives increasingly sit uneasily alongside persistent evidence of racialised exclusion, differential access to rights, and everyday experiences of racism among minoritised groups (Hervik, 2011; Skadegård, 2018; Jensen & Myong, 2020). Against this backdrop, the Danish government has, since 2024, introduced a series of policy initiatives aimed at addressing racism, hate crimes, and discrimination. Most prominently, these include the *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism* (2024) and the *Action Plan Against Racism* (2025). As a whole, these initiatives signal a renewed political willingness to name racism as a societal problem. At the same time, they have generated significant public debate and critique, raising questions about whose experiences of racism are recognised, how racism is defined, and what forms of political protection are prioritised (Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, 2025; Skadegård, 2024).

The *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism* was adopted in June 2024 as a rapid political response to a documented increase in antisemitic incidents following 7 October 2023. The agreement enjoys broad cross-party support and frames antisemitism as an acute threat to democracy, security, and national values (Regeringen, 2024). In contrast, the *Action Plan Against Racism*, published in February 2025, represents the delayed fulfilment of a political promise first articulated in 2022, following sustained pressure from civil society organisations, researchers, and affected communities (Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023). While the Action Plan is formally broader in scope, it has been criticised for its limited ambition, narrow operationalisation of racism, and lack of binding commitments. Civil society actors have argued that the plan risks treating racism as an attitudinal or behavioural deviation rather than a structural and institutional phenomenon, thereby limiting its transformative potential (Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, 2025).

Public debate surrounding these initiatives reveals deep tensions in how racism is understood and governed in Denmark. On the one hand, racism is increasingly acknowledged as a real and pressing problem, as reflected in opinion pieces, research reports, and monitoring studies documenting racialised discrimination in everyday life, labour markets, education, policing, and the public sphere (Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2022; Analyse & Tal, 2025). On the other hand, racism remains a highly politicised and emotionally charged concept, frequently met with denial, minimisation, or reframing as a matter of individual

prejudice rather than structural inequality (Myong & Bissenbakker, 2016; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). This ambivalence is particularly visible in debates over whether Denmark has a “racism problem” at all, and if so, what kinds of racism are considered legitimate objects of political intervention (Information, 2024).

A central point of contention concerns the differential political treatment of antisemitism in relation to other forms of racism, such as Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and anti-Palestinian racism. Several scholars and commentators have warned that the strong and swift political mobilisation against antisemitism, when not accompanied by an equally robust and intersectional approach to racism more broadly, risks producing a hierarchy of protection in which some minoritised groups are rendered more deserving of state concern than others (Skadegård, 2024; Altinget, 2024). This critique has been articulated forcefully in the public sphere, including by discrimination researchers who argue that isolated policy responses to specific forms of racism may unintentionally reinforce divisions rather than address racism as a structurally interconnected phenomenon (Skadegård, 2024). From this perspective, the juxtaposition of the 2024 antisemitism agreement and the 2025 racism action plan becomes analytically revealing, not only for what the policies propose to do, but for how they represent racism as a problem in the first place.

These debates unfold within a broader socio-political context marked by intensified border politics, securitisation, and ongoing struggles over national belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Wimmer, 2013). Research and documentation from civil society organisations and monitoring bodies consistently point to the prevalence of racist and hateful speech in the public debate, particularly online, as well as to the disproportionate exposure of racialised and religious minorities to harassment, threats, and discrimination (Analyse & Tal, 2025; CEDA, 2025). At the same time, recent reports indicate that experiences of racism are significantly underreported, reflecting low trust in institutional responses and a widespread perception among minoritised citizens that racism is not taken seriously unless it aligns with dominant political priorities (CEDA, 2025; Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023).

Against this background, government policy initiatives do more than respond to social problems; they actively participate in defining them. Policies do not merely address racism as an external reality “out there”, but contribute to constructing what counts as racism, who is positioned as vulnerable, and how the boundaries of the national community are drawn (Bacchi, 2009; Goldberg, 2002). As such, policy texts are key sites where dominant understandings of Danish national identity are articulated, contested, and stabilised. They

encode assumptions about who belongs, who threatens social cohesion, and which forms of difference require regulation, protection, or reassurance (Hesse, 2007; Lentin, 2020).

This thesis departs from the premise that the question is therefore not only whether Danish policies adequately combat racism, but how racism is problematised within them, and with what consequences. Rather than treating racism as a fixed or self-evident phenomenon, the analysis approaches racism as something that is politically constructed through policy discourse, measures, and silences (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Particular attention is paid to how recent government initiatives simultaneously invoke values of democracy, security, and cohesion, while potentially reproducing exclusions along racialised, religious, and national lines (Ahmed, 2004; Goldberg, 2009).

On this basis, the thesis is guided by the following research question:

**How do recent Danish government policy initiatives to address racism (re)construct Danish national identity, and what are the implications for racialised and minoritised citizens in Denmark?**

By analysing the *Action Plan Against Racism (2025)* as the primary policy text, situated in relation to the *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024)* and relevant contextual texts, the thesis seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly and public debates about racism, belonging, and state responsibility in Denmark. In doing so, it aims to move beyond descriptive accounts of policy content and instead interrogate the deeper political and normative assumptions that shape how racism is governed, whose experiences are centred, and whose remain marginal (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Lentin, 2020).

## Literature review

### Purpose and scope

This literature review situates the thesis within interdisciplinary scholarship on racism, antisemitism, national identity, and governance in Europe, with a particular emphasis on Nordic contexts. The review considers four overlapping bodies of literature: conceptual debates on racism, racialisation, and antisemitism; research on nationhood, belonging, and Nordic exceptionalism; studies of European and Nordic anti-discrimination and anti-racism governance; and critical analyses of how racism and antisemitism are framed and managed as

policy problems. Rather than offering an exhaustive overview, the review prioritises theoretically influential and debate-setting contributions that illuminate how racism and antisemitism are rendered intelligible, governable, and politically actionable in contemporary Europe. The selection reflects a combination of foundational theoretical texts, critical European race scholarship, and Nordic empirical studies that are directly relevant to analysing Danish government policy initiatives addressing racism and antisemitism.

## Race, racism and the european denial of race

A substantial body of critical race scholarship has demonstrated that racism in Europe is persistently disavowed through political, legal, and cultural strategies that render race unspeakable while allowing racialised hierarchies to endure. Alana Lentin's work is foundational here. *Across Race and Western Culture* (2001), *Racial States* (2004), *Europe and the Silence about Race* (2008), and most recently *The New Racial Regime* (2025), Lentin shows how post-war Europe has replaced race with proxies such as culture, values, cohesion, and integration, thereby enabling racism to be rearticulated as an external deviation rather than a constitutive feature of European modernity (Lentin, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2025). This silence is not an absence but a governing strategy that secures Europe's moral self-image as post-racial and anti-racist. This dynamic is empirically evident in Denmark, where racism is routinely reframed as an individual, exceptional or foreign phenomenon, while structural and institutional forms of racialisation are systematically denied in public discourse and policy (Jensen, Weibel & Vitus, 2017).

This argument is echoed and extended by David Theo Goldberg, who conceptualises Europe as a "racial state" whose commitment to liberal universalism is inseparable from racial governance (*The Threat of Race*, 2009; *Are We All Postracial Yet?*, 2015). Goldberg's analysis of racial neoliberalism demonstrates how racism is increasingly displaced onto questions of individual behaviour, extremism, or security, rather than structural power. Lentin and Goldberg establish racism as a political project embedded in state formation, not merely a residue of ignorance or prejudice.

Empirical policy-oriented studies reinforce this diagnosis. Rodríguez Maeso and Araújo (2017a, 2017b) show how EU and national policy frameworks construct racism as implausible within Europe itself, framing it instead as a risk emerging from diversity, migration, or poorly integrated populations. Similarly, Erel (2007) demonstrates that while racism manifests differently across European contexts, there is a striking convergence in how

“useful” versus “abusive” migrants are racialised, revealing a shared European grammar of conditional belonging. Kim and Steinhilper’s (2025) recent work on Germany further complicates anti-racism by showing how declared anti-racist commitments can coexist with, and even enable, racism denial. Danish integration and anti-discrimination policies exemplify this pattern by addressing discrimination primarily through awareness, education and equal treatment, while explicitly rejecting the existence of structural racism within Danish institutions (Jensen, Weibel & Vitus, 2017).

This literature establishes a critical baseline: European anti-racism operates within a political environment that systematically refuses to name race as a structural relation of power, thereby shaping the limits of what anti-racist policy can acknowledge or address.

## Whiteness, nordic exceptionalism and postcolonial amnesia

Within the European context, the Nordic countries occupy a distinctive position shaped by what scholars term Nordic exceptionalism. This ideology constructs the Nordic region as historically innocent, egalitarian, and detached from colonialism, racism, and racial violence. The edited volume *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region* (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012) is central here, documenting how Nordic national identities are constituted through whiteness, even as race is explicitly denied as a relevant analytic category.

Contributions by Jensen, Hübinette, Rastas, and Keskinen demonstrate how national belonging is implicitly racialised while racism is externalised or individualised. Danish national identity is further shaped by postcolonial amnesia, whereby Denmark’s colonial history and its racial consequences are marginalised, enabling contemporary racial hierarchies to appear disconnected from historical processes of empire and domination (Hunter, 2021). Danish scholarship has been particularly influential in exposing these dynamics. Peter Hervik’s extensive work on Danish neo-nationalism and cultural racism shows how incompatibility narratives, especially around Islam and migration, rearticulate race through culture, values, and freedom (*The Annoying Difference*, 2014; Hervik, 2005, 2014a, 2014b).

The Danish Cartoon Affair is repeatedly analysed as a key moment in which Danishness is framed as under threat, requiring defence against racialised others positioned as intolerant or illiberal (Hervik, 2014). The framing of Islam and Muslims as culturally incompatible with Danish values operates as a form of cultural racism that substitutes culture for race while producing durable enemy images and legitimising exclusionary politics (Hervik, 2011).

More recent interventions connect these dynamics explicitly to race. Bjerre (2022) argues that the refusal to name race in Denmark produces an unquestioned norm of whiteness, rendering racialised citizens hypervisible as problems while invisible as political subjects. This resonates with Lentin's (2008) argument that silence about race is itself a racial project, and with Goldberg's (2009) claim that Europe's self-understanding depends on displacing racial violence onto its imagined others.

This body of literature is crucial for analysing Danish policy initiatives, as it situates contemporary anti-racist measures within a longer history of racial denial, colonial amnesia, and moral self-exceptionalism.

### Anti-Racism, multiculturalism and the limits of inclusion

A third strand of literature interrogates anti-racism itself, questioning its assumptions, tools, and political effects. Rather than treating anti-racism as inherently progressive, scholars have highlighted its ambivalences and limitations. Lentin (2004) critiques dominant anti-racist frameworks for relying on culturalism and human rights discourses that individualise racism and depoliticise race. Similarly, Paradies (2016) argues that contemporary anti-racism often oscillates between recognition and denial, producing a double bind in which racism is acknowledged rhetorically but left structurally intact. In the Danish context, anti-racism is often displaced into integration politics, where racialised groups are governed as objects of improvement rather than recognised as subjects of political inequality (Jensen et al., 2010).

The edited volume *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (Werbner & Modood, 2015) captures earlier debates about multiculturalism, hybridity, and difference, many of which prefigure current tensions. While contributors such as Modood and Wieviorka defend forms of multicultural recognition, others, including Bonnett and Yuval-Davis, warn that anti-racism risks reifying difference while leaving power relations untouched. Ahmed's *On Being Included* (2012) powerfully extends this critique by showing how diversity and inclusion function institutionally as non-performative gestures that protect organisations from accusations of racism without transforming them. Empirical studies of everyday racism in Denmark show that such inclusionary frameworks coexist with persistent microaggressions and racialised exclusions that remain largely invisible within official anti-racist narratives (Skadegård & Horst, 2021).

More recent European research confirms these concerns. Kim and Steinhilper (2025) empirically demonstrate that anti-racist engagement can coexist with racism denial, while

Rodríguez Maeso and Araújo (2017a) show how anti-discrimination and integration policies reproduce narratives of vulnerability and deficiency among racialised groups. The result is an anti-racism that governs minoritised populations rather than redistributing power.

This literature is directly relevant for analysing policy initiatives that claim to address racism, as it cautions against equating recognition, awareness, or symbolic condemnation with structural change.

## Anti-discrimination law, policy frameworks and structural racism

Finally, a substantial body of work examines anti-discrimination law and policy as key sites where racism is both addressed and constrained. Comparative studies by Givens and Case (2014) trace the emergence of EU anti-discrimination policy, showing how it developed in response to political crises rather than structural commitments to racial justice. Their analysis highlights how legal frameworks often prioritise formal equality while sidelining questions of power, history, and racialisation. Danish policy responses to racism frequently avoid the term itself, opting instead for concepts such as equal treatment or discrimination, a linguistic strategy that neutralises race as a structural category of analysis (Hervik & Jørgensen, 2002).

The European Commission's Comparative Analysis of Non-Discrimination Law in Europe (Chopin & Germaine, 2025) provides a comprehensive overview of legal protections but also reveals the fragmentation and uneven enforcement of anti-racism across member states. Scholars have long noted that such legal approaches tend to individualise harm and require victims to prove discrimination, thereby obscuring structural racism (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Bailey et al., 2021).

Critical race scholars argue that structural racism cannot be adequately addressed through legalistic frameworks alone. Lawrence and Keleher's (2004) definition of structural racism as the cumulative effect of interconnected institutions is widely cited, while Bailey et al. (2021) emphasise how focusing on interpersonal or institutional racism without addressing structural relations reproduces inequality. Within Europe, Lentin (2025) and Goldberg (2009) both argue that anti-discrimination law often stabilises racial regimes by presenting racism as an exception rather than a governing logic. This legal and policy framing reinforces a distinction between "factual" and "experienced" discrimination, whereby racialised citizens' accounts are often dismissed as subjective perceptions rather than recognised as evidence of structural inequality (Jensen, Weibel & Vitus, 2017).

This literature underscores a central tension relevant to this thesis: while anti-discrimination policies signal political commitment, they often reproduce the very national and racial imaginaries they claim to challenge.

## Governing racism and antisemitism: dominant framings and policy repertoires

Research on European anti-discrimination and anti-racism governance identifies a set of recurring policy framings and repertoires. At the level of framing, racism is commonly problematised through competing logics of social cohesion, democratic values, security, and protection (Amiriaux & Guiraudon, 2010; Geddes & Guiraudon, 2004). These framings often pull in different directions: cohesion-oriented approaches emphasise integration and shared values, while security-oriented approaches foreground threat, protection, and surveillance (Hirschauer, 2025; Thomas & Clarke, 2013).

Policy repertoires tend to cluster around four main tools: reporting and monitoring mechanisms; educational and preventive initiatives; criminal justice and policing measures; and partnerships with civil society (Chopin & Germaine, 2025; Givens & Case, 2014a, 2014b). While these tools are often presented as neutral or technical, critical scholarship highlights their unintended effects. Reporting mechanisms can individualise racism; education initiatives may responsabilise minorities; and security measures risk reinforcing racialised suspicion and surveillance (Paradies, 2016; Ahmed, 2012; Seamster, 2026).

Antisemitism governance frequently diverges from these patterns. Scholars note that antisemitism is more readily framed as a crisis requiring swift, consensual action, often justified through historical memory and security imperatives (Feldman, 2024; Hesse, 2004). This contrasts with the slower, more contested governance of racism, which is often embedded in long-term integration or diversity agendas (Lentin, 2010; Hervik, 2019). Such asymmetries raise questions about how different hate objects are prioritised and how national identity is implicitly reasserted through differential policy responses. This asymmetry reflects broader European patterns in which antisemitism is treated as a threat to democratic order and historical memory, while racism against racialised minorities is managed as a problem of cohesion, culture, or integration (Meer & Modood, 2012).

## Gaps and bridge to theory

Across these literatures, several tensions recur. First, there is a persistent tension between universalist equality discourse and acknowledgement of structural racism. Second, social cohesion and value-based framings often conflict with the lived realities of minoritised citizenship and belonging. Third, preventive and educational repertoires coexist uneasily with security-oriented responses. Finally, group-specific crisis responses contrast with generalised, delayed policy initiatives.

While existing scholarship richly documents these dynamics, it rarely examines how the same government, within a shared temporal and political context, problematises different forms of racism and antisemitism through distinct policy texts. This thesis addresses that gap by analysing how recent Danish government initiatives (re)construct national identity through their divergent representations of racism and antisemitism, and with what implications for racialised and minoritised citizens.

The following theory chapter introduces a poststructural policy analytic lens that enables a systematic interrogation of these problem representations, their underlying assumptions, and their effects, building directly on the tensions identified in this literature.

## Methodology

### Methodological positioning

#### Research approach and purpose

The thesis mainly uses a qualitative research approach as well as comparative approach, with limited use of quantitative elements. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative focuses on analysis of non-numerical materials in order to develop an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, discussing how and why meanings, experiences and interpretations are formed (Bryman, 2016). In this thesis, the analysis is based on close reading and interpretation of policy texts, while comparison across different government initiatives makes it possible to identify similarities and differences in how problems are represented. Quantitative statistics are taken from few reports and used only descriptively to contextualise the policies, not as objects of in-depth analysis.

The purpose of the study is both critical and explanatory. Typically, explanatory purpose is found in studies where quantitative research alone cannot explain how or why certain

findings emerge and therefore requires deeper interpretive understanding (Bryman, 2016). Because the study aims to discuss how issues are framed and interpreted within policy texts rather than to assess outcomes, it adopts an explanatory qualitative approach focused on the construction of policy problematisations. Instead of evaluating the effectiveness of policy measures or assessing outcomes, the analysis critically examines how racism is constructed as a policy problem within Danish government initiatives. By analysing the problematisations found in policy texts, the study explains how specific representations of racism legitimise certain forms of governance, shape understandings of Danish national identity and position racialised and minoritised groups in specific ways. In this sense, the study aims to uncover the underlying assumptions, silences and effects of policy problem representations, rather than to offer solutions or policy recommendations.

### Methodological approach

The methodological approach used in the thesis is deductive, referring to an approach where existing knowledge and theoretical ideas are used to guide the research and examine them through empirical analysis (Bryman, 2016). The analysis in this thesis is guided by pre-existing theoretical concepts and poststructural policy analysis from the WPR approach, as outlined in the Research Design section. These concepts are used to interrogate policy texts and identify underlying problematisations. A deductive approach is appropriate because the WPR framework provides a set of predefined analytical questions that focus on how policies construct problems and govern social realities, rather than to generate theory inductively from the data.

### Relevance to research question

The research question requires a qualitative approach that can capture meaning, power relations, and interpretation within policy texts. Using a comparative design makes it possible to examine how different government initiatives construct racism and national identity in relation to one another. With a critical and explanatory focus, these methodological positioning choices are particularly relevant to the problem formulation, as they allow for an analysis of the implications of these policy constructions for racialised and minoritised citizens.

## Philosophy of science

### Ontology

The study adopts a social constructivist ontology, understanding social realities such as racism and national identity as socially produced through discourse, policy and governance practices. From this perspective, these phenomena are not treated as fixed or objective conditions but as contingent outcomes of social and political processes. This perspective emphasises that such realities and their meanings are continuously shaped and reshaped through the actions, interactions and practices of social actors involved in their formation (Bryman, 2016). This ontological position is appropriate because the thesis examines how government initiatives actively construct these realities through specific representations and problematisations.

### Epistemology

The epistemological position of the study is interpretivist and poststructuralist, emphasising the interpretation of social meanings while rejecting the idea of fixed or universal truths (Bryman, 2016). As such, knowledge is understood as produced within specific social and political contexts and as dependent on how issues are framed and interpreted, rather than as neutral or universally given. From this perspective, the analysis looks at how policy texts define what racism is, how certain groups or behaviours are constructed as problematic and how particular forms of governance are presented as appropriate or necessary responses.

### Reflexivity & researcher positionality

This study recognises that qualitative analysis is inherently interpretive and that the researcher is not a neutral observer but situated within the same social and political contexts as the policies analysed. Own background, values and prior academic engagement with issues of racism and governance may shape analytical focus and interpretation.

Because of this, reflexivity is practiced by critically reflecting on how personal background, values and prior academic engagement with issues of racism, governance and national identity may influence analytical focus and interpretation. As subjectivity cannot be eliminated completely, it is acknowledged as an inevitable aspect of qualitative research and managed through transparency and consistent reflection. Reflexivity is also practiced by applying the same critical scrutiny to the own framing of the research problem and analytical

decisions as is applied to the policy material so that the risk of unreflexive interpretation or confirmation bias is reduced.

## Research design

### Method of analysis

The analysis employs Carol Bacchi's (2009, 2016) *What's the Problem Represented to be?* (WPR) approach, situated within poststructural policy analysis. WPR is used as an analytic strategy to examine how policies represent certain issues as problems and how governing takes place through these representations. The analysis works backwards from proposed policy measures to identify the implicit problematisations they contain, instead of treating racism as a predefined problem.

This involves identifying problem representations within policy texts and closely examining their underlying assumptions, silences and effects, as based on the WPR approach (2009, 2016). Particular attention is paid to how these representations define what needs to change, who or what is positioned as problematic and which responses are presented as appropriate. The focus is therefore on governing rationalities and forms of knowledge embedded in policy proposals. In this sense, the analysis is concerned with discourses as socially produced ways of thinking and governing, rather than with discourse analysis understood as the examination of linguistic features. Accordingly, it can be understood as analysis of discourses rather than discourse analysis.

### Type of analysis

The study uses a comparative design to analyse multiple Danish government initiatives addressing racism. Comparison is employed to examine how similar issues are problematised differently across policy documents produced within the same national and political context. This makes it possible to identify differences in urgency, framing, and emphasis, as well as how national identity and racialised or minoritised groups are portrayed. The comparative design strengthens the analysis by making it possible to highlight both similarities and differences in modes of governance across cases.

### Use of theory

The study uses theoretical concepts to deepen and support the analysis. These concepts are applied alongside the WPR approach to provide analytical depth and contextual

understanding of the problem representations identified in the policy material. The theoretical framework guiding the analysis is presented in detail in the theory chapter.

## Data collection methods

### Primary data

The primary data consists of two Danish government policy documents: the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024) and the Action Plan Against Racism (2025). These documents are the main focus of the analysis and are used as primary empirical material because they are examined directly as policy texts that propose solutions and, in doing so, construct specific problem representations.

The decision to compare these two documents is methodologically justified by the fact that they are produced by the same governing authorities and within a closely related time period, enabling a focused comparative analysis of how the same political actors address different forms of hate crimes. While the antisemitism agreement of June 2024 can be understood as an acute crisis response to the sharp increase in antisemitic incidents following 7 October 2023, the racism action plan from February 2025 represents a delayed fulfilment of a political commitment announced in 2022 and shaped by prolonged political negotiation. By analysing these documents as primary data, one can show how aspects like national identity are constructed differently across policy initiatives that deal with related but distinct issues.

### Secondary data

Secondary material includes policy-related documents as well as academic sources such as news articles, journal articles and books. These materials are used to provide contextual background for the primary policy documents and to support the analysis by situating the identified problem representations within broader political, social and academic debates. In addition, the secondary material offers insight into how specific problem representations emerge, circulate and become stabilised across institutional and public contexts.

### Sampling strategy

The study applies a non-probability sampling strategy or more specifically, purposive sampling. The goal is to choose samples or cases intentionally rather than at random, based on their usefulness for understanding the topic being studied (Bryman, 2016). Such strategy works well for qualitative policy analysis where the aim is to select material based on

analytical relevance rather than representativeness. The purpose of the sampling is to ensure that the selected texts are well suited for answering the research question in this thesis and supporting a comparative analysis of how racism is addressed within Danish government initiatives.

The two primary policy documents were selected because they represent the most central and recent governmental efforts addressing racism-related issues in Denmark. Both documents are produced by the same political entity within a limited time span, which allows for a focused comparison in a broader political context. At the same time, the documents differ in their political background, timing and degree of urgency, making them particularly suitable for examining how similar issues are framed and addressed under different conditions. These characteristics form the main criteria for their inclusion.

Secondary material was also selected using purposive criteria aimed at supporting contextualisation. Materials were chosen based on their contributions to understanding the broader political and public debates surrounding racism and antisemitism in Denmark and beyond. Priority was given to materials published relatively close in time to the policy documents and to sources that reflect Danish political, institutional or scholarly perspectives. Overall, the sampling strategy is designed to ensure coherence between the research question, the analytical framework and the empirical material, while maintaining transparency regarding the criteria used to include both primary and secondary sources.

## Validity & reliability

Validity refers to how sound and credible the conclusions drawn from a research study are (Bryman, 2016), with the validity of this study is strengthened through a close alignment between the research question, the WPR approach and the empirical material. By analysing policy texts as governing documents, the analysis remains focused on how racism and national identity are constructed, rather than drifting into evaluation of policy outcomes. The comparative design further strengthens validity by enabling cross-case comparison between two policy initiatives produced within the same political context. This makes it possible to assess whether identified problem representations are specific to individual documents or reflect broader patterns in governmental problem construction. Validity is further strengthened by using theoretical concepts alongside the WPR approach to support and contextualise the interpretation of problem representations. Additionally, it is supported through transparency in analytical steps, including clear identification of problem

representations, allowing the reader to follow how interpretations are derived from the material. At the same time, validity is potentially weakened by the interpretive nature of the analysis, as different readings of policy texts are possible. This limitation is addressed through reflexivity.

Reliability is strengthened by the use of a clearly defined analytical framework, namely the WPR approach, which provides a structured set of questions applied consistently across the policy documents. This reduces arbitrariness in interpretation and supports a systematic comparison between cases. This is especially important since reliability deals with the repeatability of a study by other researchers (Bryman, 2016). The deductive use of predefined analytical questions further enhances reliability by ensuring that similar analytical procedures are applied to all primary texts. In addition, explicit documentation of data selection, sampling criteria and analytical decisions increases allows other researchers to assess how conclusions were reached. Reliability may be challenged by the translation of policy texts from Danish to English, as meanings can shift across languages. This is addressed by careful translation practices, including cross-checking key terms and concepts against the original Danish formulations to preserve conceptual and political nuances.

## Methodological limitations

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. Besides researcher positionality and potential biases already mentioned in the section Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality, a few other limitations should be recognized. First, the analysis is based on a small number of policy documents and focuses on a specific national and political context. While this makes it possible to conduct a detailed qualitative analysis, the findings cannot be generalised beyond the Danish case or the particular policy initiatives included in the study. The study therefore aims to provide analytical insights rather than broad empirical generalisations.

Second, the study relies mainly on qualitative textual analysis and does not include analysis of quantitative data or empirical examination of policy implementation or outcomes. As a result, it cannot show how the policies work in practice or how they are experienced by the groups they affect. Instead, the focus is on how racism and national identity are constructed within policy discourse and governance.

Third, the WPR approach focuses on how problems are represented in policy texts and does not examine policymakers' intentions, motivations or internal decision-making

processes. The analysis therefore does not seek to explain why particular representations were chosen, but rather how they function and what implications they have in published policy documents.

Finally, the analysis is limited to policy documents produced within a relatively short time period. This may limit the ability to capture long-term shifts in policy thinking or historical continuities beyond the selected period.

## Theoretical framework

This thesis examines how recent Danish government policy initiatives addressing racism (re)construct Danish national identity and with what implications for racialised and minoritised citizens. While the analysis is methodologically informed by a poststructural policy approach inspired by Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" framework, the theoretical framework provides the conceptual lenses through which policy problem representations and their effects are interpreted. The aim of this chapter is therefore to clarify the theoretical perspectives that underpin the analysis, rather than to account for the analytical procedure itself.

The framework brings three complementary theoretical perspectives: intersectionality, critical race theory and critical racism studies, and theories of belonging and boundary-making. These perspectives enable an analysis of how racism is conceptualised and governed by the state, how national identity is reproduced through policy discourse, and how the effects of these processes are distributed unevenly across racialised and minoritised populations.

### Intersectionality

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), is employed in this thesis as a critical lens for analysing how policy problem representations generate differentiated implications across social positions. Rather than functioning as a descriptive framework for mapping identities, intersectionality is used analytically to interrogate how policies simultaneously address, collapse, or silence multiple axes of inequality.

From this perspective, policy texts do not merely respond to pre-existing social groups, but actively participate in producing categories of subjects through which harms, responsibilities, and protections are allocated. Intersectionality draws attention to how race

intersects with other structuring dimensions such as gender, religion, class, migration status, and generation within policy discourse, often without being explicitly named. This is particularly relevant in the context of Danish anti-racism initiatives, where broad and seemingly neutral categories may obscure significant internal differentiation and unequal exposure to harm. In this thesis, an intersectional lens is used to examine which experiences of racism become legible within policy, and which are marginalised or excluded. This includes attention to how certain forms of racism are recognised as serious and actionable, while others are rendered secondary, ambiguous, or outside the scope of state intervention. It also involves analysing how policy measures implicitly assume particular subject positions, for example by constructing some groups primarily as victims in need of protection, while positioning others as objects of regulation, education, or behavioural change.

Intersectionality is particularly relevant for analysing the effects and silences of policy problem representations. By foregrounding the interaction of multiple power relations, it enables a critical examination of how policies may reproduce inequality even when framed in universalistic or inclusive terms. In this sense, intersectionality supports the analysis of how anti-racism initiatives may simultaneously acknowledge racial harm while failing to address the specific conditions under which that harm is experienced by differently positioned groups (Crenshaw, 1989).

## Critical race theory and critical racism studies

Critical race theory and critical racism studies provide the conceptual tools for analysing how racism is framed, managed, and depoliticised within state policy. Central to this body of scholarship is the insistence that racism should be understood not primarily as individual prejudice or extremist ideology, but as a structural and institutional phenomenon that is deeply embedded in the formation and governance of modern nation-states (Goldberg, 2002; Hesse, 2007; Lentin, 2020).

Goldberg's theorisation of the racial state is particularly important for this thesis, as it foregrounds the role of state institutions and policy regimes in producing and sustaining racial orderings. From this perspective, state commitments to equality and anti-discrimination do not necessarily disrupt racial hierarchies, but may instead reconfigure them through new administrative, legal, and discursive practices (Goldberg, 2002). Lentin extends this critique by analysing how contemporary anti-racism discourse often operates through a narrowing of racism, framing it as exceptional, episodic, or attitudinal, rather than as systemic and

historically rooted (Lentin, 2020). Hesse similarly highlights how European states tend to externalise racism, positioning it as incompatible with national values and democracy, and thereby displacing it onto marginal actors or “imported” conflicts (Hesse, 2007).

Within this thesis, critical race theory and critical racism studies are used to interrogate how racism is defined and located within Danish policy texts. This includes analysing whether racism is constructed primarily as a matter of individual hostility, hate crime, or extremist behaviour, or whether it is acknowledged as a structural condition linked to institutions, governance practices, and national narratives. It also involves examining how responsibility is allocated, particularly whether the state is positioned as a neutral manager of racism or as an actor implicated in its reproduction.

This theoretical perspective enables a critical reading of anti-racism initiatives as potential technologies of racial governance. Rather than assuming that policies addressing racism are inherently transformative, the analysis examines how they may function to stabilise the moral authority of the state, affirm national self-understandings, and limit the scope of political contestation around racism (Goldberg, 2002; Lentin, 2020; Hesse, 2007).

## Politics of belonging and boundary-making

Theories of belonging and boundary-making provide the primary conceptual framework for analysing how Danish national identity is (re)constructed through anti-racism policy. Yuval-Davis (2011) conceptualises belonging as a political process through which boundaries of membership are drawn, maintained, and contested. Belonging is understood as multi-dimensional, encompassing legal status, social recognition, emotional attachment, and moral worth, all of which are subject to political negotiation.

Wimmer’s work on boundary-making complements this perspective by offering a sociological account of how boundaries between “us” and “them” are produced and institutionalised through classification, categorisation, and policy practices (Wimmer, 2013). Boundaries are not merely symbolic, but are embedded in governance structures that regulate access to rights, resources, and recognition. From this perspective, national identity is continuously reproduced through everyday policy language and administrative categories, rather than only through explicit nationalist discourse.

A Danish perspective on these dynamics is provided by Hervik’s work on nationalism, migration, and racialisation in Denmark. Hervik demonstrates how narratives of Danishness are closely tied to ideas of cultural homogeneity, shared values, and moral

community, and how these narratives are reproduced through political discourse and state practices (Hervik, 2011; 2015). His work is particularly relevant for analysing how anti-racism initiatives may simultaneously articulate commitments to equality while reaffirming implicit norms of national belonging that position racialised minorities as conditional members of the national community.

In this thesis, the politics of belonging and boundary-making are used to analyse how policy texts implicitly define who belongs to the nation, under what conditions, and on what terms. This includes examining the construction of an implied national “we”, the identification of threats to social cohesion or democratic values, and the positioning of racialised and minoritised citizens in relation to these narratives. Attention is paid to how belonging is offered through conditional inclusion, for example through expectations of participation, compliance, trust, or alignment with dominant values (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Wimmer, 2013; Hervik, 2011).

The three theoretical perspectives provide a coherent framework for interpreting the policy texts analysed in this thesis. Intersectionality enables an analysis of how policy problem representations generate uneven effects and silences across intersecting social positions. Critical race theory and critical racism studies illuminate how racism is governed, narrowed, and displaced within state discourse. Theories of belonging and boundary-making provide the conceptual tools for analysing how national identity and membership are constructed through policy.

While the WPR approach structures the analytical process by guiding attention to problem representations, assumptions, and effects, the theories outlined in this chapter specify the forms of power and exclusion that are at stake. This separation ensures analytical clarity, with the methodological framework guiding how the analysis is conducted and the theoretical framework shaping how the findings are interpreted.

## Analysis

### Governing racism, national identity and belonging in Danish policy

Across the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) and the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024), racism is governed through a set of overlapping problem representations that appear to stabilise Danish national identity as fundamentally democratic, tolerant and morally coherent. Rather than approaching racism as a structural feature of social

and institutional arrangements, the policies seemingly construct racism as a disruption to an otherwise cohesive national community. In line with Bacchi's argument that policies do not respond to problems but actively constitute them (Bacchi, 2009), the proposed measures in both documents make racism intelligible in particular, and politically consequential, ways. A central feature of this problematisation is the repeated construction of racism as incompatible with Danish values. In the foreword to the Action Plan Against Racism, the government states that "racism has no place in Denmark" (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). This formulation is immediately followed by an assertion of national pride, emphasising that Denmark "stands at the forefront in the fight against racism" (p. 4). One could argue that this opening does more than set a normative tone; it establishes a moral-national boundary within which racism is positioned as external to Danishness. Racism thus appears as something that enters the national space, rather than something produced through it.

This boundary-making is further reinforced through the explicit statement that "racism is un-Danish" (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). This formulation can be read as a powerful problem representation that displaces racism from the nation-state and relocates it in individual behaviour, ignorance or moral failure. As Hesse (2007) and Lentin (2020) have argued, such externalisation is characteristic of European state discourses that seek to reconcile commitments to equality with the ongoing reproduction of racialised hierarchies. One could therefore argue that by defining racism as incompatible with national identity, the policy simultaneously affirms Denmark's moral innocence.

At the same time, racism is framed as a threat to social cohesion rather than primarily as a violation of rights or a manifestation of structural power. The action plan states that racism "damages social cohesion in Denmark and erodes the shared understanding we have with one another" (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). This framing arguably shifts the harm of racism from racialised and minoritised citizens to the national community as a whole. Racism becomes a collective inconvenience, something "none of us can accept" (p. 4), rather than a condition that disproportionately structures the lives of specific groups. From an intersectional perspective, this universalising move risks flattening asymmetries of power and exposure, rendering differentiated experiences of racism less visible (Crenshaw, 1989).

A similar logic can be observed in the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, expressed through a different temporal and political register. Here, antisemitism is framed as an acute crisis, triggered by specific events and requiring immediate action. The agreement opens by affirming that "Danish Jews are part of Danish

society. They are our fellow citizens. Part of our shared history, life, and culture” (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, 2024, p. 1). This explicit articulation of belonging positions Jewish citizens as unquestionably inside the national “we”. One could argue that belonging here is not conditional or aspirational, but stated as a historical fact.

At the same time, antisemitism is framed as a defining moral test for the nation. The agreement states that “we once again stand at a defining moment in our history, and in Denmark we will not accept antisemitism” (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, 2024, p. 1). This language situates antisemitism within a national historical narrative, linking present policy action to Denmark’s self-understanding as a protector of Jewish life. It seems that antisemitism is not only a social problem but a threat to the moral integrity of the Danish state itself.

The urgency attributed to antisemitism is further reinforced through references to security, protection and extraordinary measures. The agreement emphasises that Jewish citizens must be able to “live in safety” (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, 2024, p. 1), and proposes enhanced penal measures and policing capacities. These proposals seemingly indicate that antisemitism is represented as a security problem, legitimising exceptional forms of state intervention. In contrast, racism in the broader sense is addressed through long-term strategies of education, dialogue, and awareness, suggesting a different temporal and political status.

One could argue that this differentiation produces a hierarchy of racism within state policy. Antisemitism is treated as an urgent, existential threat, while other forms of racism are governed as diffuse, cultural or pedagogical challenges. From an intersectional lens, this hierarchy has implications for which harms are recognised as serious, and which groups are positioned as deserving immediate protection (Crenshaw, 1989). It also raises questions about how histories, geopolitics, and dominant narratives shape the visibility of certain racisms over others.

Across both documents, racism is further individualised through an emphasis on attitudes, behaviour, and knowledge deficits. The Action Plan Against Racism explicitly warns against defining racism “so broadly that the concept loses its meaning” (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 5). While this may be intended to preserve conceptual clarity, it arguably also functions to police the boundaries of legitimate claims. By cautioning against overuse of the term, the policy implicitly positions some experiences and interpretations as excessive or unwarranted. One could argue that this narrows the political space for contestation, aligning

with what Lentin (2020) describes as the depoliticisation of racism through definitional containment.

Similarly, many proposed measures focus on education, awareness and behavioural correction. Racism appears to persist because individuals lack understanding or fail to internalise shared values. From a critical race perspective, this focus on individual change risks obscuring the role of institutions and governance practices in reproducing racial inequality (Goldberg, 2002). It also positions racialised subjects in ambivalent ways: as victims in need of protection, but also as objects of integration, education, and responsabilisation.

These dynamics are particularly visible in the action plan's linkage between anti-racism and integration. The plan states that efforts against racism are "an important part of the integration effort" and emphasises expectations that newcomers adopt Danish values (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). One could argue that this framing subtly positions racialised minorities as both the subjects and objects of anti-racism policy. Belonging appears conditional upon alignment with dominant norms, rather than as an unconditional aspect of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Collectively, these problem representations suggest that anti-racism policy in Denmark functions not only as a response to harm, but also as a technology of national self-affirmation. By constructing racism as un-Danish, episodic, and primarily behavioural, the policies stabilise a national identity centred on tolerance, cohesion, and moral responsibility. At the same time, this framing arguably limits the extent to which structural and institutional racism can be articulated as political problems requiring transformation.

For racialised and minoritised citizens, the implications are complex. While the policies offer recognition, protection, and inclusion, they do so within a framework that emphasises cohesion, values, and conditional belonging. Experiences of racism that challenge national self-understandings may therefore be difficult to articulate without appearing disruptive or excessive. In this sense, anti-racism policy can be understood as simultaneously addressing and containing racism, governing it in ways that reproduce existing boundaries of belonging and national identity (Bacchi, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Wimmer, 2013).

## Governing racism through national moral exceptionalism

Altogether, the two policy documents can be read as participating in the ongoing reproduction of Danish national identity through what could be described as moral

exceptionalism. Racism is not simply addressed as a social harm but is governed in ways that repeatedly reaffirm Denmark as a fundamentally tolerant and democratic society. One could argue that this moral positioning is not incidental, but constitutive of how racism is rendered governable in the first place.

In the Action Plan Against Racism (2025), the insistence that racism “has no place in Denmark” (p. 4) is paired with repeated references to national pride and Denmark’s leading role in combating racism. This combination arguably produces a policy logic in which racism becomes intelligible only as a deviation from an otherwise coherent moral order. Such formulations are analytically significant because they shape what kinds of problems can be recognised and what kinds of solutions appear appropriate (Bacchi, 2009).

Similarly, in the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024), antisemitism is framed as incompatible with Danish history and values, and as something that must be rejected in order to protect “the open and free society” (p. 1). One could argue that antisemitism is thus positioned as a threat not only to Jewish citizens, but to Denmark’s self-understanding as a moral nation. This framing arguably elevates antisemitism to a national concern, while simultaneously displacing racism from the ordinary workings of state institutions.

Critical racism studies offer useful tools for interpreting these dynamics. Goldberg’s (2002) concept of the racial state highlights how modern states often manage racism by publicly condemning it while continuing to reproduce racialised hierarchies through policy and governance. In this light, Danish anti-racism initiatives can be read as simultaneously acknowledging racism and containing it within a narrative of national moral virtue.

## Temporalities of racism: crisis, delay and political urgency

A further dimension that emerges from an integrated reading of the two texts concerns the temporal framing of racism. Racism is not governed as a uniform or continuous condition, but through differentiated temporalities that shape political urgency and legitimacy.

The Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024) constructs antisemitism as an acute and escalating crisis. References to a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents following 7 October 2023, and to a “defining moment in our history” (p. 1), situate antisemitism within a temporal register of emergency. One could argue that this crisis framing legitimises extraordinary measures, such as enhanced policing, stricter penalties, and intensified monitoring. In Bacchi’s terms, the proposed solutions reveal that the problem is

represented as one requiring immediate containment rather than long-term transformation (Bacchi, 2009).

By contrast, racism in the broader sense is framed in the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) as a persistent but gradual challenge. The plan emphasises long-term efforts, dialogue, and incremental change, and notes that this is the first comprehensive action plan against racism since 2010 (p. 4). One could argue that this temporal delay implicitly positions racism as less urgent or less politically pressing than antisemitism. The effect is not necessarily to deny racism, but to govern it through slower, less disruptive forms of intervention.

From an intersectional perspective, this temporal differentiation matters. It suggests that some experiences of racism are recognised as crises demanding immediate protection, while others are treated as background conditions to be managed over time. This uneven distribution of urgency may contribute to hierarchies of victimhood and protection, shaping which harms are perceived as intolerable and which are normalised (Crenshaw, 1989).

## Silences and the limits of structural critique

An important aspect of WPR analysis involves attending not only to what is problematised, but also to what remains unproblematised (Bacchi, 2009). Across both policy texts, one could argue that structural and institutional racism occupies a notably marginal position.

While the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) briefly acknowledges historical power relations in relation to discrimination against Greenlanders, racism is otherwise rarely connected to state practices, legal frameworks or migration regimes. Instead, racism is predominantly located in interpersonal interactions, cultural misunderstandings or extremist behaviour. The policy explicitly warns against defining racism “so broadly that the concept loses its meaning” (p. 5), which may function to constrain structural interpretations of racism.

Similarly, the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024) focuses primarily on protection, security and education, rather than on examining how state policies may contribute to racialisation or exclusion. One could argue that the absence of institutional self-critique reinforces the state’s position as a neutral arbiter of racism rather than as an implicated actor.

From a critical race perspective, these silences are politically consequential. Lentin (2020) argues that contemporary anti-racism often operates through a narrowing of racism, rendering it exceptional, individualised and disconnected from state power. The Danish policies analysed here appear to exemplify this tendency. By limiting the scope of racism to

specific behaviours or events, the policies arguably foreclose deeper questions about how racialised inequalities are produced and sustained through governance.

One of the most striking silences across the analysed policy texts concerns the absence of anti-Muslim racism and the racialisation of “non-Western” Danish citizens as explicit policy objects. This silence is particularly notable given that ECRI identifies Muslims as “the main group falling victims of hate speech in Denmark” (ECRI, 2022, p. 19) and repeatedly calls for targeted measures to address anti-Muslim discrimination.

The Action Plan Against Racism’s failure to name these groups can be understood through what Hesse conceptualises as a *conceptual double bind* of liberal anti-racism. In this bind, the state simultaneously acknowledges racism as morally wrong while refusing to recognise its own role in producing racial hierarchies, particularly when these hierarchies are tied to national identity, security, and governance (Hesse, 2007). One could argue that naming anti-Muslim racism too directly would risk exposing how Danish state practices—from integration policy to housing legislation—actively participate in racialisation.

This silence is further reinforced by the selective application of intersectionality. While the Action Plan addresses Greenlanders, following ECRI’s recommendation that “the Danish Government... offer access to tailor-made integration and inclusion courses to Greenlanders” (ECRI, 2022, p. 32), it remains silent on Muslims and “non-Western” citizens, despite ECRI’s parallel and even more forceful recommendations regarding anti-Muslim racism (ECRI, 2022, pp. 33–35). One could argue that this selectivity reflects a hierarchy of racialised subjects that are differently compatible with Danish national self-understandings. Greenlanders can be positioned as internal to the Danish realm through a colonial narrative of responsibility and care, whereas Muslims and “non-Western” citizens are more readily positioned as cultural outsiders whose marginalisation is reframed as an issue of integration, values, or social cohesion rather than racism.

The temporal dimension further sharpens this silence. In 2022, the Danish government committed to launching an action plan against racism, yet the plan did not appear until 2025 (Lagoni Pedersen & Nabil, 2024). During this period, ECRI repeatedly reiterated its concerns and recommendations, particularly regarding anti-Muslim racism (ECRI, 2022). The eventual plan’s failure to meaningfully engage with these concerns suggests that delay itself may function as a political strategy, allowing pressure to dissipate while maintaining the appearance of responsiveness.

From a WPR perspective, these silences are not absences to be filled but productive effects of the problem representations themselves (Bacchi, 2009). By not naming certain

racisms, the policy actively delimits the scope of legitimate anti-racist intervention and, in doing so, reproduces a national identity that appears anti-racist while remaining structurally invested in racialised exclusions.

An additional silence that warrants explicit attention concerns the relationship between racism and core state policy areas such as housing, welfare, and migration governance. While the Action Plan Against Racism addresses discrimination in specific sectors, it does not engage with how broader policy frameworks may actively produce racialised exclusion. This is particularly striking given ECRI's recommendation that Denmark avoid forced evictions as a tool for achieving demographic balance in so-called "parallel society" areas, and instead introduce positive incentives for inclusion (ECRI, 2022, p. 35).

One could argue that the absence of this discussion reflects a deeper reluctance to confront how racialisation is embedded in ordinary policy instruments. Housing policies aimed at reshaping neighbourhood composition are not framed as potentially racist, but as neutral tools for cohesion and integration. This framing forecloses the possibility of analysing such policies as sites of racial governance. Racism is thus delimited to interpersonal discrimination and extremist violence, while structural mechanisms of exclusion remain outside the scope of anti-racist policy.

This silence reinforces Hesse's conceptual double bind. Acknowledging racism in housing or migration governance would require questioning foundational assumptions about national cohesion, security, and deservingness. Instead, these domains are insulated from anti-racist critique, allowing the state to maintain a self-image as anti-racist while continuing to deploy racialising policy tools.

## Subject positions: victims, learners and responsible citizens

The problem representations identified above also produce specific subject positions. Racism is governed not only through measures, but through the kinds of subjects these measures presuppose and enact (Bacchi, 2009).

In both documents, racialised and minoritised citizens are positioned primarily as victims in need of protection or recognition. This is particularly evident in the antisemitism agreement, where Jewish citizens are explicitly framed as deserving safety and security as part of the national community (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism,

2024, p. 1). One could argue that this recognition affirms belonging, but also fixes Jewish citizens within a victimised subject position.

At the same time, the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) frequently positions citizens as learners who must be educated into tolerance and shared values. Racism is to be addressed through awareness-raising, dialogue and democratic education, especially among children and young people. While these measures are presented as inclusive, they also imply that racism persists because individuals fail to internalise the correct norms. Moreover, the explicit linkage between anti-racism and integration policy positions racialised minorities as responsible for aligning themselves with Danish values. The plan emphasises that those who come to Denmark are expected to “take Denmark and Danish values to heart” (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). One could argue that this framing constructs belonging as conditional and performative, rather than as an unconditional aspect of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

## Anti-racism as a technology of boundary-making

When read through theories of belonging and boundary-making, the policies analysed here can be understood as participating in the continuous construction of the national “we”. Anti-racism is not merely a protective intervention but a boundary-making practice that delineates who belongs, on what terms and under what conditions.

The explicit inclusion of Danish Jews as “our fellow citizens” (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, 2024, p. 1) contrasts with the more ambivalent positioning of other racialised groups, who are often addressed through integration frameworks. One could argue that this differential articulation of belonging reflects broader hierarchies within national narratives, where some minorities are more easily incorporated into the imagined community than others (Hervik, 2011; Wimmer, 2013).

In this sense, anti-racism policy can be read as simultaneously inclusive and exclusionary. It extends recognition and protection while reaffirming normative expectations of behaviour, values, and loyalty. Racism is governed in ways that protect the coherence of the national community, even as they address specific harms.

## **Social cohesion as an affective governing rationality**

The repeated emphasis on social cohesion across the policy texts can also be read as an affective mode of governance. Rather than functioning solely as a descriptive or normative

concept, cohesion appears to operate as an emotional register through which racism is made politically legible. One could argue that racism is framed not only as morally wrong or socially harmful, but as something that disturbs collective comfort, trust, and a sense of togetherness.

In the Action Plan Against Racism, racism is said to undermine “the shared understanding we have with one another” and to damage cohesion within society (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4). This formulation arguably shifts attention from racism as a relation of power to racism as an affective disruption. Racism becomes problematic insofar as it unsettles the emotional fabric of the nation, rather than because it produces unequal life chances or structural exclusion. One could argue that this framing aligns anti-racism with the management of collective feelings, such as reassurance, harmony, and social calm.

From the perspective of the politics of belonging, this affective framing is significant. Yuval-Davis (2011) emphasises that belonging is not only about formal membership, but about emotional attachment and feelings of being “at home”. When racism is framed as a threat to cohesion, anti-racism policy may function to restore emotional equilibrium rather than to challenge underlying hierarchies. In this sense, cohesion operates as a technology of governance that prioritises comfort and stability over conflict and critique.

The affective dimension also helps explain why structural critiques of racism can appear politically uncomfortable or excessive. One could argue that naming racism as embedded in state practices risks disrupting the affective narrative of Denmark as cohesive and morally unified. As a result, anti-racism becomes oriented toward calming tensions rather than exposing them, which may further narrow the space for contestation.

## Part conclusion

As a whole, the integrated analysis suggests that Danish government initiatives addressing racism do not merely respond to racism as a social problem, but actively participate in constructing racism, national identity and belonging in specific ways. Racism is represented as exceptional, episodic and primarily behavioural, while Danish national identity is stabilised as tolerant, cohesive, and morally grounded.

For racialised and minoritised citizens, the implications are ambivalent. While the policies offer recognition and protection, they do so within a framework that limits structural critique and conditions belonging to alignment with dominant norms. This arguably

highlights how anti-racism can function as a technology of governance that simultaneously addresses and contains racial injustice (Bacchi, 2009).

## Effects and implications of governing racism through policy

### Discursive effects: narrowing the meaning of racism

One of the most significant effects of the problem representations identified above is the narrowing of what can legitimately be understood and articulated as racism. Across the analysed policy texts, racism is seemingly constructed as a phenomenon that must be clearly bounded in order to preserve its political and moral force. The Action Plan Against Racism explicitly cautions against defining racism too broadly, arguing that excessive conceptual expansion risks undermining public support for anti-racism efforts (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 5). One could argue that this concern with definitional restraint produces a discursive effect in which certain experiences and interpretations of racism are rendered excessive, inappropriate or politically inconvenient.

From a WPR perspective, this is not merely a semantic issue but a governing effect. By delimiting what racism can be said to be, the policy implicitly structures which claims are intelligible and which are likely to be dismissed or marginalised (Bacchi, 2009). Experiences of racism that point toward institutional practices, migration regimes, or welfare governance may appear to exceed the acceptable scope of the term, particularly when they challenge national self-understandings. As Lentin (2020) argues, contemporary anti-racism frequently operates through such containment strategies, acknowledging racism while restricting its analytical and political reach.

This narrowing effect has implications for racialised and minoritised citizens who seek recognition of harm. One could argue that when racism is framed primarily as individual prejudice or extreme behaviour, claims that foreground structural or systemic dimensions risk being perceived as exaggerations or as attempts to politicise issues that the state has already framed as settled. The effect is a constrained discursive space in which racism can be named only in specific, state-sanctioned ways.

### Subjectification effects: producing governable anti-racist subjects

The policies analysed also produce a range of subject positions that shape how individuals and groups are expected to relate to racism and anti-racism. Bacchi (2009) emphasises that

policy problem representations are always productive of subjectivities, and this is clearly visible in the Danish anti-racism initiatives.

Racialised and minoritised citizens are frequently positioned as victims in need of protection, education, or reassurance. In the antisemitism agreement, Jewish citizens are explicitly constructed as subjects whose safety must be guaranteed by the state, reinforcing a protective relationship grounded in historical responsibility (Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism, 2024, p. 1). While this recognition is significant, one could argue that it also fixes Jewish citizens within a subject position defined primarily by vulnerability, potentially limiting the space for agency beyond victimhood.

At the same time, the Action Plan Against Racism positions citizens, particularly racialised minorities, as learners who must be educated into tolerance, democratic participation and shared values. Racism is to be addressed through awareness-raising, dialogue, and behavioural change, especially among young people. This pedagogical framing arguably constructs racism as a failure of learning rather than as a consequence of power relations. From an intersectional perspective, this risks obscuring how racialised harm is differentially produced and experienced across social positions (Crenshaw, 1989).

Moreover, the explicit linkage between anti-racism and integration policy produces a subject position in which racialised minorities are simultaneously beneficiaries of protection and objects of governance. The expectation that newcomers must adopt Danish values in order to belong (Action Plan Against Racism, 2025, p. 4) arguably places the burden of anti-racism on those most affected by racism. One could argue that this responsabilisation effect shifts attention away from state accountability and toward individual adaptation.

### Political effects: limiting the scope of contestation

Another key effect of the identified problem representations concerns the narrowing of legitimate political contestation around racism. By framing racism as un-Danish, episodic and primarily behavioural, the policies arguably reduce the space for structural critique. Racism becomes something to be managed, corrected, or prevented, rather than something that calls for fundamental political transformation.

From a critical race perspective, this has important implications for democratic debate. Goldberg (2002) argues that racial states often manage racism by incorporating it into administrative and legal frameworks, thereby neutralising its radical political potential. The Danish policies analysed here can be read as exemplifying this logic. Anti-racism is

institutionalised in ways that stabilise existing governance arrangements, rather than opening them up to deeper questioning.

This effect is particularly evident in the emphasis on social cohesion. When racism is framed primarily as a threat to cohesion and shared understanding, political disagreement about racism risks being interpreted as divisive or socially harmful. One could argue that this produces a chilling effect on public debate, where critiques of structural racism may be perceived as undermining unity rather than as contributing to democratic accountability.

### Differential effects: hierarchies of recognition and protection

The differentiated treatment of antisemitism and racism more broadly also produces unequal effects across racialised groups. As discussed earlier, antisemitism is governed through a crisis frame that legitimises urgent and extraordinary measures, while other forms of racism are addressed through slower, pedagogical strategies. One could argue that this produces a hierarchy of recognition in which some harms are treated as existential threats to the nation, while others are normalised as ongoing social challenges.

From an intersectional perspective, this hierarchy has concrete implications. Groups whose experiences align with dominant national narratives of historical responsibility and moral obligation may receive more immediate protection and recognition, while others are positioned as subjects of integration and behavioural change (Crenshaw, 1989). This uneven distribution of urgency and legitimacy can shape access to resources, protection and political attention.

Moreover, the crisis framing of antisemitism may inadvertently reinforce the perception that racism becomes politically relevant only when it threatens national self-understandings or international reputation. Racism that does not fit this frame may remain less visible and less actionable within policy discourse.

### Effects on belonging: conditional inclusion and moral membership

Finally, the analysed policies have significant implications for belonging. Drawing on Yuval-Davis (2011), belonging can be understood as a political process through which membership is negotiated and conditional. The Danish anti-racism initiatives repeatedly articulate an inclusive national “we”, but this inclusion is often conditional upon alignment with dominant norms and values.

The explicit affirmation of Jewish belonging in the antisemitism agreement contrasts with the more ambivalent positioning of other racialised groups, who are frequently addressed through integration frameworks. One could argue that this differential articulation of belonging reflects broader boundary-making processes within Danish nationalism, where some minorities are more easily incorporated into the imagined community than others (Hervik, 2011; Wimmer, 2013). As an effect, anti-racism policy may simultaneously extend protection and reinforce boundaries. Belonging is offered, but it is framed as something that must be maintained through appropriate behaviour, participation and loyalty. Racism is governed in ways that protect the moral coherence of the national community, even as they address specific harms.

### Concluding reflections on effects

Overall, these effects suggest that Danish government initiatives addressing racism function as complex technologies of governance. They shape how racism can be named, who can speak it, how subjects are positioned, and what forms of political action are considered legitimate. While the policies undeniably seek to reduce harm, they also operate to stabilise national identity, delimit critique, and condition belonging.

From a WPR perspective, the key analytical insight is not whether the policies succeed or fail, but how they make certain ways of thinking and acting possible while foreclosing others (Bacchi, 2009). For racialised and minoritised citizens, this produces a landscape in which recognition and protection coexist with constraint and conditionality.

### How and where are these problem representations produced, disseminated and defended?

Following Bacchi, one could argue that problem representations do not originate in isolated policy texts but are instead produced within, and sustained by, broader discursive and institutional environments (Bacchi, 2009). In this case, the Danish government's Action Plan Against Racism (2025) and the Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism (2024) appear to draw on already sedimented public and political discourses about threat, cohesion, and national responsibility.

The prioritisation of antisemitism as an object of urgent political intervention arguably reflects a well-established moral and political consensus within Danish and broader European

political discourse, where antisemitism is recognised as a historically exceptional form of hatred demanding extraordinary protective measures. This is visible in the speed with which the antisemitism agreement was adopted and in its framing as a response to an acute security situation following 7 October 2023. One could argue that this urgency is enabled by a dominant discourse in which antisemitism is already intelligible as racism, violence, and threat to democracy.

By contrast, the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) appears to be produced within a discursive environment where racism is more ambiguously defined, more frequently individualised and more readily displaced onto questions of behaviour, attitudes, and social cohesion rather than structures of power. This difference arguably helps explain why the plan emerged only after prolonged political delay, despite repeated calls from international monitoring bodies such as ECRI for a comprehensive anti-racism strategy (ECRI, 2022). ECRI explicitly notes that, despite widespread evidence, “Muslims in Denmark are increasingly depicted, including by politicians of different political parties, as a threat to Danish values and culture” (ECRI, 2022, p. 6). At the same time, ECRI observes a lack of consistent political counter-speech, noting that racist hate speech is often tolerated “under police protection provided in the name of freedom of expression” (ECRI, 2022, p. 6). One could argue that this discursive tolerance creates the conditions under which anti-Muslim racism is rendered politically unspeakable as racism, even while antisemitism is clearly articulated as such. Seen through a WPR lens, these discursive environments do not merely surround the policy texts; they actively shape what can appear as a legitimate policy problem and what cannot (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). The absence of anti-Muslim racism as a named and central problem in the Action Plan Against Racism thus seems less like an oversight and more like a reflection of the discursive limits within which the plan is produced.

### Genealogical echoes: from “parallel society” to anti-racism governance

One way of approaching WPR Question 6 is to situate the analysed problem representations within a longer genealogy of Danish governance of race, migration, and belonging. One could argue that the silences and priorities identified in the Action Plan Against Racism (2025) do not emerge in a vacuum, but rather echo earlier and ongoing political discourses in which racialised minorities, particularly Muslims and people categorised as “non-Western”, are governed primarily through frames of integration, cohesion, and security rather than racism.

ECRI's sixth monitoring report on Denmark explicitly links discrimination against Muslims to broader political and media discourse, noting that Muslims are "increasingly depicted, including by politicians of different political parties, as a threat to Danish values and culture" (ECRI, 2022, p. 6). One could argue that this depiction aligns closely with earlier policy frameworks centred on "parallel societies", ghettos, and value-based integration requirements. Within such frameworks, racialisation is rarely named as racism, but instead reframed as cultural incompatibility, social dysfunction or risk to cohesion. Seen from this genealogical perspective, the absence of anti-Muslim racism as a central category in the Action Plan Against Racism appears less anomalous. It seems to reflect a broader continuity in which racialised governance is normalised through integration policy rather than problematised as racism. From a WPR standpoint, this continuity helps explain how certain forms of racism are rendered politically unintelligible as racism, even when international monitoring bodies repeatedly identify them as such (Bacchi, 2009).

At the same time, the explicit inclusion of Greenlanders in the Action Plan Against Racism can be read as genealogically consistent with Denmark's postcolonial self-understanding. ECRI recommends that the Danish government offer "tailor-made integration and inclusion courses to Greenlanders" (ECRI, 2022, p. 32), a recommendation that the Action Plan appears to take up. One could argue that Greenlanders are more readily accommodated within an anti-racist framework because their marginalisation can be framed through a narrative of historical responsibility that does not fundamentally disrupt dominant constructions of Danish national identity.

This selective genealogy suggests that racism becomes actionable when it can be historicised, externalised or morally contained. Racism that directly implicates contemporary state practices toward Muslims and "non-Western" citizens, by contrast, appears to remain outside the boundaries of legitimate anti-racist intervention.

### Dissemination and defence: legitimacy, delay, and international critique

Another aspect of question 6 concerns how problem representations are disseminated and defended. One could argue that the three-year delay between the Danish government's 2022 commitment to launch an action plan against racism and the publication of the Action Plan in 2025 is itself analytically significant. During this period, ECRI repeatedly reiterated its concern that Denmark lacked a comprehensive and targeted anti-racism strategy, particularly with regard to anti-Muslim racism (ECRI, 2022).

The eventual publication of the Action Plan could therefore be read as a response to sustained international pressure. However, the content of the plan suggests a selective uptake of that critique. While the plan adopts the form of a national action plan, it does not fully incorporate ECRI's emphasis on anti-Muslim racism, despite ECRI's explicit recommendation that Denmark introduce "a national action plan against racism, with a particular emphasis on preventing anti-Muslim racism and discrimination" (ECRI, 2022, p. 33). This selective uptake can seemingly be understood as a defensive strategy that preserves state legitimacy while limiting the scope of critique. By producing an action plan that affirms Denmark's commitment to anti-racism in general terms, the government can be seen as responding to international expectations without fundamentally reconfiguring dominant problem representations. Racism is acknowledged, but only within boundaries that remain compatible with existing governance rationalities.

This dynamic illustrates how problem representations are not only produced but actively defended. The defence does not necessarily take the form of explicit rejection of alternative framings, but rather of partial incorporation that neutralises their transformative potential.

## How could these problem representations be thought about differently?

Thinking otherwise, in Bacchi's sense, requires questioning the underlying logic that renders some forms of racism governable and others unsayable. One could argue that a different problem representation would begin by treating racism not primarily as a matter of individual prejudice or social cohesion, but as a historically produced and institutionally embedded relation of power.

From this perspective, anti-Muslim racism and racialisation of "non-Western" citizens would not appear as sensitive or divisive topics to be avoided, but as central mechanisms through which Danish national belonging is continuously policed. ECRI's repeated emphasis on anti-Muslim racism as a major concern suggests precisely such an alternative framing. In its sixth monitoring report, ECRI recommends "a national action plan against racism, with a particular emphasis on preventing anti-Muslim racism and discrimination" (ECRI, 2022, p. 33), thereby explicitly naming what the Danish Action Plan later leaves largely unaddressed. Another way of thinking differently would involve taking intersectionality seriously not merely as a rhetorical commitment but as an analytical and political orientation. From such a

perspective, it becomes difficult to justify why groups identified by ECRI as among the most exposed to discrimination in Denmark, particularly Muslims and people categorised as “non-Western”, are effectively absent from the Action Plan Against Racism, while Greenlanders are explicitly addressed.

This selective visibility suggests that alternative problem representations are not only imaginable but already articulated by international bodies, civil society actors, and earlier monitoring reports. The issue, then, is not a lack of available knowledge, but rather which knowledges are taken up as politically actionable.

### **ECRI as a counter-problematization of racism**

The repeated recommendations issued by ECRI offer a useful point of contrast that highlights the contingency of Danish policy problem representations. ECRI consistently frames racism, particularly anti-Muslim racism, as a structural and political issue requiring targeted and explicit intervention. In its sixth monitoring report, ECRI recommends that Denmark adopt a national action plan against racism “with a particular emphasis on preventing anti-Muslim racism and discrimination” (ECRI, 2022, p. 33).

One could argue that ECRI’s framing constitutes an alternative problem representation in Bacchi’s sense. Rather than treating racism as a diffuse cultural issue, ECRI positions it as a systemic pattern requiring state accountability. The fact that this framing is only partially taken up in the Action Plan Against Racism underscores that the Danish approach is not inevitable, but selective. WPR argues that the existence of such alternative framings is analytically important. It demonstrates that different ways of representing racism are already available, but are actively marginalised within national policy. This reinforces the argument that silences around anti-Muslim racism and “non-Western” citizens are not due to lack of evidence, but to political limits on what can be problematised

### **Delay as a mode of governing critique**

The temporal gap between the Danish government’s 2022 commitment to launch an action plan against racism and the plan’s eventual publication in 2025 warrants further analytical attention. One could argue that delay itself functions as a mode of governance, shaping how critique is absorbed and neutralised.

During this period, international bodies such as ECRI repeatedly reiterated their concerns regarding racism in Denmark, particularly anti-Muslim discrimination (ECRI, 2022). The eventual publication of the Action Plan can thus be read as a response to sustained pressure.

However, the content of the plan suggests that delay allowed for a reframing of the problem in less confrontational terms.

Arguably delay does not merely postpone action; it reshapes the problem representation. By the time the plan emerges, urgency has dissipated, and racism can be addressed as a general, long-term challenge rather than an acute political issue. One could argue that this temporal strategy enables responsiveness without transformation, maintaining state legitimacy while limiting structural critique.

### Escaping the liberal double bind of anti-racism

WPR step 7 invites reflection on how the identified problem representations could be thought about differently. In this context, Hesse's concept of the conceptual double bind is particularly useful. Hesse argues that liberal democratic states are caught in a bind in which they must simultaneously condemn racism and deny its structural embeddedness, especially where acknowledging such embeddedness would implicate the state itself (Hesse, 2007). One could argue that Danish anti-racism policy exemplifies this double bind. On the one hand, racism is unequivocally condemned as morally wrong and incompatible with Danish values. On the other hand, racism is framed in ways that systematically avoid naming how state policies, institutional practices, and dominant national narratives contribute to racialisation. The result is an anti-racism that is morally assertive but structurally constrained.

Thinking otherwise would require breaking with this bind by reframing racism as a feature of governance rather than as a deviation from it. From such a perspective, anti-Muslim racism would not appear as an uncomfortable or divisive topic, but as a central site where national identity, security, and belonging are actively negotiated. ECRI's repeated insistence on addressing anti-Muslim racism provides a concrete example of such an alternative framing, one that treats racism as systemic rather than exceptional (ECRI, 2022). Intersectionality further strengthens this alternative approach. Taking intersectionality seriously would require analysing how race intersects with religion, migration status, class, and gender in producing differentiated exposure to discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). From this perspective, the absence of Muslims and "non-Western" citizens from the Action Plan Against Racism appears particularly problematic, given that these groups are consistently identified as among the most discriminated against in Denmark. One could argue that intersectionality exposes not only who is absent, but how absence itself functions as a mechanism of power.

Bringing question 6 and step 7 into the analysis makes visible that the problem representations identified earlier are not merely descriptive but deeply political. They are produced through historical continuities, reinforced through selective responsiveness to critique, and defended through silences that protect core governance rationalities. At the same time, alternative ways of thinking are not abstract or speculative. They are already articulated by international bodies such as ECRI and by critical scholarship that foregrounds racism as structural and intersectional. The analytical task, then, is not to invent new understandings of racism, but to show how existing ones are actively marginalised within state policy.

## Discussion: implications for racialised and minoritised citizens in Denmark

This thesis has examined how recent Danish government policy initiatives addressing racism (re)construct Danish national identity and the implications this has for racialised and minoritised citizens. The analysis suggests that anti-racism policy in Denmark operates through a set of problem representations that simultaneously acknowledge racism while limiting how it can be understood, contested, and addressed. In this discussion, these findings are interpreted through the broader body of research on racism, governance, and belonging in Europe and the Nordic context, drawing explicitly on the literature reviewed earlier in the thesis.

### Racism, denial and the management of national self-image

A key implication of the analysis is that Danish anti-racism policy appears to participate in what several scholars have identified as a broader European pattern of racism denial and displacement. Research by Lentin (2020), Goldberg (2006), and Hesse (2007) has shown how European states often position racism as morally unacceptable while simultaneously framing it as exceptional, imported, or incompatible with national values. The finding that racism is repeatedly represented as “un-Danish” in the Action Plan Against Racism aligns closely with this literature.

Studies of Nordic exceptionalism further support this interpretation. Gullestad (2006) and Loftsdóttir and Jensen (2012) have argued that Nordic self-understandings are often

anchored in narratives of equality, progressiveness, and moral superiority, which can make structural racism particularly difficult to name. From this perspective, the Danish policy framing identified in this thesis can be understood as part of a broader regional tendency to reconcile egalitarian self-images with persistent racialised inequalities.

For racialised and minoritised citizens, the implication is that racism is acknowledged primarily at the level of values and norms, while experiences that point toward institutional or systemic discrimination risk being rendered illegible or excessive. This resonates with Ahmed's (2012) analysis of how diversity and anti-racism discourses can function to protect institutional reputations rather than to transform power relations.

### Hierarchies of racism and differential visibility

The differentiated treatment of antisemitism and racism more broadly also echoes findings in the existing literature. Several scholars have noted that European states tend to govern racisms unevenly, with some forms receiving heightened political attention while others are normalised or reframed (Meer, 2014; Lentin & Titley, 2011). The analysis in this thesis suggests that antisemitism is governed through a security and crisis lens, whereas other racisms are addressed through education and integration, producing a hierarchy of urgency and legitimacy.

This hierarchy has implications for which groups are recognised as deserving protection. Research on Islamophobia in Europe has consistently shown that anti-Muslim racism is often reframed as concerns about culture, values, or security rather than racism (Sayyid & Vakil, 2010; Garner & Selod, 2015). The absence of explicit engagement with anti-Muslim racism in the Danish Action Plan Against Racism, despite extensive documentation by ECRI and other bodies, aligns with these findings.

Intersectional scholarship further helps interpret this uneven visibility. Crenshaw (1989) reminds us that policy frameworks often fail to capture how multiple axes of power intersect, resulting in some forms of harm being systematically overlooked. In the Danish case, the selective inclusion of Greenlanders alongside the absence of Muslims and “non-Western” citizens suggests that intersectionality is applied unevenly, shaped by historical narratives and political comfort rather than empirical prevalence of discrimination.

## Integration, responsabilisation and conditional belonging

Another important implication concerns the entanglement of anti-racism with integration governance. The literature on integration in Denmark and other European contexts has long highlighted how integration policies often place disproportionate responsibility on racialised minorities to adapt, perform belonging, and demonstrate loyalty (Schinkel, 2017; Favell, 2001). The analysis in this thesis suggests that anti-racism policy risks being absorbed into this logic.

Hervik's (2011, 2021) work on Danish nationalism and boundary-making is particularly relevant here. He shows how discourses of Danishness are frequently articulated through cultural and moral distinctions that position racialised minorities as perpetual outsiders. When anti-racism is framed as part of integration, racism is subtly repositioned as an obstacle to inclusion rather than as a product of exclusionary governance.

Yuval-Davis' (2011) distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging further illuminates this dynamic. While the policies rhetorically affirm inclusion, they simultaneously enact boundaries by attaching belonging to value alignment and behavioural conformity. For racialised citizens, this produces a form of conditional belonging, where recognition is offered but remains fragile and revocable.

## Structural silences and the limits of policy recognition

The analysis also resonates with a growing body of scholarship on policy silences and non-recognition. Bacchi (2009) emphasises that what policies do not problematise is often as politically significant as what they do. In this case, the absence of sustained engagement with structural racism, migration governance, housing policy, and welfare conditionality mirrors findings in comparative research on European anti-racism strategies (Lentin, 2020; De Genova, 2018).

ECRI's repeated recommendations to Denmark, particularly regarding anti-Muslim racism, provide a clear counterpoint that reinforces this interpretation. That these recommendations are only partially taken up suggests that policy recognition is shaped not by lack of evidence but by political limits on what can be acknowledged without destabilising national narratives. This aligns with Schinkel's (2017) argument that integration and anti-racism policies often function to manage critique rather than to transform underlying power relations.

## Implications for racialised and minoritised citizens

Collectively, the findings suggest that Danish anti-racism policy creates a complex and ambivalent landscape for racialised and minoritised citizens. On the one hand, racism is publicly condemned and certain harms are recognised. On the other hand, the scope of legitimate critique is narrowed, and belonging is governed through conditional and uneven frameworks.

For racialised citizens, this means that experiences of racism may be acknowledged only when they fit dominant policy framings, while structural critiques risk being marginalised. As several scholars have noted, this can contribute to a sense of political disempowerment and mistrust toward institutions that claim to address racism while leaving its root causes intact (Ahmed, 2012; Lentin, 2020).

Rather than assessing policy effectiveness, this thesis contributes to the literature by showing how anti-racism policy in Denmark functions as a site of national identity construction and boundary-making. In doing so, it aligns with and extends existing research on racism, governance, and belonging in Europe, highlighting how even progressive policy initiatives can reproduce the conditions they seek to address.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how recent Danish government policy initiatives to address racism (re)construct Danish national identity, and what the implications of these constructions are for racialised and minoritised citizens in Denmark. Through a comparative poststructural policy analysis of the *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism* (2024) and the *Action Plan Against Racism* (2025), the thesis has demonstrated that these initiatives do not merely respond to racism as a social problem, but actively participate in shaping how racism is understood, governed, and located within the Danish national communities.

The central finding of the thesis is that Danish national identity is (re)constructed through these policy initiatives as fundamentally anti-racist, democratic, and morally intact, while racism is positioned as an external, exceptional, or abnormal phenomenon. This construction allows the state to appear as a neutral protector of vulnerable groups rather than as an actor implicated in the production and maintenance of racialised inequalities. As a result, the policies function not only as instruments of intervention but also as technologies of national self-affirmation.

Across both policy texts, racism is primarily represented as a problem of individual hostility, hate crime, extremist behaviour, or imported conflict, rather than as a structural condition embedded in institutions, governance practices, and national histories. This representation narrows the scope of racism in ways that align with a broader European tendency to externalise racism and frame it as incompatible with national values. By doing so, the policies reaffirm an image of Denmark as a fundamentally just and inclusive society that occasionally needs to correct deviations from its core values, rather than confronting racism as a constitutive feature of the national social order.

The comparative analysis shows that while both initiatives contribute to this overarching construction, they do so in uneven and politically revealing ways. The *Agreement on Strengthened Efforts Against Antisemitism* is characterised by urgency, cross-party consensus, and a strong protective logic. Antisemitism is framed as an acute threat to democratic society, demanding immediate state intervention. Jewish citizens are positioned primarily as victims in need of protection, while antisemitism itself is treated as a dangerous exception to Danish norms. This framing produces a clear moral boundary between a democratic “we” and a racist “them”, thereby reinforcing a cohesive national identity grounded in historical responsibility and liberal democratic values.

In contrast, the *Action Plan Against Racism* presents racism as a diffuse, long-term challenge requiring education, dialogue, and gradual behavioural change. The plan lacks the same sense of urgency and political anchoring, and its broad definition of racism results in a simultaneous expansion and dilution of the problem. While the plan rhetorically acknowledges racism as harmful, it avoids confronting specific structures of racialisation within Danish institutions. As a result, responsibility is frequently displaced onto individuals, civil society actors, and local communities, rather than being assumed by the state itself. Taken together, these differences reveal a hierarchy of racial harms within Danish policy discourse. Some forms of racism are recognised as exceptional, urgent, and threatening to the national community, while others are rendered ordinary, ambiguous, or secondary. This hierarchy reflects and reproduces existing boundary-making processes through which belonging is unevenly distributed.

The implications of these constructions for racialised and minoritised citizens are significant. First, the narrowing of racism to individual acts and extremist behaviour limits the political intelligibility of structural and institutional racism. Experiences of everyday racialisation, discrimination, and exclusion that do not fit the dominant policy representations risk being rendered invisible or unintelligible within official frameworks. This has concrete

consequences for which harms are recognised, which grievances are legitimised, and which forms of redress are made available.

Second, the policies produce differentiated subject positions for racialised groups. Some groups are primarily constructed as vulnerable victims deserving protection, while others are positioned as objects of regulation, education, or behavioural correction. These subject positions are not neutral but are shaped by intersecting dynamics understood through an intersectional lens. Race intersects with religion, migration status, class, and gender in ways that influence how groups are governed and how their belonging is conditioned. Muslims and racialised minorities more broadly are often implicated indirectly through silences, generalisations, or behavioural framings that leave structural power relations unaddressed.

Third, by positioning the Danish state as an external manager of racism rather than an implicated actor, the policies constrain the scope of political contestation. Anti-racism is framed as a matter of implementation, coordination, and awareness-raising rather than as a site of fundamental political disagreement about national identity, history, and power. This depoliticisation risks foreclosing more transformative engagements with racism and reinforces a moral economy in which the nation's self-image remains largely intact. Methodologically, the thesis has demonstrated the value of a poststructural policy analysis inspired by the WPR approach for examining how governing takes place through problem representations. By working backwards from policy proposals, the analysis has shown how racism, national identity, and citizenship are constituted through policy discourse rather than treated as pre-given realities. The comparative design has further strengthened this analysis by revealing how different policy responses within the same political context produce distinct modes of governance and belonging.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that recent Danish government initiatives addressing racism contribute to the reproduction of a national identity that is formally anti-racist yet structurally limited in its capacity to confront racial inequality. While these policies signal commitment and concern, they simultaneously delimit the meanings of racism and belonging in ways that unevenly distribute recognition, protection, and responsibility. For racialised and minoritised citizens, this results in conditional inclusion within a national community that remains defined by implicit norms of Danishness. Addressing racism in more transformative ways would therefore require not only additional policy measures, but a fundamental re-politicisation of how racism, nationhood, and state responsibility are understood within Danish governance.

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