"Not the Irish Way": an exploration into the absence of top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures within the context of migration in Ireland

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Abstract

Despite the fact that a widely criticised international protection system for migrants has existed on the island of Ireland since the dawn of the millennium and that, in recent months, there has been a steep rise in public support for far-right political parties and their anti-migrant views there, it is seldom that Ireland as a nation is ever mentioned in discussions on the securitisation of migration. Whilst one of the aims of this thesis is to, using the Paris School of security studies' notion of routinised *security practices*, demonstrate that migration is, indeed, securitised in Ireland by virtue of the Irish system of accommodation (known as the Direct Provision system) for international protection applicants, its core aim is to explain why migration is *not* securitised in Ireland from a more top-down, Copenhagen perspective. In other European contexts, governments have overtly securitised migration for years now and are only growing more and more comfortable doing so; thus, this begs the question: why not the Irish government? By exploring the racial makeup of Ireland's migrant population, Irish economic reliance on migration, and the country's history of turning a blind eye to techniques of population containment, possible answers to this question will arise. However, it will be through the theory of Ontological Security and, particularly, the concept of ontological (or autobiographical) state narratives that it will become clear how loyalty to a particular *idea* of what constitutes "the Irish way" has led to a historical absence of top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures on the migration scene in Ireland. This thesis will contribute to the existing conversation on the securitisation of migration in two ways: by finally – and explicitly – including the topic of how migrants are treated in *Ireland* to this conversation and by setting out what factors might *constrain* – not *enable*, as is often the focus – governments from securitising migration from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective.

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Introduction

In Ireland there is a Gaelic saying: *céad míle fáilte*. In English it translates to *a hundred thousand welcomes*. It is a phrase that adorns doorways and doormats, and any sort of entryway leading into Irish households and shops alike. It is intended to draw people in, to let people know that they are welcome and will be accepted in Irish spaces. Over time, it has become part of how Ireland defines itself; it is often said that Ireland is *the land of a hundred thousand welcomes* because, on the *Emerald Isle*, everyone is welcome. And while there are no overt conditions attached regarding who exactly is welcome in Ireland, there appears to be an understanding that certain people do not qualify for Ireland's welcome – namely, refugees, asylum seekers and other categories of migrants – or, at least, that they may be welcome, "but on defined terms" (Tipton 2018, para 11). On many levels, however, Ireland is not generally regarded as a place in which people foster unwelcoming attitudes towards anyone, especially not towards migrants (Bramhill 2017); or, rather, Ireland does not generally regard *itself* as a place in which such peoples are made to feel unwelcome (Kumar and Donoghue 2023, 11). Hence, there is a belief on the island that such attitudes do not constitute, in the words of Irish *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar, "the Irish way" (Burne 2023, para 1). But what exactly is "the Irish way" if not *exactly* this?

Research problem

Since the early 2000s, one of the most criticised international protection systems in the world has existed on the island of Ireland – one that has been condemned by both national and international human rights organisations (Murphy, Keogh and Higgins 2018; Coakley 2022), by Irish non-profit organisations (Lentin 2020; Murphy 2021), as well as by key figures in Irish politics (O'Brien 2014; Government of Ireland 2020) and academia (Haynes, Breen and Devereux 2005; Breen 2006, 2008; Murphy, Keogh and Higgins 2018; O'Reilly 2018; Lentin 2020; Murphy 2021; Hewson 2022). This system, referred to on the island as *Direct*

Provision, has subjected a generation of refugees and asylum seekers to prison-like living conditions in which they are stripped of their basic human rights, driven further and further away from centres of Irish society and, therefore, from any prospect of integrating into it (Murphy, Keogh and Higgins 2018; Khambule, 2019; Gorman 2022). Coupled with an appalling system for migrants have been appalling – and yet repressed – attitudes towards them. Over the past year, there has been a steep rise in support for far-right political parties on the island of Ireland which, while still peripheral in terms of their political influence, have managed to convince certain factions of the Irish public of their anti-migrant views, culminating in the rise in anti-refugee protests in Ireland since early 2022 (Carroll 2023; Hosford and Murray 2023; Ryan 2023; Quann 2023; Murphy 2021). Despite the existence of a widely condemned international protection system and a growing endorsement of anti-migrant sentiment by the Irish people, however, Ireland still escapes being mentioned in the same breath as *securitisation* in this context, which could mean one of two things. Either migration is *not* securitised in Ireland or, as this study argues, migration *is* securitised in Ireland, but in a different way than what we might expect, particularly in the context of Europe.

The concept of securitisation first debuted in the realm of Security Studies via the work of IR scholar Ole Wæver, an affiliate of the Copenhagen School of security studies, specifically in his article "Securitization and Desecuritization" (1995). The term *securitisation* was a necessary addition to the vocabulary of Security scholars at this time, for, before it, there existed no words nor theories to describe the prevailing phenomenon of certain issues – be they military, economic, political, societal or environmental – being dealt with "beyond the established rules of the game" (Buzan et al. 1998, 23) and by extraordinary means. To securitise an issue, according to Wæver and the Copenhagen School's logic, is to claim that an issue is existentially threatening in nature and, therefore, deserving of a certain

level of counter force to eliminate the issue. As the theory goes, however, it is not that these threats are *real* or *objective*; they are socially constructed (Buzan et al. 1998, 26). Speaking within the context of migration in Europe, European governments have for decades now contributed to the construction of migration as a security threat to European societies and identities with the aim of protecting what they see as the "garden" that is Europe from external influence in the form of migration (Liboreiro 2022). But there have been – and still are – exceptions to this.

Contrary to other European governments, the Irish government has historically adopted a more positive tone when speaking on the topic of migration and its treatment of migrants (Department of the Taoiseach 2019; Stanton 2020; Browne 2022; Loughlin and Hosford 2023). Unlike its British counterpart, for instance, there has been no sign of the Irish government passing controversial (and illegal) migration bills (Donald and Grogan 2023) or openly announcing plans to fund refugee detention centres on neighbouring shores so as to limit refugee arrivals in Europe on the whole (Adu 2023). Though this manner of overtly securitising migration from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective may be absent in the context of Ireland, this does not mean that migration is not securitised in Ireland *at all*; it just means that it is happening differently there. What this thesis claims is that migration *is* securitised in Ireland, not from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective, as is the case in other European countries, but in a more covert manner and from a routinised, Paris perspective. Within the Irish context, there is an absence of top-down securitisation procedures invoked in relation to migration and for this there exists a handful of reasons, one of which, this study argues, relates to the concept of ontological security, which made its way to the forefront of the field of International Relations (IR) via the work of scholars like Brent Steele and Jennifer Mitzen.

Ontological security refers to the security of and in a consistent self (Subotić 2012); it is not about the physical or material security of the state, but about security in a state's identity and sense of self. For scholars like Steele and Mitzen, ontological security is about eliminating ontological *in*security within the state by countering feelings of anxieties (Krickel-Choi 2022). This occurs either by changing one's behaviour so that it reflects one's biographical narrative or by engaging with routines that bring one a sense of stability in a particular identity (Krickel-Choi 2022). Whilst the work of Mitzen is of great importance to discussions on ontological security, it is the work of Steele that will be of particular importance to this study because it is there that the idea of security-inducing "autobiographical identity narratives" originates (Innes and Steele 2014). For Steele, the focus in his work is on how a state sustains a particular autobiographical narrative in order to produce a sense of stability and consistency (Steele 2008; Innes and Steele 2014; Subotić 2016), particularly in times of crisis (Subotić 2016). Such narratives are anchored in historical experiences (Delehanty & Steele, 2009) and become political myths of sorts that, when reproduced, result in feelings of ontological security (Gellwitzki and Houde 2023). Later in this thesis, we will see how Steele's argument that states derive ontological security from the maintenance of specific autobiographical narratives can be applied to the context of Ireland and, likewise, used as a theoretical foundation that can explain why the Irish government does not securitise migration from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective. Along with the ontological security argument, however, other explanations for this will, too, arise in the final chapter.

Aim and research question

The aim of this thesis is twofold: on a secondary level, it is to back up the claim that migration is securitised in Ireland by virtue of Ireland's system of accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers (Direct Provision). On a primary level, though, owing to the

consistent lack of attention given to this issue in mainstream Irish politics, and to the fact that there has been arguably no attempt on the part of the Irish government to – from a top-down, discursive perspective – securitise migration, this study aims to address why this mainstream absence occurs within the Irish context, drawing particular inspiration from the theory of Ontological Security. It will be argued that because Ireland's "ontological narrative" (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 325) is so crucial to the Irish people's sense of security, and because this narrative is centred on the idea that Ireland is a welcoming country populated by people who are no stranger to the experiences of migrants today, the Irish government fails to entertain top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures to the extent that other European governments do in relation to migration. Whereas in other European contexts, it is the case that, in the pursuit of ontological security, migration becomes securitised (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2009; Kinnvall 2012; Mitzen 2018), in Ireland it is, rather, that, in the pursuit of ontological security, migration *does not* – and, arguably, must never – become securitised because of the specific nature of Ireland's *ontological narrative*. Hence, in the Irish context, the desire to achieve ontological security represents one of a plethora of *inhibiting* – not enabling – factors that prevent the Irish government from securitising migration in similar ways to its other European counterparts.

With the above in mind, at the heart of this study is the following question:

> Why has migration not been securitised from a concomitant top-down, Copenhagen perspective in Ireland?

Justification

In terms of why Ireland is the elected region under investigation in this study, for one, an examination of migration control and the treatment of migrants in Ireland within the framework of securitisation has not been carried out before or, at least, not *obviously* so. Furthermore, on the one discernible instance that the term "securitisation" has appeared in a

discussion on migration in the Irish context, it has been argued that migration is *not* securitised on the island (Ferrario 2017, 15). Moreover, in the literature on securitisation, there has tended to be much more emphasis on addressing the *enabling* factors of securitisation – the speech act, the securitising actor, security practices, the role of the audience, the context within which security threats are constructed, and the like – rather than on what factors or conditions might *constrain* securitisation. What an analysis of the securitisation of migration in Ireland will show is that there are factors that can constrain or prevent certain securitising actors from securitising migration in ways that we might expect, especially within the context of Europe and the European Union (EU). Determining what these factors are is worth addressing because such a focus is unique within the literature on securitisation, and because honing in on these factors is a way of, too, finally integrating Ireland into the discussion on the securitisation of migration.

A final reason as to why Ireland is the ideal region to study within this context is because migrant presence in Ireland is a very new phenomenon relative to other European countries. Only since the early 2000s has Ireland begun to accept forcibly displaced persons and to devise plans to encourage the arrival of economic migrants – where convenient, nonetheless (Loyal 2003, 76-79). In light of the fact that there are such small numbers of migrant arrivals to Ireland each year, one might struggle to accept that migration is securitised in Ireland. Since Irish borders are not being, as the phrasing goes, *overwhelmed* by migrants to the extent that the borders of continental European (and Schengen) countries supposedly are, one might be inclined to ask if there is even an imperative to securitise migration in Ireland. The short answer is yes, there is an imperative, particularly because Ireland shares an uncontrolled land border with the United Kingdom (UK). This border, located in the north of Ireland, seems to have determined the trajectory of Irish migration policy in two ways: for one, according to scholars, it has forced Ireland to alter how it treats

migrants according to the needs of the UK. Since the British government wants no potential back door through which migrants could possibly access its territory, Irish migration policy has historically mirrored that of the British (Loyal and Quilley 2016, 82). In another way, to meet *Irish* needs, this open border has arguably given Ireland an imperative to securitise migration because, if Ireland is seen in any way as a better dwelling place for migrants than the UK, Ireland could potentially end up with a greater migrant presence than it ever anticipated. Hence, in an effort to remain on good terms with the British and to maintain what has been referred to as a "homogenous Irish society" (Loyal 2003, 76), there exists the need, in the eyes of some, for migration to be securitised in Ireland.

Structure

With the above in mind, the layout of this thesis will be as follows: in the first chapter, I will discuss the foundations of Securitisation theory, drawing particularly on the work produced by scholars of the Copenhagen School of security studies. This will then segue into a discussion on the work of those who apply the concept of securitisation to non-traditional issue areas, of which migration is one. The revisions of Securitisation theory by "second generation" scholars and, especially, those associated with the Paris School, will be addressed subsequently. The final section, then, is where I will outline what is being said among scholars who write on the general topic of the securitisation of migration.

It is the intention of the second chapter to back up the abovementioned claim that migration is securitised in Ireland. Here, the Irish system of asylum seeker and refugee accommodation (Direct Provision) will be discussed within the theoretical framework of the Paris approach to securitisation. In the final part of this chapter, the rise in anti-migrant sentiment on the island will be addressed in the context of the budding Irish far-right political movement. Although far-right parties in Ireland have little to no bearing on the mainstream Irish political landscape, throwing light onto their activities seems an essential addition to this

conversation, for it reflects what is happening presently in Ireland in the context of migration – and what the future may hold too in terms of the potential for *mainstream* Irish politics to one day engage with more overt and top-down, Copenhagen securitising procedures as occurs in the greater European space.

The third and final chapter will be reserved for answering the question of why there is an absence of a discursive rendering of migration as a security issue in mainstream Irish politics. To do so, I will introduce a new theory into the discussion, that of Ontological Security, whilst paying particular attention to Brent Steele's notion of state autobiographies – or *ontological narratives* – as an stability-inducing mechanism. Before exploring what exactly Ireland's *ontological narrative* looks like and how this narrative acts as a constraint of sorts preventing the Irish government from securitising migration from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective, I will elaborate on other possible constraining factors. The reliance of the Irish economy on migrant presence, the lack of racial diversity among Ireland's migrant population, and the country's historical commitment to secretly containing portions of its population will all be discussed in this chapter. At the end of this thesis, the question of why there is such a disconnect between the reality of migration control in Ireland and the fantasy of what is being projected to the world will be answered.

Definitions

Whereas under international law there exists no official definition of the term *migrant*, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides its own definition in the UNHCR *Emergency Handbook* (2016). According to the *Handbook*, "[t]raditionally, the word 'migrant' has been used to designate people who move by choice rather than to escape conflict or persecution, usually across an international border" (UNHCR 2016, 1). Over time, it has become an umbrella term referring to "any person who moves away from their usual place of residence, whether internally or across a border, and regardless of whether the

movement is 'forced' or voluntary" (UNHCR 2016, 1). For the purposes of this study, although there will appear some specifications throughout, the term *migrant* will appear most frequently when referring to those who experience the effects of securitisation in the context of migration, not least because the phenomenon is referred to as the securitisation of *migration* – not the securitisation of *a specific kind of migration* (voluntary, forced, economic, etc.). This decision was further informed by the fact that there have been scholars who have written on this topic before and have, too, opted to use the word *migrant* in their discussions. As explained by Phillipe Bourbeau, for instance, "a security framework is not applied only to refugees but rather to the entire category of the movement of people" (Bourbeau 2011, 6). In other words, transforming migration into a security issue is something that has not only affected refugees or asylum seekers, but other categories of regular and irregular migrants too, which is why using the broadest version of the term is beneficial in this context. It is my view that to speak in specifics heightens the chance of overlooking how securitisation has affected particular categories of migrants, hence the adoption of a broader term throughout this study.

Chapter 1 – Copenhagen, Paris, and the Securitisation of Migration

While it was during the 1970s that the "renaissance of security studies" (Walt 1991) began, it was during the late 1980s that some of the most significant developments in the field were made by members of the Copenhagen School of security studies (henceforth referred to by the acronym "CS"). To date, the scholarship produced by the CS has been revised and criticised copious times by those referred to as "second generation" security scholars. In the work of the latter, Securitisation theory, as proposed by CS affiliates Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, is the focal point, with many scholars proposing new ways of reconceptualising various aspects of the theory. Alongside this "second generation" work, another strand of scholarship has emerged, one in which the concept of securitisation has been applied to non-traditional issue areas. More recently, the areas of climate change, public health, terrorism, minority issues and migration have been thought of within the framework of securitisation in order to better understand the contemporary approaches taken by governments when tackling these alleged issues, as well as the climate of fear generated among the public in response to them.

After outlining the basics of Securitisation theory, as conceptualised by the Copenhagen School, I will discuss the nature of the debates surrounding securitisation by drawing on the work of "second generation" security scholars and on the work of those who apply the concept to non-traditional issue areas. The conversation being had among scholars relating to the area of migration and, more specifically, the securitisation of migration, will be addressed in the greatest detail in the final section of the chapter.

1.1 The Copenhagen School and Securitisation theory

Traditional notions of security had largely been unchallenged until the mid-1970s, when security scholars finally began reacting to the kind of "disciplinary orthodoxy" (Booth 2007, 172) that had defined the field since its inception. In the post-Cold War world, it was

becoming clear that the state was no longer the only entity at risk from potential existential threat and that the conversation on security could no longer ignore "nonmilitary sources of international tension" (Walt 1991, 215). For security scholars like Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, replacing traditional convictions regarding security was a necessity, for "[s]uch things as the peaceful ending of the Cold War, the growth in intra-state conflicts, Western societies' fear of immigration, the decaying environment and the acceleration of the HIV/AIDS epidemic demonstrated that traditionalism was unable to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War era" (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 187). Over time, the narrative shifted from one wherein governments cautioned people against threats to the state, to one wherein they warned people of threats to the state's sovereignty, to collective identities, natural habitats, and entire economies. Hence, security issues took on different dimensions and spanned different "sectors" (Albert and Buzan 2011, 413) – political, societal, environmental, economic, *and* military. While the intention of the CS was to expand the security agenda (Booth 2007) and to take it out of the hands of those whom Ken Booth calls "the disciplinary gate-keepers" (2007, 99), their work did overlap in many ways with that of the traditionalists of the field.

According to the estimations of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde in their 1998 publication, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, security is "about survival" (Buzan et al. 1997, 21). It is – although not completely – about the state and, to some degree, it is still about military affairs (Buzan et al. 1998, 21). Although these convictions would attest to the fact that the CS approach to security was not so different to that of traditionalists, still, Buzan et al. managed to differentiate themselves from the traditionalists. According to CS logic, security issues are only threatening to the extent that they are constructed as threatening; that is, they are the product of social construction (Atak and Crepeau 2013) and not evidence of an objective threat. Such issues are formed by virtue of what they term the "speech act"

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(Buzan et al. 1998, 26): a discursive act, an "utterance" (1998, 26), performed by a "securitising actor" (1998, 36) in an effort to convince an audience of people that the issue in question is necessarily existentially threatening and, therefore, deserving of extraordinary counterforce to ensure its elimination. The process by which an issue is collectively agreed upon – by and among an audience – as being threatening enough to be dealt with outside the realm of normal politics using extraordinary measures is known as *securitisation* (1998, 23). Its opposite, *desecuritisation*, however, is the preferred means, according to Buzan et al., of coping with potential security issues, and refers to the process by which issues return to and are dealt with within the realm of *regular* politics no matter their nature (Hansen 2012, 525).

Revered as Buzan and his CS colleagues were for contributing to the field with such logic, however, many scholars have struggled with certain aspects of their work, specifically with their specific rendering of Securitisation theory. Moreover, many have developed on Buzan et al.'s work, not only by criticising the theory but by experimenting with its application to non-traditional issue areas.

1.2 Expanding the theory

1.2.1 Non-traditional issue areas

Although some critique Securitisation theory and the very components that comprise the theory, others use it as a framework within which to understand how the "logic of war" (Weaver 1995, 54) has infiltrated certain non-traditional issue areas and coloured how such issues are viewed and dealt with. While some scholars conclude that the securitisation of non-traditional issue areas can be beneficial, others are more critical of this; it is rather field dependent. In terms of environmental security, while there are those who believe securitising the environment can bring great benefits (Allenby 2000; Barnett 2003; Floyd 2008), there are those who warn of its downsides (Deudney 1990; Deudney 1999; Brauch 2008; Gordeeva 2022). As Jon Barnett argues, "[s]ecurity communicates a certain *gravitas* that is arguably

necessary in climate change policy" (Barnett 2003, 14); on the other hand, as Maria Trombetta explains, "security can…introduce a zero-sum rationality to the environmental debate that can create winners and losers, and undermine the cooperative efforts required by environmental problems" (2008, 586). Hence, securitising the environment is a divided issue.

In the realm of public health, the divide is less pronounced, with most scholars agreeing on the fact that to speak of infectious diseases and viruses in terms of security is necessarily damaging (Elbe 2006; Elbe 2010; Elbe and Voelkner 2014; Lawrence 2020; Kirk and McDonald 2021). This disdain for the securitisation of non-traditional issues is echoed in the work of Will Kymlicka who, speaking on the topic of ethnic relations between minorities and the state, has argued that "[u]nder conditions of securit[s]ation, minority self-organi[s]ation may be legally limited…, minority leaders may be subject to secret police surveillance,…and so on" (2002, 18). In relation to the area of terrorism, however, there are those who perceive certain benefits to securitisation in this context (Kaunert and Léonard 2019).

1.2.2 Second generation and the Paris School

Foundational as their work was at one stage, it was only a matter of time before the scholarship produced out of the Copenhagen Peace and Research institute was revised by successive critical security scholars. Those who have taken issue with the particular rendition of securitisation proposed by Buzan et al. in *Security* are often referred to in the field as "second generation" scholars, some of whom have paid special attention in their work to the notion of the *speech act* according to the CS. (McDonald 2005; Möller 2007; Baysal 2020). For Matt McDonald and Frank Möller, for instance, the original securitisation theory relies too heavily on speech as the means through which issues become securitised (2005, 568; 2007, 180); for them, and for others in the Paris School, securitisation is possible "without speech or discourse" (Bigo 2000, 194). Securitisation, in their view, can occur by virtue of an array of *security practices* (Balzacq, Basaran, Bigo, Guittet and Olsson 2010), both over time

and as a process (Baysal 2020, 10). In other words, "it is the institutionali[s]ations and routini[s]ations through repetitions of security practices that produce security issues" (Baysal 2020, 7), according to these scholars. Relatedly, this socio-political approach to securitisation – one that considers not only how speech acts, but how everyday security practices and categorisations play into the threat construction process – has been adopted by Paris School scholars who seek to establish a link between the concept of securitisation and identity politics or identity-related fears (Bigo and Guild 2005; Bigo 2009). This has been further developed by scholars like Brent Steele and Jennifer Mitzen who are affiliated with the Ontological Security approach, at the core of which lies the observation that states will go to incredible lengths in order to feel as though their identities are secure (Mitzen 2006b; Mitzen 2006a; Steele 2008). Moreover, according to the logic of the Paris School, processes of securitisation necessarily, and against their alleged intention, create a kind of *in*security within a society that is referred to within the School by the term *(in)securitisation* (Bigo 2009; Bigo and Tsoukala 2009).

While the CS approach has been criticised for primarily presenting securitisation as a top-down process (Baysal 2020, 9), those associated with the Paris and Welsh School have sought to rectify this by focusing on the bottom-up aspects of the process (Baysal 2020; Floyd 2007; Bigo 2016). In this way, these scholars draw attention to the fact that securitisation can also be performed by "non-elites" (Baysal 2020, 9) contrary to CS thought. This, and the lack of attention paid in the original theory to the context within which a "securit[s]ing move" (Buzan et al. 1998, 25) is made, has been highlighted by scholars as being another major flaw in the original Securitisation theory (Baysal 2020; Balzacq 2010). Allegedly Eurocentric (Hansen 2000; Bilgin 2011; Wilkinson 2016) and "elitis[t]" (Baysal 2020, 9), the original version of Securitisation theory proposed by Buzan et al. is constantly

being challenged owing to its "several limitations" (Baysal 2020, 7) that are repeatedly being thrust into the limelight for review.

1.3 The securitisation of migration

In discussions on the securitisation of migration, it is generally understood that what we are dealing with is a phenomenon located primarily within the European Union (EU) (Huysmans 2000; Guild 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; Pellerin 2005; Colman 2006; van Munster 2009; Léonard 2010; Kinnvall 2016; Grey and Franck 2019; Lucarelli 2019; Léonard and Kaunert 2020; Sajjad 2022), but by no means restricted to the EU (Gerstle 2004; Ackleson 2005; d'Appollonia 2015; Colomé-Menéndez, Koops and Weggemans 2021). It is a phenomenon that has been ongoing within this geographical space at least since the 1980s, and has become even more pronounced since the events of 9/11 and the 2015 refugee "crisis" (Baker-Beall 2009; Casagrande 2012; Cesari 2012; Hintjens 2019; Asderaki and Markozani 2021; Bello 2022; Sajjad 2022).[1] It is widely agreed upon among scholars that, in the aftermath of such events, migrants within the EU have gradually become handcuffed to notions of threat (Huysmans 2000; Ibrahim 2005; Innes 2010; Léonard 2010; Vallet 2014; Jones 2017; Mofette and Vadasaria 2016; Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Grey and Franck 2019; Léonard and Kaunert 2020), and migratory movements to notions of crisis (Ibrahim 2005; Gray and Franck 2019; Bello 2022; Sajjad 2022). Over time, it has been argued, the phenomenon of migration has become appropriated by Europeans – by "national governments, grass roots, European transnational police networks, the media, etc." (Huysmans 2000, 758) – and presented as a security issue to be solved – erased, even – because of the alleged threat posed by migrants to European life and, as some scholars have expressed, because of an inherent racism among Europeans (Huysmans 2000; Ibrahim 2005; Togral 2011).

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[1] The term crisis appears here in inverted commas so as to draw the reader's attention to the notion of the "crisification" of migration or, rather, the construction of migration as a crisis by securitising actors in order to legitimise the "(re)formation and institutionalization of restrictive governance measures" (Simon 2022, 3).

If migration is a problem to be solved, then it is generally believed in the literature that migrants are burdens to be neutralised in an effort to facilitate the creation of a homogenous European culture and identity; for, as Jef Huysmans iterates, migrants are individuals who are viewed as endangering "the good life in west European societies" (Huysmans 2000, 752). In order to eliminate the possibility of migrants tainting such "goodness," various mechanisms have been installed throughout the EU and wider European space as countermeasures to limit migrant presence in this space. One of the most – if not *the* most – widely mentioned tactics of securitisation to appear across the literature is that of bordering practices; continental EU bordering practices, to be precise (Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002; Léonard 2010; Kinnvall 2016 Léonard and Kaunert 2020; Bello 2022; Sajjad 2022). Hand in hand with oppressive bordering techniques that are made possible through the cooperation of the European Union border agency FRONTEX (Neal 2009; Léonard 2010; Léonard and Kaunert 2020) is EU migration policy. This discursive form of securitisation facilitates the securitisation of migration just as much as physical practices of bordering do and constitute a form of "colonial technolog[y]" (Kinnvall 2016, 157) just as bordering practices do. Speaking on this subject, Jef Huysmans notes that "the development of a common migration policy in the [EU] is embedded in wider societal, political and professional processes that articulate an endangered society" (2000, 752). Hence, operationalising policy as a means of securitising migration has become a way for securitising actors within the EU to propel the idea that migrants pose a threat against which the state must react with force, thereby becoming part and parcel of this *politics of fear* that is spread across the EU. But policy is not the only discursive means by which migration is securitised; it is also achieved through anti-migrant rhetoric promulgated by far-right political parties that have existed on the continent since the 1980s (Middleton 2016; Sunawar and Muhammad 2020; Ünal ERİŞ, ÖNER, and Makalesi 2021).

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Finally, the matter of historical conditions reappears time and again in conversations on the securitisation of migration insofar as it is generally agreed upon among scholars that such a phenomenon is "located within a broader set of historically specific power relations" (Moffette and Vadasaria 2016, 294). As Aneira Edmunds notes, "securit[s]ation is part of raciali[s]ed coloniality. It has its origins in colonialism as whole populations had to be subdued and regulated to prevent uprisings – part of which involved a regulation of the colonial [and] exotic" (2021, 316). In essence, securitisation is believed by some to be the "modern colonial project of the nation" (Moffette and Vadasaria 2016, 294).

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What this chapter has endeavoured to address is the contours of the discussion on the securitisation of migration, as well as the theoretical framework through which such discussions are accessed. While it has been shown that there are indeed distinctions between Copenhagen and Paris approaches to securitisation – the former draws on the logic of exception, on discursive, top-down, elitist securitisation procedures, whilst the latter draws on the logic of routine, on *security practices* and bottom-up procedures – second generation scholar Phillipe Bourbeau argues that, in reality, it tends to be the case that migration is securitised on both levels at once – not either/or. Speaking within the context of migration in France, Bourbeau writes that "sophisticated empirical studies reveal elements of both exception and routine in the securitisation process" (2014, 188). In other words, Copenhagen and Paris securitisation procedures coexist and are not mutually exclusive. As Bourbeau writes, "when considered separately, both theoretical stances [the logic of routine and that of exception] offer an incomplete picture of the contemporary process of securitisation" (2014, 191). His argument is that security scholars should not separate themselves into different camps or schools because doing so is to ignore the similarities necessarily shared between two or more schools and to undermine the advancement of theoretical research on

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securitisation processes in general (2014, 195). Hence, for Bourbeau there is no question about whether or not the logic of exception and the logic of routine exist in tandem with one another in the context of securitisation; equally, there is no question about whether or not he agrees that recognising their coexistence is essential to the progression of the field. But what happens if there are contexts where there is no coexistence?

Of course, Bourbeau demonstrates how there are "multiple points of intersection between the logic of routine and the logic of exception" within the context of the securitisation of migration in *France*. But that is France. And whilst it is certainly possible – and, even, expected – that Bourbeau's logic can be applied to other contexts too, in Ireland the matter is different. That is to say, in Ireland, whilst migration is securitised by virtue of the Direct Provision system that would embody Bourbeau's notion of the *logic of routine*, there exists no evidence of mechanisms within the Irish context that would relate to Bourbeau's *logic of exception*. In other words, there are no concomitant top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures that "legitimi[s]e exceptional policies and practices in the face of an existential security threat" (2014, 190) in Ireland. There are, however, routinised security practices that reflect more of a Paris approach to securitisation, exemplified through the system of accommodation for international protection applicants in Ireland. Hence, in his insistence that both Copenhagen and Paris procedures coexist within the context of the securitisation of migration, Bourbeau overlooks scenarios occurring in countries like Ireland where its people's very sense of ontological security, among other things, depends on this top-down, Copenhagen *absence* – an absence that, if recognised, could be of equal relevance to the advancement of theoretical research on securitisation.

Following from this line of thought, what will be of interest for the remainder of this study is determining *why* this is the case – in other words, why there have been no attempts on the part of the Irish government to securitise migration in this top-down, Copenhagen

manner that is so visible in other European contexts. To reach some form of a conclusion, the

theory of Ontological Security will be consulted in the third chapter as a means of

determining what factors constrain or prevent the Irish government from securitising

migration on an equal footing to its other European counterparts. Before this, however, the

matter of how migration is securitised by virtue of the Direct Provision system in Ireland will

be addressed, in the briefest of terms, in the proceeding chapter.

Chapter 2 – Direct Provision and Security Practices

Put simply, one could argue that by virtue of Ireland's very presence within the EU, and the fact that it is bound by certain – but not all – of the Union's migration policies, Ireland is implicated in the kind of discussions featured in the preceding chapter on the securitisation of migration. But since Ireland is not a Schengen country and, therefore, does not have security-oriented migration policies as is custom of countries in the Schengen Area (Bigo 2001, 123), one may doubt Ireland's role in the maintenance of the so-called "migration-security nexus" that has existed in the European space since the early 2000s (Pinyol-Jimenez 2012, 54). By virtue of *not* acceding to the Schengen Agreement (1985) and because it is an island nation with minimal amounts of migrant arrivals each year (McGinnity and Kingston 2017; Turner 2010), one might be inclined to believe that Ireland has no need to – and, therefore, does not – securitise migration. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, migration *is* securitised in Ireland, but it is done in a more covert way than in other European countries – and without the help of the Irish government. Using the Paris School's notion of *security practices*, this chapter aims to show how Ireland's system of accommodation for international protection applicants securitises migrants' lives in Ireland. It will end with a brief discussion on the rise in anti-migrant rhetoric by peripheral far-right parties and their supporters in Ireland over the past year (2022-2023), as well as a prediction as to what the Irish political landscape might look like in the years to come within the context of migration.

2.1 The presence of Paris procedures

In Ireland, borders are not manned by agencies like FRONTEX that are tasked with and guilty of securitising migration in the Schengen Area (Pinyol-Jimenez 2012, 44), nor do politicians in mainstream politics partake in discursively securitising migration like politicians in France, Italy or the United Kingdom do, for instance (BBC News 2022; Jack 2022). However, this is not to say that migration is not securitised in Ireland *at all*. On the

contrary. Since the turn of the century, there has existed a system of accommodation for

international protection applicants – refugees and asylum seekers, among other categories of

migrants – in Ireland, run by the Refugee Integration Agency (RIA) in order to deal with the

influx of forcibly displaced persons (Breen 2008; Lentin 2020). The Agency, a subpart of the

Irish Department of Justice, however, does not act alone in managing the Direct Provision

(DP) system; it works alongside for-profit companies (Lentin 2020, para 1).

Now, over twenty years on from the inception of what has been termed this "whiplash

response" (Murphy 2021, 4) to British anxieties regarding the potential for migrants to access

the UK through its shared border with Ireland, the DP system stands strong in Ireland to this

day. For twenty-three years, the Irish establishment has thrusted thousands of beneficiaries of

international protection into this system, dispersing men, women and children across the

country into reception centres with substandard living conditions (Murphy 2021, 8). And it

has managed to do so despite criticism from migrant rights groups (Gorman 2022), from

human rights organisations in Ireland and abroad (Murphy, Keogh and Higgins 2018;

Coakley 2022) and even from certain Irish politicians (O'Brien 2014; Government of Ireland

2020). Much like Maltese detention and reception centres in which migrants are kept upon

arrival on the island of Malta, it can be argued that the existence of DP centres – and the

nature of life afforded residents within them – constitute a *security practice* in the sense that

DP centres, too, "prevent migrants from interacting with the local population because of their

geographical location, administrative functioning, and lack of resources" (Lemaire 2019,

723).

Speaking within the context of the securitisation of migration, Jef Huysmans writes in

The Politics of Insecurity that "[a]sylum does not have to be explicitly defined as a major

threat to a society to become a security question…[i]ts security modulation can emerge from

the context within which it is embedded rather than from the act of threat definition as such"

(2006, 3-4). In the case of DP centres, it is not as though the RIA nor the Department of Justice created the Direct Provision policy and explicitly stated, in justifying its creation, that migration is existentially threatening and that this system will, therefore, be used in order to defend ourselves against this threat. Similar to how Léa Lemaire argues that Maltese detention and reception centres do not "raise the issue of threat definition" (2019, 723), yet still play a role in securitising migration, such is the case with DP centres. In the context of Ireland, these reception centres securitise by virtue of their ability to exclude. DP centres are about reining in migrants, about restricting them to an existence in specific – and closely monitored – spaces within Irish society. As Zoë O'Reilly states, these reception centres were created – and are maintained – to "ensure that asylum seekers are kept outside or in between" (2018, 822) and away from sight so as to enable Irish society to continually neglect their existence (Lentin 2020). Hence, in line with how Jef Huysmans sees a security practice as that which does not necessarily convey, in the context of his discussion, *asylum* as a threat, but, rather, something that "distances a community from groups of other human beings" (2006, 57), the same can be said of Direct Provision. DP centres, therefore, constitute a security practice by virtue of how they separate people like "a form of gardening that concentrates on protecting the beautiful and harmonious life in the garden against contamination, parasites and weeds, which are perpetually trying to destroy it" (Huysmans 2006, 52).

Rather than being about exceptionality or security elites articulating a threat through discourse, DP centres are more so aligned with the logic of routine, occurring from a field of security professionals – the RIA, to be exact – through practices. The DP system does not constitute – or is not the result of – a once-off, exceptional event where an individual may or may not have announced the phenomenon of migration to be existentially threatening to Irish society, security or culture. It constitutes a *security practice*, a routinised practice, that, over

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the course of twenty-three years, has repeatedly subjected refugees and asylum seekers to prison-like living conditions and that has had the eventual effect of producing a security issue. Not only does the fact that these centres constitute "routini[s]ed practices of everyday politics" (Bigo et al. 2010, 3) align them with a Paris rendition of securitisation, but so too does their overlap with technology. As various prominent scholars in the field have discussed, technology "hold[s] a prominent place" (Bourbeau 2014, 191) in the context of security practices, and there has come to be a massive reliance by security professionals on technological tools – such as databases, biometrics, wiretapping and more – in processes of securitisation (Bigo et al. 2010, 11). In the context of Irish reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers, residents are constantly being watched by security cameras, are required to submit fingerprints and photography upon arrival to these centres and are required to register their presence daily in electronic attendance-recording systems (Hewson 2022). Hence, through a Paris framework of securitisation, it can be concluded that Direct Provision centres contribute to the securitisation of migration in Ireland. But they may not be the sole contributors for long.

2.2 Copenhagen procedures on the rise?

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March of 2022, Ireland was one of many European countries to grant those fleeing Ukraine Temporary Protection status in accordance with the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (2001). Although this act garnered the Irish government and people a lot of praise because it meant accepting much greater amounts of migrants into the country than Ireland was used to (Blaney 2022; Euronews 2023), certain factions within Irish society were less than impressed with the numbers of migrant arrivals. Whilst in the direct aftermath of the full-scale invasion the Irish people very happily went to great lengths to support the displaced (Kennedy and O'Sullivan 2022; McCárthaigh 2022; Killoran 2022), positive – and *welcoming*– attitudes only lasted so long. In other words, the

"immense outpouring of public good-will" (Killoran 2022, para 2) in response to Ukrainian refugee arrivals had an expiration date.

Come late 2022, groups of protesters began taking to the streets to express their discontentment with the number of migrants arriving in the country and being resettled in Irish communities; their slogans: "Ireland is full" (O'Carroll 2023) and "Keep Ireland Irish" (Askew 2023). Spurred on by far-right politicians and supporters from peripheral political parties like the Irish Freedom Party and National Rally, members of the Irish public began showing their support for the kinds of anti-migrant views that these parties have publicly espoused for the past fifteen years (Maguire 2023). In terms of how these anti-immigrant and anti-refugee protests impede on mainstream politics and the Irish public's political views on the subject, however, it is generally understood that they do not reflect the attitudes of the majority (Quann 2023; Wilson 2023). And they certainly do not reflect the views of the current government. The Minister for Justice, Simon Harris, referred to the protests as "thuggish, mobbish, intimidatory behaviour" (Lally 2023, para 2), whilst in a statement from the Department of Equality the protests were, too, deplored (Boal 2023). Adding to the chorus, current *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar insisted that these demonstrations were "not the Irish way" (Burne 2023, para 1). Perhaps mistakenly so.

According to a recent opinion poll administered by the national newspaper *The Independent*, a "small majority" (Gannon 2023, para 2) – fifty-six percent, to be precise – of Irish respondents agreed that too many refugees have been accepted into Ireland since last year (Bracken and Corcoran 2023). There is a growing sense of unease surrounding the subject of migrants in Ireland, but in no way are these anti-migrant attitudes being reflected in the rhetoric of mainstream politicians who for the past year have been busy putting out – not exacerbating – the fires caused by these protesters. But there is a sense on the ground that the tide is changing and that in the near future the Irish government could be "staring at an

exodus of voters for whom Right-wing populism is suddenly palatable" (Ryan 2023, para 13). In other words, although "Ireland's modern political landscape has no equivalent to Le Pen, Orbán, or Trump" (Ryan 2023, para 7), this does not mean that an equivalent will never be found – and elected. With regards to politics in Ireland, it is generally understood that the country is always a few steps – but never too far – behind its UK and European counterparts in the sense that whatever the political trend is across the Irish Sea or on the continent, it is always soon mirrored in Irish politics (Gannon 2023; Via 2023). As Colin Gannon for *The Guardian* writes, the anti-migrant attitudes that are now floating to the surface in Ireland are being imported from the UK in particular (Gannon 2023, para 5): a "mirror image" (Gallagher 2023, para 17), even.

After years of "bucking the European trend" (Gannon 2023, para 1) of anti-migrant attitudes and protests, the Irish public has finally capitulated. So, one might wonder how long it will be before the government do the same. Put differently, how long will it be before the Irish government securitises migration from the kind of top-down, Copenhagen perspective that Phillipe Bourbeau insists always intersects with practice-based approaches to securitisation that, in the Irish context, is exemplified by the Irish Direct Provision system.

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Now that it has been addressed how exactly migration is securitised in Ireland, and what the future might hold for Ireland in this regard, the following chapter seeks to address why there are no – or, at least, *not yet* – concomitant top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures visible in the Irish context in relation to migration. By consulting the theory of Ontological Security, a potential answer to this question will be sought, but not without considering a handful of other factors related to race, Ireland's political landscape, and its hidden history of population management.

Chapter 3 – Ireland, Ontological (In)Security, and More

In order to form a conclusion regarding why the Irish government does not securitise migration, it is necessary to introduce a sister theory into the discussion: that of Ontological Security. By integrating this theory, the intention of this chapter is to provide a theoretical cushion on which to couch the forthcoming claims that will be made regarding why migration has not been securitised from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective in Ireland. Through the concept of ontological security – and particularly through the notion of "ontological narratives" (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 325) or autobiographical narratives, inspired by the work of IR scholar Brent Steele (2005) – a possible answer to the above-mentioned question will be sought. But, beyond this – and beyond this theory – other answers may, likewise, appear. In terms of how this study goes about looking for evidence of Ireland's particular biographical narrative, various recent surveys on Irish attitudes towards migrants, the latest newspaper articles in which members of the Irish government have addressed the topic of migration, and articles by prevalent Irish academics will feature most prominently.

3.1 Theoretical framework: Ontological Security Theory

Although the concept of ontological security first intercepted the field of International Relations (IR) in 1990 via Anthony Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity* (Bregman 2019, 71), its roots can be found further back in time and in different fields. As a concept, its foundations lie in the work of psychoanalyst Ronald Laing (1960) and in that of various sociologists and political psychologists too. Just as these scholars did, Giddens conceptualised ontological security as something centred on the maintenance of identities, that is, of intersubjective notions of the self that one seeks to maintain in order to feel secure (Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018). In Giddens' view, ontological security was something that states – like individuals – sought on a constant basis in order to avoid feeling ontologically *in*secure. Ontological security goes beyond the traditional concern with the

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physical or material security of the state (Browning 2016; Subotić 2016); it is, rather, about

the "security of being" (Kinnvall 2018, 529) – of the self – and security in "the subjective

sense of who one is" (Mitzen 2006b, 344). Since it is something that states seek on a constant

basis yet never fully achieve (Krickel-Choi 2022; Kinnvall 2018; Eberle 2019), scholars have

since adapted this phrase to "security-as-becoming" (Cash and Kinnvall 2017, 269). Hence,

the quest for ontological security is ongoing because if it were not ongoing this could mean a

potential – or definite – plummet into a pit of existential anxiety and fear.

More so than any other factor, anxiety is believed to be the primary stimulus that

causes states to seek ontological security (Krickel-Choi 2022; Browning 2018; Kinnvall

2018; Shani 2017; Mitzen 2006b; Steele 2005). To cope with these future-oriented worries,

states seek out remedies that can at once eliminate their anxiety and justify their eliminatory

behaviour. The remedy of choice among the ontologically insecure tends to be found either in

routinised social interactions with other actors whose recognition produces ontological

security (Mitzen 2006b), or in the creation of narratives or "state autobiographies" (Innes and

Steele 2014, 17; Subotić 2016, 611; Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018, 253) that achieves

the same thing. Whereas IR scholar Jennifer Mitzen advocated a strand of ontological

security that focused on how states adhere to certain "routines that sustain feelings of agency

and identity" (Krickel-Choi 2022, 9) in order to gain a sense of security, her contemporary,

Brent Steele, more so explored how state narratives are used to this end (Steele 2005).

Also referred to as "ontological narratives" (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 325), it is

believed that through these particular stories and self-conceptions, states acquire consistency

and stability in their sense of self and, therefore, achieve ontological security (Browning

2018). As Browning explains, "the melioration of ontological anxieties is…dependent upon

the production, performance and reinforcement (including routinisation) of biographical

narratives of self-identity that provide an account of ourselves and our actions in relation to

others and unfolding events" (2016, 3). They provide "autobiographical continuity, a sense of routine, familiarity, and calm" (Subotić 2016, 611) and are the result of a sort of nostalgia and a desire to return to a certain moment in the past (Kinnvall 2018). In this way, these narratives are historically oriented. They function as reassuring mechanisms whereby the state draws on events of the past in order to establish a sense of belonging among a community of people in the present (Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018). As Steele sees it, these narratives provide people with the tools to understand their immediate environment and give meaning to the events and interactions that take place within these very environments (Steele 2008). Thus, everything must align – the behaviour of the actor included – in order to prove the soundness of these autobiographical narratives and to produce an optimal sense of security among a community of people (Steele 2005). People resonate with these narratives, attach themselves to them and, resultingly, establish "collective identities" (Cash and Kinnvall 2017, 269) that produce a sense of security and predictability within a state.

Particularly useful in times of crisis (Subotić 2016, Steele 2008), these narratives act as a sort of lighthouse in the storm that can alleviate existential anxieties and serve as an antidote to past or present trauma (Subotić 2016; Innes and Steele 2014; Kinnvall 2012; Kinnvall 2004). Caterina Kinnvall discusses this notion of narrative-as-response-to-trauma in "European trauma: governance and the psychological moment" (2012), where she suggests that the various terrorist attacks occurring across Europe over the past two decades have caused a continent-wide trauma that, in turn, has led to the securitisation of migration in European states (267). To deal with trauma of this sort, narratives about self-identity are generated by states, but they are also accompanied by certain behaviours that serve to reinforce these narratives (Krickel-Choi 2022). In other words, it is believed that what states *say* is always reflected in what states *do* because demonstrating this kind of consistency only serves to reinforce the state's sense of self. In fact, it is understood that states will actively

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seek to avoid engaging with behaviours that contradict the particular narratives they are promoting for fear of attracting shame (Browning 2018; Steele 2008). And they will do so even if their narratives have no relationship to reality (Kinnvall 2018, 526).

Now that the theoretical basis for this chapter has been laid out, we can now consider the particular *ontological narrative* that structures the image of Ireland in discourses on migration. This narrative from which Ireland derives ontological security appears to be constructed around two main axes: 1. a welcoming axis, where Ireland is presented as a positive, open space for migrants; and 2. an emigration axis, where Ireland's history of mass emigration is evoked in order to prove that migrants are welcome in Ireland. Before addressing Ireland's specific *ontological narrative*, however, other reasons for which the Irish government does not securitise migration from a top-down perspective will, firstly, be considered.

3.2 Beyond identity

Besides arguments relating to ontological security, there exist other factors that can explain why migration is not securitised in Ireland from a top-down approach, some of which become particularly visible when looking closely at who exactly migrates to Ireland. The fact that in Ireland the government opts to speak of migration in largely positive terms and not in "the language of security" (Roe 2004, 290), as is the case in the rest of Europe, does not only relate to the Irish desire to protect its *ontological narrative*. One could argue that it has to do with the element of race – or, rather, lack thereof – and the fact that the majority of migrants in Ireland come from other European countries and fall into the category of white Christian (Social Justice Ireland 2019; Loyal 2003; McGinnity and Kingston 2017). This, and the fact that a significant amount of migrants in Ireland comprise returning Irish emigrants (Kumar and Donoghue 2023). Compared to continental Europe and to those European countries within the Schengen Area in particular, the migration landscape in Ireland evidently lacks

racial diversity. This is an important fact to consider within the discussion on the securitisation of migration because race – or *racism* – is a huge element and driving force behind states' efforts to securitise migration (Varghese 2023; Mofette and Vadasaria 2016; Booth 2007; Ibrahim 2005; Huysmans 2000). Thus, if in Ireland the majority of migrants are Caucasian and European and, therefore, those considered "more easily 'assimilable' into Irish society" (Loyal 2003, 80), one might understand why the Irish government does not, or, rather, does not *feel* the same need as other European governments, to securitise migration.

Another possible reason why the Irish government chooses not to securitise migration is because the government is acutely aware that the Irish people are unreceptive to the kind of authoritarian and extreme politics that nurture anti-migrant views (The Social Change Initiative 2018). The fact that the Irish people associate negative attitudes towards migrants with a lack of education (McGinnity and Kingston 2017) may, too, point to why the Irish government does not overtly securitise migration. This refusal to securitise migration is reflected in the Irish political landscape where most mainstream parties are pro-immigration and where the subject of migration rarely features as a topic of discussion (O'Malley 2008). And, even with regards to the political party Sinn Féin that occupies the populist, nationalist, right-wing space within the Irish political scene (O'Malley 2008), there is still no desire expressed by these politicians to exploit the issue of migration (Kumar and Donoghue 2023; O'Malley 2008; Doyle 2005). Not only is this the case because the Irish public does not respond positively to anti-migrant views, but because this party is more preoccupied with achieving a united Ireland than with excluding migrants (Kumar and Donoghue 2023). What has preoccupied Sinn Féin and other Irish political parties for centuries is not migration, but the yet unachieved goal of resolving the issue of British presence on the island of Ireland. Moreover, if the very party that one would expect to entertain the idea of securitising migration actually did securitise migration, this would mean falling prey to and reproducing

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colonialist rhetoric – something entirely intolerable for an anti-colonial party (Doyle 2010;

O'Malley 2008).

On another note, the Irish economy has always been and is still currently reliant on

inward migration (Kumar and Donoghue 2023; Garner 2007; McGinnity, Grotti, Russell, and

Fahey 2018). Without migrants, the Irish economy would suffer greatly, which is why it has

always been common for the government to link migration to economic growth in

discussions on the topic and to portray migration as being "in the national interest" (Kumar

and Donoghue 2023, 18), rather than as something to be feared. And this has been the case

even during periods of economic crisis in Ireland (Fanning 2015). As such, if the Irish

government were to speak of migration as a security issue to the extent that other European

governments do, this could deter migrants from coming to Ireland and, therefore, have

potentially damaging effects on the country's economy. In order to avoid such a thing from

happening, the government steers clear of framing migration as a security issue in Ireland

and, conversely, welcomes it. But it does so all whilst protecting – and concealing – the

system of Direct Provision that, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, securitises

migration by virtue of repeated and routinised security practices.

That the Irish government avoids speaking negatively about migrants and migration in

general – or, rather, that they do not securitise migration from a top-down, Copenhagen

perspective – can be put down to one other final reason. This reason relates to the State's

history of secret-keeping. In as far back as the eighteenth century until the mid-1960s, certain

carceral institutions were created by the Catholic Church – with the knowledge and support

of the Irish government – in order to deal with allegedly problematic portions of the

population: criminals, the disabled, and women. Workhouses, psychiatric hospitals, industrial

schools and what are referred to as Magdalen Laundries for "fallen women" (Blakemore

2019) not only *existed* on the island for over two-hundred years but *thrived* there – and

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thrived in silence. These establishments subjected innumerable amounts of Irish people to human rights abuses for two centuries, and some believe that this predisposition to population management still exists on the island today in the form of Direct Provision centres (Loyal and Quilley 2016). Some Irish academics argue that this same level of control and tendency towards population management is embodied by the Direct Provision system that, today, sees to the incarceration of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers each year (Kumar and Donoghue 2023; Murphy 2021; Loyal and Quilley 2016). As Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley argue, Direct Provision centres "resurrect, albeit in a modified form, processes of containment and confinement that have been a significant aspect of the state's repertoire for two centuries" (2016, 76). What mentioning this history of containment and secrecy does within the context of this discussion is shed light on the fact that, in Ireland, it is standard practice for the government to not get directly involved in certain activities that would necessarily undermine the Irish *ontological narrative*, but, nonetheless, allow these activities to persist in the background. Hence, concealment – turning a blind eye – is a huge part of the Irish narrative (McGinnity, Creighton, and Fahey 2020) because it allows the Irish people (government included) to do two things. It allows them to figuratively open their arms to migrants, to embrace them because it is what the Irish believe they should do – and what their *ontological narrative* tells them they should do if they want to feel secure – as a country of emigrants and empaths. But, most importantly, it allows them to do so *and* rest assured knowing that business is being taken care of behind the scenes.

3.3 Ireland's ontological narrative

3.3.1 A welcoming country

In the first section of this chapter, it was mentioned how states acquire a sense of ontological security through specific (and generally unchanging) narratives surrounding national identity. The construction of particular identities brings states a sense of stability in that it gives people

something tangible to attach themselves to, to relate to, especially in times of uncertainty or crisis (Krickel-Choi 2022; Subotić 2016). Although Ireland has not experienced any sort of migration crisis to the extent that other European countries claim to have had over the past decade, in the past year Ireland has opened its borders to a much larger amount of migrants than usual (Kumar and Donoghue 2023; McQuinn 2023; Euronews 2023). Complementing this rise in the number of migrants arriving in Ireland has been the increased effort made on the part of the Irish government to project a certain self-image to the world in which Ireland is depicted as a welcoming place for migrants. Never has the promotion of this image been more important than in recent months when the government has had to respond to the numerous anti-refugee and anti-migrant protests that have spanned the country (Carroll 2023; Hosford and Murray 2023); whilst addressing the matter earlier this year, *Taoiseach* Leo Varadkar insisted that "refugees are welcome here" (Burne 2023, para 7). And when the government recently came under fire for housing Ukrainian refugees in tented accommodation (Lynott 2023), its reaction was to still run a communications campaign that would tell Ukrainians they are *welcome* in Ireland, despite the fact that there may be some difficulty in finding appropriate accommodation for them (Gataveckaite and Downing 2022, para 2; Loughlin and Hosford 2023). But presenting an image of this nature to the world is by no means a new occurrence within the Irish context. It has always been the default of the Irish government to convey Ireland as – and celebrate it for being – *the land of a hundred thousand welcomes* (Loyal 2016).

Historically speaking, Ireland differs from other European countries in the sense that it does not have a track record of speaking negatively about migration; that is, there is a "low salience of the topic" (Kumar and Donoghue 2023, 18) in Ireland. Instead, the government has always invested in a particular narrative that presents the country and its people as being open and tolerant – and so has the public (Kumar and Donoghue 2023, 11). This

characterisation of Ireland as welcoming is, too, reflected in the attitudes and opinions of the Irish people who, like their government, adopt the role of "narrative entrepreneur" (Subotić 2016, 611) in the process. In recent years, various organisations have carried out surveys in an attempt to gauge the opinions of the Irish public regarding migration and the State's response to migration. In 2018, a survey conducted by the Social Change Initiative showed that the Irish public consider themselves open and welcoming to migrants, and that terms such as "welcoming, optimistic, tolerant and open" (2018, 3) were among the most popular used when participants were asked to describe Ireland within the context of its treatment of migrants. Moreover, in 2023 a similar survey was carried out with the same purpose of determining public opinions towards migrants. According to the country study on Ireland carried out by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Irish attitudes towards migrants rank among the most positive in Europe and are "underpinned by values that prize openness and welcome" (Kumar and Donoghue 2023, i). But this narrative of Ireland being welcoming has not only become part of the Irish national narrative by virtue of government or public participation in its construction. It, too, has come to be owing to external help; after the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen praised Ireland for being so receptive and kind to its new refugee population (Blaney 2022), whilst the President of the European Parliament thanked the Irish people for welcoming Ukrainians (Euronews 2023). Hence, Ireland's "national self-conception" (Vieira 2018, 153) has become *international* and has only gained greater validation in the process, meaning that there is an even greater incentive for the behaviour of the government to reflect this narrative.

Since the traction of a biographical narrative depends on the extent to which a state can put its words into action (Krickel-Choi 2022), it should be mentioned that the Irish government has – at least to an extent – taken certain action in the realm of immigration

policy in order to further fortify the narrative of Ireland being a welcoming place for migrants. In 2021, for instance, the government created the *White Paper to End Direct Provision* in response to public and political backlash regarding the Irish system of accommodation for applicants of international protection, the aim of which is to see to the partial reformation of the system (Government of Ireland 2021). This has been accompanied by a new Migrant Integration Strategy and a regularisation scheme offered to undocumented migrants residing in Ireland (Kumar and Donoghue 2023) that both aim at improving life in Ireland for migrants and living up to the claim that Ireland is indeed welcoming. Such changes in Ireland's immigration policy give credence to this particular narrative regarding Ireland's welcoming attitude towards migrants. But this is not the only state narrative that the Irish government promotes in discourses on migration.

3.3.2 A country of emigrants and empaths

While a large part of the collective narrative surrounding Irish attitudes towards migrants is about being – or, rather, being *perceived* as – welcoming, it is also about Ireland's emigrant past. In her article on the role of collective memory and history on ontological security, Kathrin Bachleitner writes that "a country's self or identity emerges from its past experience…is transported into its present through 'narration', or…through 'collective memory'" (2023, 26). In other words, what she terms "collective narratives" (2023, 30) – or *ontological narratives* – are often formed on the basis of past events and it is because they have their roots in a country's history, and because they have survived for so long, that reproducing these narratives brings stability and ontological security to a people. In the context of Ireland, emigration has been a huge part of the country's history and, therefore, its identity; as Frances McGinnity and Gillian Kingston claim, "[Ireland's] self-image as a country is closely linked to emigration" (2017, 254). More so than any other European country, Ireland has experienced an unprecedented amount of large-scale emigration since the

nineteenth century to the present day – it is said to be unique within Europe in this way (Kumar and Donoghue 2023; Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí 2015). It is a source of great sadness for the Irish people and, contrary to political and media trends on the continent, it is *e*migration more so than *im*migration that is spoken about negatively in political and media narratives in Ireland (Kumar and Donoghue 2023); phrases like the "scourge of emigration" (Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí 2015, 13), for instance, have dominated media narratives on the subject.

In order to cope with such negative feelings towards emigration and to reconcile with this part of Ireland's history, emigration has been reclaimed and recycled into a positive; that is, it has become an explanation as to why Ireland is – or should be – so receptive to migrants. The story goes that because the Irish people are historically familiar with the same kind of discrimination that migrants in Europe face today, migrants are necessarily to be treated well in Ireland. As Steven Loyal points out, there is a "belief that the colonialism and persistent emigration experienced by the Irish population will automatically engender in them sympathy towards others who are in poverty and are forced to emigrate" (2003, 75). Whether this is true or not, those like Loyal are sceptical of this narrative. The fact that Ireland is a country that has experienced colonial domination is, likewise, an important part of the particular narrative Ireland reproduces of itself in order to feel ontologically secure. It is believed that Ireland views itself as an "underdog" (Garner 2007, 119) that has survived British colonial rule and, against all odds, repelled the kind of colonialist and anti-migrant rhetoric that festers in other European spaces. In other words, such things have no relevance to the Irish identity and, therefore, are not a part of Ireland's *ontological narrative* because they bring the Irish people no sense of security. In a speech given by Irish *Taoiseach* Leo Varadkar after the onset of anti-migrant protests in Ireland this year, Varadkar drew on Ireland's emigrant past in an effort to pacify protesters; he stated that "[these protests are] not

the Irish way. Irish people understand migration. All of our families have been shaped by it. We've been welcomed all around the world and in some parts of the world, we've been mistreated" (Burne 2023, para 10). Put differently, it is not within the Irish DNA to not welcome migrants because we were once the unwelcomed. Moreover, when justifying the new regularisation scheme that the Irish government introduced earlier this year to naturalise undocumented migrants in Ireland, Justice Minister Helen McEntee stated that this scheme was an important amendment to Irish immigration policy because it embodies the kind of generosity that has historically been shown to Irish emigrants in other countries throughout history (Kumar and Donoghue 2023).

Hence, the particular *ontological narrative* that gives Ireland a sense of self, and reassurance in that self, is centred on two elements: Ireland's commitment to believing that it is welcoming towards migrants and its belief that this is the case because it is a country whose people are historically familiar with what it feels like *not* to be welcome. This narrative is upheld at all times, by government and people, especially in times of crisis when the State is aware that this narrative has the potential be undermined – by anti-migrant movements and by the truth coming to light about its inability to cater to the amount of migrants it has accepted over the past year. What this means in the context of this study is that the Irish government does not securitise and barely even politicise migration to the extent that other European countries do. In other European countries, the *ontological narrative* that brings *them* security is centred on the preservation of a white and secular Europe free of migrants (Kinnvall 2012, 271). In these other European contexts, national narratives are backward-looking and about wanting to return to the Europe of the past; they are about promoting nostalgia for a which Europe was "free from 'cultural infection'" (Kinnvall 2012, 271), in other words, foreigners or migrants. This is not the case in Ireland, however, where there is a definite lack of nostalgia among the Irish people because of the country's repressive

history of colonisation and stringent Catholicism (Kumar Donoghue 2023), not to mention

because the Irish, as emigrants, were once the unwanted Other (Hickman and Ryan 2020;

Joseph 2017). Hence, speaking of migration as a threat, as something to be feared – that is,

securitising migration – in other European countries is only another means of increasing

feelings of security in these spaces because it is on this particular image of a historically

white, homogenous European society that their respective identities are built. Government

involvement in maintaining these identities and embracing top-down securitisation

procedures in the process can, therefore, be expected because it is within the government's

power to re-establish a sense of ontological security among the people. In Ireland, however,

the case is different.

Just as other European governments dedicate themselves to upkeeping their respective

ontological narratives at the expense of migrants, so too does the Irish government seek to

protect the Irish state narrative, but with the opposite effect and intention. In Ireland,

ontological security derives not from excluding, demonising or securitising migration; it

comes from the historically-established narrative that Ireland is welcoming and that it is

welcoming because it is a country of emigrants. Thus, to maintain a sense of ontological

security, the Irish government does not – and, perhaps, cannot – engage in securitising

migration. To do so may diminish the nationwide sense of ontological security and, with it,

public support for the government. It should be mentioned here that this sense of ontological

security is especially important to postcolonial states like Ireland because, as Jelena Subotić

argues, they have a particular desire to assert their presence within the international system

and preserve their "biographical continuity" (2016, 614) that colonialism took from them. For

postcolonial states, it is all about maintaining a sense of stability and security through the

continuation of their identity that they historically never had control over, which may explain

why the Irish government and people display such a commitment to maintaining the particular *ontological narrative* mentioned above.

Hence, it can be argued that the Irish government steers clear of securitising migration from a top-down, Copenhagen perspective in an effort to protect the longstanding Irish identity – or *ontological narrative* – that brings the Irish people stability and, of course, security. Together with a handful of other factors relating to race, the Irish economy and the secret tradition of mass confinement on the island, Ireland's *ontological narrative* constitutes a kind of constraining or inhibiting factor that prevents the Irish government from entertaining any sort of ideas relating to a top-down approach to the securitisation of migration.

Conclusion

While the general understanding across the island of Ireland is that migrants or, indeed, any other genre of foreign visitor in Ireland, are – and always have been – welcome in the country, there is room for debate regarding whether or not this is, in reality, true. It has been argued that the *ontological narrative* onto which the Irish government and people cling and reproduce portrays Ireland's people as some of the most welcoming in the world; fourth most, to be exact (Joseph 2017). This narrative not only brings stability and ontological security in the form of consistency and predictability, but it especially does so for a country in whose case these things have been historically challenged and undermined. Being a formerly colonised country, having the ability to acquire ontological security – security of the self – is a significant step forward for a people that has typically had no agency nor the ability to construct its own autobiographical narrative. The very narrative portrayed to the world about the Irish people was, throughout Irish history, dictated by the British: the Irish were known to the world as others, suspect people, and backward outsiders (Hickman and Ryan 2020). However, rather than follow in the footsteps of other postcolonial nations that have modelled their *ontological narratives* and identities on that of their former colonial masters in the hopes of feeling something that resembles agency (Vieira 2018, 151), the narrative entrepreneurs of Ireland took a different route and, instead, chose to base the Irish narrative not on exclusionary or colonialist logics, but on the precise opposite: on the people's welcoming, inclusive attitudes. But even though this narrative has for hundreds of years brought a, some might say, long-awaited and deserved sense of ontological security to a formerly oppressed people, little has been done to interrogate the reputability of this ontological security-inducing narrative.

Welcoming as Ireland may be to migrants, and positively as the government and people may speak about migration, the reality on the island is that migration is securitised –

maybe to a different or lesser degree than it is in other European countries but, still, nonetheless, securitised by virtue of Ireland's system of accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers. And with the growing presence of far-right supporters on the island that espouse anti-migrant views, it is conceivable that migration will be securitised in more ways than just one in the near future. What is, perhaps, less conceivable, however, is that the Irish government – present or future – will involve itself in these securitising procedures since Ireland's sense of ontological security derives from a particular narrative which is rooted in the idea that, because Ireland is a country of emigrants and historically oppressed peoples, it is naturally welcoming to all migrants. To do anything else would be contrary to "the Irish way" (Burne 2023, para 1). Not only this, but, since the Irish government is acutely aware of the fact that the country's economy is heavily reliant on migrants, they are also aware that speaking of migration in terms of threat and security would be harmful to the Irish economy as much as it would be to the Irish identity. Securitising migration from a top-down perspective in Ireland is, thus, counterintuitive from the perspective of the Irish government, not least because the majority of migrants in Ireland are viewed as "assimilable" Others owing to their white, Christian, European and, even, *Irish* roots. And, to address perhaps one of the most believable reasons as to why there are no concomitant top-down, Copenhagen securitisation procedures occurring in the Irish context in relation to migration, in Ireland, there exists a host of instances throughout Irish history where the government has successfully preserved the State's *ontological narrative*, all whilst shutting its eyes to the ill-treatment of minorities within its population. So why would it start doing any different now.

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