

# Post-colonial governance through securitization?

A narratological analysis of a securitization controversy in contemporary Danish and Greenlandic uranium policy

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*This article combines the securitization approach with theory of risk and narratological methodology in the analysis of the Danish-Greenlandic government debates about potential uranium exploitation. The authors conclude that the securitization controversy visible at the surface level of policy documents reflects an identity struggle at the deeper narrative level closely related to the understanding of national identity politics. These underlying stakes are brought to the fore when securitization is used as a governance technique.*

## Introduction

In the last decade, the Arctic region has become an arena for renewed geopolitical and economic interests and activities. Climate change and the prospect of permanently passable Northwest Passage and Northeast Passage have contributed to a renewed interest in the region. This interest has been accentuated by the recent continental shelf controversy among Arctic states, so much so that some scholars talk of a securitization of the Arctic region (cf. Jacobsen and Strandsbjerg this issue; see also Borgerson 2008; 2013). The renewed interest in the Arctic has also been discernible in recent Danish foreign policy strategy (Danish Government 2016a, 2) wherein The Kingdom of Denmark's role as a "major arctic power" is emphasized. However, the revitalized role of the Arctic has simultaneously contributed to new disputes over sovereignty between Denmark and Greenland, not least due to new complexities in shared and independent responsibilities between the Greenlandic and the Danish governments that resulted from the 2009 Self-Government Act (Gad 2014). This new division of jurisdiction implies that while Den-

mark still controls security, defense, and foreign policy<sup>1</sup> (see also Jacobsen and Gad 2017), Greenland's government has taken control over many areas of domestic policy. The most profound change among these authority alterations are those over natural resources, including the power to issue exploration rights and extraction licenses.

In Greenland, future extraction of hydrocarbon and valuable minerals such as rare earth elements (REE) and uranium is envisioned as one of the most feasible paths towards economic growth and independence from Denmark (Naalakkersuisut 2008a; 2010; 2014b, see also Bjørst 2016; Kristensen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017). Therefore, lifting the ban on uranium mining and export became especially imperative for the political elite in the years preceding the Self-Government Act, and after intense and protracted public debates, the ban was abolished in 2013. Greenland's newly acquired control of its natural resources and the accentuated potential of uranium mining have created a delicate situation between the two countries where juridical, security, and identity agendas intersect. This is epitomized by the dual-use property of uranium: as a mineral, it pertains to the field of raw materials, which falls under Greenland's jurisdiction; and as an explosive material, it pertains to the field of security and foreign policy, which falls under Denmark's jurisdiction.

The policy positions related to uranium are at the core of what we term a 'securitization controversy' between the two governments. We term the political and legal exchanges between Nuuk and Copenhagen related to uranium a 'controversy' in order to delineate these from the process of securitization proper which by definition ends all negotiations on a given issue. In contrast, the securitization controversy between Denmark and Greenland came to a provisional closure when a formal arrangement between the two countries was reached in 2016 with the *Agreement on security issues pertaining to uranium extraction and export* (Danish Government and Naalakkersuisut 2016). This agreement acknowledges Greenland's full legal right to the uranium as a mineral, while concurrently recognizing the necessity of Denmark's continued authority over the practical implementation of international treaties related to uranium security and non-proliferation. The agreement also stipulates that Greenland's Ministry of Industry, Labour, and Trade must "be heard" in all matters regarding uranium (see Søndergaard 2016).

This article aims to unpack the policy narratives pertinent to extraction and export of uranium articulated by the Danish and the Greenlandic Governments in official documents from the 2008 transition period to Self-Government to the Agreement in 2016. By doing so, the study seeks to explain how the underlying narrative structures in the documents reveal profound conflicts of interests between the two countries. Through the analysis, we argue that the securitization controversy is the manifestation

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<sup>1</sup> However, according to §13.2 in The Self-Government Act (2009), Greenland can have foreign affairs responsibility in certain cases: "In matters which exclusively concern Greenland, the Government may authorize Naalakkersuisut to conduct the negotiations, with the cooperation of the [Danish] Foreign Service". See Jacobsen 2015 for a discussion.

of a latent post-colonial identity struggle. The analytical strategy of this article establishes a conceptual framework whereby the Copenhagen School's securitization theory is integrated with a relational theory of risk and the concept of risk games. Methodologically, we connect this framework with a narratological approach. In the analysis, we identify how Danish and Greenlandic Governments establish different types of risks that appear disconnected from each other, but through a deep narratological analysis are connected and constitute a profound conflict involving fundamental aspects of identity and sovereignty. In a concluding section, we discuss the implications of the securitization controversy in terms of the future of Denmark, Greenland, and the relationship between the two.

### Analytical strategy

During the past decade, the theory of securitization has opened up new avenues for studying security in International Relations. The theory has been applied in a wide array of empirical contexts, including the renewed geopolitical interest in the Arctic region that has followed the post-Cold War de-securitization of the region (cf. Watson 2013). According to the Copenhagen School, securitization is a speech act that can move certain societal issues away from the normal democratic institutions of political control and into a state of emergency with limited democratic control (Wæver 1995). Being successful with a 'securitization move' depends on a 'securitizing actor' linking an 'existential threat' to a 'referent object' and that this move is accepted as such by an audience (Buzan et al. 1998). Conversely, issues can be subject to 'de-securitization', which according to the Copenhagen School, is the preferred state of affairs insofar as the state of emergency carries with it fundamental challenges to political legitimacy. When de-securitized, the security issue will enter traditional societal arenas and institutions like politics, science, market etc. These arenas open up for debating the issue according to the prevailing institutional logics thereby providing more transparency (Buzan et al. 1998, 206).

The constructivist approach of securitization theory highlights the contingent nature of which issues qualify for being accepted as existential threats (see e.g. Hansen 2011). While some 'facilitating conditions' regarding the speech act, the securitizing actor, and the existential threat are important for a successful securitization, it has been stressed that success ultimately relies on the acceptance by the audience (Buzan et al. 1998). Securitization faces similar audience perception as risk management does. Both rest on a well-known distinction between real risks and perceived risks. Successful management of national security and societal risks depends on the threats in question being understood, or at least accepted, by the public or important constituents (Slovic 1992). In this respect, securitization is nothing but a special case of riskification (see Petersen 2017 for a recent review).

Similar to the Copenhagen School, social theories of risk have pointed to the relational and constructivist nature of risk. According to Hilgartner (1992, 42), "the pro-

cess of constructing a risk object consists of defining an object and linking it to harm. This task is a rhetorical process, performed in texts that are displayed in specialized organisations or in public arenas, and it usually involves building networks of risk objects". In its simplest form, risk involves two objects. Boholm and Corvellec (2011) term the first object the 'object at risk,' which can refer to whatever physical or symbolic entity that represents a value to some actors. In securitization theory, the equivalent concept is the 'referent object'. The second object is termed 'risk object,' and refers to whatever physical or symbolic entity that represents a threat to the object at risk. In securitization theory, this is known as the 'existential threat'.

The main exception to this striking similarity between a relational theory of risk and securitization theory is that securitization involves only a certain kind of risks that can justify governing through extraordinary means. A key difference between securitization and riskification is that in the latter, "audience" is not conceived of as a homogeneous entity. What is an object at risk for one actor may or may not be a risk object for another (Boholm 2009). Such risk controversies are manifold in the everyday practice of risk management and societal regulation. In a security context, they have been observed on the level of macro-securitization (cf. Buzan and Wæver 2009). For instance, in alliances between states where changes in hierarchical ordering of security claims in order to "secure a 'monolithic identity' may be presented as a threat to some other aspect of the group's identity or to a sub-group subsumed under the group" (Watson 2013, 266). The tensions between actors in such relations is what we term a securitization controversy. A securitization controversy is a risk game (Slovic 2001) where the stakes for one or more actors can potentially be elevated to the level of national security. At the level of national security, a risk game resembles what has been termed a 'sovereignty game' (cf. Adler-Nissen and Gammeltoft 2008) insofar that a securitization move always (at least implicitly) involves a sovereignty claim. A securitization controversy is a process that installs a hierarchy of risk agendas of which some have the potential for becoming securitized. Other risk agendas may not have that potential but are nevertheless important to the extent that they can serve to strengthen a securitization move or the opposite, for instance through de-securitization.

Structural narratology: a methodological alternative to discourse analysis

In pointing to securitization controversies as a process that precedes securitization or de-securitization as a final outcome in cases where audiences do not constitute a monolithic identity, we contend that a simple discourse analysis, as proposed by Wæver (1998, 176-78), is the most suitable method. When a monolithic identity cannot be presupposed, it becomes relevant to address how identities are relationally constructed in discourses and which role such constructions have in the controversy. In order to account for the complex nature of what we have termed securitization controversies, we argue that structural narratology offers a viable alternative to discourse analysis: First, structural narratology emphasizes the oppositional nature of narrative meaning by as-

suming that conflicts and antagonistic relations are fundamental to signification; second, by presenting a rigorous methodology, structural narratology enhances the possibility for comparison and replication, therefore increasing its overall validity; and third, its focus on relations between specific actantial functions makes it analytically compatible with both securitization theory and relational risk theory.

According to the structuralist tradition on which modern narratology is based, a central distinction is made between surface and deep structure of society understood as semiotic sign systems (cf. Levi-Strauss 1955). This means that all narratives consist of two levels: the syntagmatic relations between signs at the level of discourse and what is said/in which order. By contrast, the deep narratological structure is paradigmatic and constitutes the level at which meaning is generated. Greimas' actantial model (1966) explains how deep narratological structures are central in generating meaning at the surface level of discourse (fig. 1). The model consists of three axes. The first horizontal axis describes the internal level of communication within the narrative whereby a 'sender' (or 'giver') makes an 'object' available to a 'receiver'. For instance, in the traditional fairy tale, the king is the 'sender' that sends the protagonist on a quest to rescue the princess. This is the communication axis. In most narratives, the protagonist is a 'subject' that has a desire for an 'object' (i.e. the protagonist's desire for the princess). This second vertical axis is the desire axis. To complicate matters and for the purpose of creating dramaturgical tension and narrative energy, the third horizontal conflict axis describes how the 'helper' and the 'opponent' relate to the 'subject'. In a fairy tale, the classic villain can take many forms and also so in modern policy narratives which often invoke a greater evil – e.g. globalization or terror – to justify action (see Rasmussen 2017).

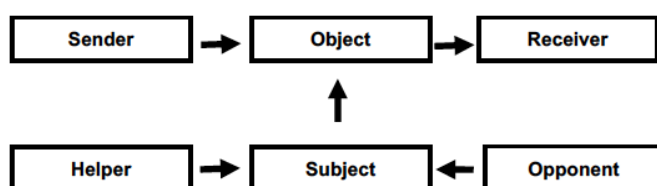


Figure 1. Greimas' actantial model (1966)

As the example of classic and modern villains illustrate, the meaning of the narrative depends on the underlying function and not on whether the actual discourse contains a dragon, a wizard, climate change, or terrorism. The purpose of conducting an actantial analysis is to bring the underlying structure of the story to the foreground in order to explain how identities at the surface level are constructed. It is important to stress that the actantial analysis pertains to how meaning is generated within and between texts in intertextual meta-narratives. It refrains from making speculations about an author's intentions, audience reception, and other conditions beyond the narrative. Thus, the ques-

tion of audience becomes an intra-textual part of the narrative in the form of an ‘implied’ or ‘model’ reader (Eco 1979). This does not render the empirical audiences irrelevant; rather, it simply points to how these extra-textual audiences are already institutionalized into certain forms of representations, e.g. other policy documents or media accounts that constitute overarching societal narratives.

While initially drawing on a distinction between manifest and latent (cf. Greimas 1971), the ontological foundation of structuralism and structuralist narratology have been subject to profound criticism (e.g. Derrida 1966). In post-structuralist epistemology, the notion of (objectivistic) deep structures has been abandoned. We agree with much of the post-structuralist criticism. Yet, we argue that it is possible to employ the structuralist methodology with the purpose of explicating the transformational process whereby human actors and objects are constructed in narratives without making inferences concerning the contested ontological status of underlying structures. Thus, we employ this methodology in terms of its ability to explain phenomena that are not immediately observable in a way similar to how psychological constructs are used. Thus, the key benefit of structural narratology is its ability to provide explanations at a general level through a simple and replicable methodology.

Operationalization: using the policy narratives as sources of securitization

Methodologically our study is based on a combination of the relational model of risk and the actantial model. Empirically we analyze policy documents. Policy documents exhibit clear narrative traits (Stone 2002) and within the broad field of policy analysis a narratological approach has gradually evolved (Jones and McBeth 2010). Following the ‘linguistic turn’ in security studies, (Payne 2014) narrative analyses of foreign policy-making have become more common (e.g. Krebs 2015; Kubiak 2014). We have chosen policy documents over other types of texts because of their status as ‘authoritative’ or ‘programmatic’ texts (Kuhn 2008, Clarke 2005, Clegg et al. 2006). In a political context this means that they serve to bind actors and other texts to a degree that exceeds the performativity of other types of speech acts. Following this, we understand the practice of politics as being exclusively dependent upon documents (Latour 1988; Shore and Wright 1997; Riles 2006; Law and Singleton 2014).

Our initial analysis of the policy documents, listed below, is purely descriptive and operates on the surface (discourse) level. We use the relational model of risk to identify the main conflicts between the securitization vis-à-vis de-securitization moves employed by the Danish and Greenlandic governments. When applying the model to a security context it is possible to situate the object at risk (or the referent object) as the desired *object* in the actantial model. Conversely, the risk object (or existential threat) has its equivalent in the *opponent*. Thus, in the second step of our analysis, we identify narratives and counter-narratives, which together account for the opposing value preferences that underlie the controversy.

Our empirical material consists of a large compendium of policy documents and strategies from 2008 through 2016 published by the Danish and the Greenlandic governments where we have sampled 10 specific documents for the analysis. Here, our inclusion criteria have been the policy documents and strategies that explicitly deal with Denmark's and Greenland's future foreign policy and/or raw materials, specifically uranium (and REE). In addition, we have included statements on independence and/or uranium made by Danish and Greenlandic politicians in the press during the period. We have also traced the issues back to parliamentary debates and drawn on written material in the form of 'Questions for a Cabinet Minister' – so-called 'Section 20 questions' (see Bibliography Section B).

## Analysis

In the policy documents, we observe how the status of the so-called zero-tolerance policy on uranium exploitation plays an important role. There has been a commonly shared understanding in both countries that a ban on uranium exploitation exists, a ban that allegedly originates from a Danish parliamentary decision in the late 1980s (see Vestergaard and Thomasen 2015). In the following section, we show how the Government of Greenland articulates this ban as a de-securitization move that at the deep narrative level draws on a latent identity conflict involving the two countries' post-colonial status.

The securitizing controversy over uranium: conflicts at the surface level of discourse

### *The Greenlandic Perspective: uranium as the object at risk*

The importance of uranium in the Greenlandic narrative about its future cannot be underestimated. In 2008, two years before the responsibility over raw materials and minerals was officially transferred, the Home Rule of Greenland commissioned the *Uranium Report vol. 1* (Naalakkersuisut 2008) on the potentials – and risks – related to uranium exploitation. The report paints a rosy picture of uranium as a prerequisite of economic growth; it is based on a high world market price on uranium. Rhetorically, it projects a scenario for “a uranium industry in Greenland” by drawing on the existing successful uranium industry in Saskatchewan, Canada. This is done in order to “set potential uranium extraction in relation to the Home Rule's mineral strategy and the described goals for the development of the raw material sector to a viable business which can contribute to economic development and employment” (Naalakkersuisut, 2008, 5-6). In other words: uranium is enacted as *the* future of Greenland (Michael 2016). The linkage between welfare and uranium is also present in a later report by the Tax and Welfare Commission of 2010 which emphasizes future revenues (Naalakkersuisut 2010). However, the 2008-report also tells another more complex story of the history of the Realm's preceding governance of uranium, focusing on how the so-called zero-tolerance policy was engendered by the Danish State. This led the authors of the report

to the conclusion that “[i]t will not be possible to begin uranium exploration or extraction before a new political decision is made” (Naalakkersuisut 2008, 3). This decision was made in 2013, when the zero-tolerance policy was lifted by the Inatsisartut.

While Danish reports and policy papers in this period tend to downplay, or even silence, the significance of the uranium issue, Greenlandic policy papers and strategies articulate the conflict very clearly. The conflict is most visible in an advisory opinion report (a so-called ‘responsum’) commissioned by the Home Rule and written by former professor of International Law Ole Spiermann (Spiermann 2014).<sup>2</sup> In this report, the juridical implications of the transference of jurisdiction concerning raw materials are outlined. While emphasizing the Greenlandic perspective, the report offers an analysis of the focal points of conflicts by referring to the Danish interests. As such the report serves as an important repertoire of legal arguments which are to be found in the ensuing policy documents from the Greenlandic government. One of the key documents in this period is the 120-page report titled, *Greenland’s Oil and Mineral Strategy 2014-2018* (Naalakkersuisut 2014a; 2014c). To stress its societal importance, this report was also published and distributed in a short, popularized version to a wider audience (Naalakkersuisut 2014b). Here, the benefits of mineral extraction are presented under headlines like “Raw materials create wealth” and “Raw materials contribute to our society with (...) tax revenues (...) salaries to workers (...) company profits” (Naalakkersuisut 2014b, 8). It concludes that mining is “For the benefit of Greenland” – which incidentally is also the title of an independent report on sustainable development in Greenland (see Ilisimatusarfik, Københavns Universitet 2014).

Uranium mining is presented as a safe and unproblematic solution to independent economic development. In order to counter the popular narrative of the dangers of mining, Canada and Australia are enrolled as archetypical examples of a safe uranium export industry. The report does, however, point to a potential conflict when stating that “Greenland has the right to give exploration and utilization licenses, but if export is of a kind which can have consequences for foreign, defense and security policy, Denmark must be involved” (Naalakkersuisut 2014b, 14). The structure of this argument follows Spiermann’s strong emphasis on Greenland’s full *legal* right to the authority over its natural resources (Spiermann 2014).

By applying the relational risk theory, we can extract a simple figuration that captures the essence of how the Greenlandic government establishes its risk narrative concerning uranium at the surface level:

economic growth  
object-at-risk

zero-tolerance policy  
risk-object

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from being visible in policy papers the same patterns of conflict are present in contemporary Danish and Greenlandic parliamentary debates as pointed out by a recently published master’s thesis – see Hansen 2016.



While it has been observed that the so-called zero-tolerance policy never actually existed (Vestergaard and Thomasen 2015), by treating it as a policy, the Greenlandic government has the advantage of being able to change the policy in accordance with its aspirations of becoming economically self-sustaining. As a total ban on uranium renders an explicit security policy pertaining to its dual use superfluous, lifting the ban has no security implications per se. Thus, it can take place within the domain of ‘normal’ politics. Accordingly, the 2013 bill emphasizes that future uranium extraction should take into account public health, nature, and the environment. It also stresses that “extraction and export of uranium can be done in full compliance with international rules and with a country's overall foreign and security policy interests” (Naalakkersuisut 2013). Thus, the passing of the bill is a strong de-securitization move from the Greenlandic government. Although the 2014 strategy states that Denmark must be involved *if* export can have consequences for foreign, defense, and security policy, the bill argues that this is not a problem. By this move, the Greenlandic government successfully replaces the zero-tolerance policy as a risk-object with the potential national security aspects that are presented as a simple matter of complying with international regulations.

*The Danish Perspective: uranium as the risk object*

*The Uranium Report Vol. 1*-document is so successful in establishing the zero-tolerance narrative and the idea of the need of a new political decision that uranium is acknowledged as a common policy issue by shifting Greenlandic and Danish administrations. This is evidenced by the Realm's 2011 joint *Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020* in the section on the potential exploitation of “Critical metals and rare earth elements and deposits in Greenland” where it is stated that “Greenland currently has zero-tolerance policy on uranium and thorium.” (Governments of Denmark, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands 2011, 28). But most pertinent, the successful establishment of uranium as a policy field in need of a new decision happens in 2012 when this debate is institutionalized in a joint Danish-Greenlandic intra-governmental working group on “the consequences of lifting the zero-tolerance policy” and their subsequent report from 2013 (Danish Government Naalakkersuisut 2013). The political and governmental complexities governing uranium's dual use is aptly captured in its summary: “The need for a clarification [of the zero-tolerance policy] is due to the fact that Greenland's self-government took over responsibility of the raw material field as of 1st of January 2010 and thus has the legislative and executive power over this field and that export of uranium has foreign, defense and security political implications” (ibid., 5).

The report confirms the narrative of the zero-tolerance policy as a historical fact. It also establishes a central policy problem in that the zero-tolerance policy becomes a key element in a sovereignty game. In a post-colonial context, this means the ‘hierarchization’ of “three priorities: legal self-government, economic self-sufficiency and aboriginal cultural identity” (Gad 2014, 7). The report emphasizes the completion between the two first priorities: who has the final word in controlling the riches of the underground, and thus the territory, of Greenland? By de-securitizing uranium as a

peaceful energy source (and potential source of welfare), Greenland seeks to minimize Danish influence. By pointing to the security implications of its dual use, Denmark rebuffs Greenland's de-securitization move. However, at the same time Denmark is keen on not going in the opposite direction since a successful securitization move would end the game. Such a move would stand in stark contrast to the newly transfer of sovereignty to the self-government of Greenland. This non-confrontational stance is stressed by statements made in January 2014 by then Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt: "It is clear that uranium is a special material, and therefore we should have a cooperation agreement in this area" (Ritzau 2014). However, a securitization-like move emerged when the Danish Parliament adopted the Great Scale Act ('storskalaloven'). Here the Ministry of Justice stated that rare earth materials "can potentially raise questions related to foreign-, defense- and security policy" (Ministry of Justice 2014) in response to a parliamentary question from Greenlandic MP Sara Olsvig (Olsvig 2014).

From 2014 to 2016, the security issue of uranium was tackled at the bureaucratic level by the Danish Government. For instance, the 2016 security trend analysis published by the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS) stated that "[towards 2030] China will still be interested in extraction of raw materials in the Arctic, including Greenland" (DDIS, 2016, 10). This echoes a general securitization narrative of the Arctic (e.g. Bamford 2015), specifically the supply security of REE materials and uranium narrative prevalent around 2010-2014 (e.g. Boersma and Foley 2014). At the higher governmental levels pertaining to Denmark's foreign policy, the issue of uranium is absent. This is the case in the comprehensive foreign policy review published by the Danish Government – the so-called Taksøe Report (Danish Government 2016a; 2016b). While the issue of uranium may be deemed an unimportant detail in Denmark's grand strategy for its foreign relations, the Arctic is given weight as part of The Kingdom's security priorities. And The Kingdom's status as an Arctic great power is emphasized when the report states "we must take advantage of our position as a major Arctic power" (Danish Government 2016b, 13). To give muscle to Denmark as a heavy-weight champion in international politics, 'The Kingdom' gives Denmark the opportunity to present the state as among the world's 12<sup>th</sup> largest territories and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest within NATO, after the US and Canada (Danish Government 2016a, 2).<sup>3</sup> In this way, the report uses 'The Kingdom' when this is opportune to promote *Denmark's* foreign political ambitions.

By applying the relational risk theory, we can extract a hierarchy between two simple figurations that capture the essence of how the Danish government establishes its risk narrative. At the highest institutional level, the narrative silences the uranium in favor of emphasizing the importance of the Arctic region in general:

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<sup>3</sup> Such interpretation is corroborated by statements made by the former Danish foreign minister in an interview given in 2011. Here Martin Lidegaard stated that "We have a greater presence in Beijing and Washington and Berlin because of Greenland. That's what makes Danish foreign policy unique" (Braum 2015, 344).

Arctic Great Power  
object-at-risk

Competing Arctic Great Powers  
risk-object

It is only at the lower institutional levels in the Danish administration that the securitization controversy is played out. Here, the Danish Government is careful not to counter the Greenlandic de-securitization move with a decision that overrules the Greenlandic annulment of the zero-tolerance policy. Yet, it is clear that the annulment is perceived as a problem and that in the Danish narrative uranium is treated as a risk-object:

National security  
Object-at-risk

Uranium as dual-use material  
risk-object

It is interesting to observe how the two risk figurations, while clearly connected in a hierarchical order, thematically remain disconnected. Denmark's status as an Arctic great power appears not to be threatened by the rather insignificant securitization controversy concerning uranium.

The identity struggle: latent conflicts in Greenland's and Denmark's post-colonial narratives

The analysis of the narratives thus far reflects what can be achieved through a simple discourse analysis (cf. Wæver 1998). At surface level, the narrative shows the basic configuration of the securitization controversy. It provides answers to questions such as: which are the competing risk constructions, and what is the hierarchy between them? The analysis also points to some peculiar moves in the struggle that are difficult to analyze at the surface level of the narratives. New questions arise: what exactly is the thematic relation between the two risk figurations in Denmark's narrative? What is the function of uranium in the two countries' narratives, and why does it become a point of controversy? In order to answer these questions, the analysis must take into account the deep structure of the narrative at the level of the latent actants and functions.

*The Greenlandic deep narrative: Denmark as a colonial power*

From a securitization perspective, Greenland's government is the first actor to make a clear de-securitization move. At the backdrop of the 2010 transfer of jurisdiction over raw materials in the Greenlandic underground, the Nalakkersuisut presented a simple narrative with a happy ending: In the Greenlandic interpretation of this jurisdictional transfer, Denmark as an actant has been erased from the story<sup>4</sup>. The story simply consists of a *subject* (Greenland) and a desired object (full control over uranium extraction) without any obstructing *opponent*.

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<sup>4</sup> Gad (2014, 17) makes a similar observation when pointing to how "communicating with the EU, Greenland also envisions sovereign equality by photo-shopping Denmark out of the picture".

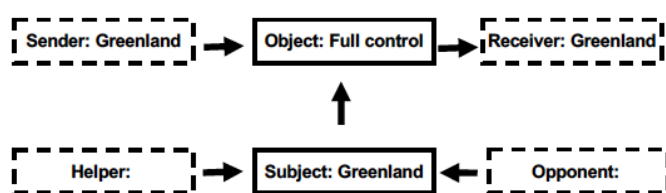


Figure 2. The simple Greenlandic story: Denmark erased from the narrative

This contrasts with the pre-self-government narrative imposed by Denmark. In this, Denmark was an ambiguous actant in the sense of relieving Greenland from the economic and bureaucratic burdens of being an independent state while at the same time imposing limitations on its sovereignty. That is, at the deep narrative level, Denmark has been the *sender* (or giver), a *helper* and an *opponent*. As a *giver*, Denmark has generously supported Greenland's fragile economy. As a *helper*, Denmark has assisted Greenland with overcoming the dangers mainly stemming from self-inflicted problems, which in this (Danish) narrative makes Greenland its own worst enemy. As *opponent*, Denmark has taken the role of the responsible parent that imposes some restrictions on the freedom of a disorderly child in order to protect it from its own failures. This grand narrative, we argue, bears all the traits of the form of power inflicted by a colonial ideology (cf. Osterhammel 1997. See also Rud 2016 for a discussion on the positions on Denmark as colonial power in Greenland). While Denmark is careful not to reproduce this paternalism in official documents, it is articulated in many statements made by Danish People's Party's spokesman for foreign and Greenlandic affairs, Søren Espersen. His proclamations like “[r]ather than ranting and raving, it would be better if Greenland took care of its own problems” (Kristiansen 2016) are emblematic of the colonial narrative of the “ungrateful child”. In this paternalistic role, Denmark has been an antagonistic actant which has prevented Greenland from realizing its desired object of independence (Breum 2011; Gad 2016). A central aspect of legitimizing this role has been how the grand narrative about the Danish-Greenlandic relationship has installed Greenland as the key *opponent* in its own ‘tragic’ story.

In this respect, the post-self-government narrative established by the Greenlandic government is a successful counter-narrative. It is possible to write Denmark as an *opponent* out of the narrative. And even if this narrative may appear naïve and too optimistic, it places Denmark in a serious dilemma. By accepting Greenland's new narrative move, the Danish government loses influence as an Arctic great power; by rejecting the narrative, Denmark makes a clear signal that despite the transfer of authority to the Greenlandic Government, the Danish Government as the old colonial power still pulls the strings. The Greenlandic narrative clearly presents uranium as the solution to achieving economic independence. By blocking this road to independence, the Danish Government faces the risk of being perceived as a colonial power that is desperately seeking to maintain its colony in a relationship of dependency and subordination. At the deep narrative level, the Greenlandic counter-narrative cannot erase the Danish gov-

ernment entirely from the story, but it effectively exposes the hypocrisy of the colonial master plot in the Danish pre-self-government narrative. Thus, if the Danish Government should seek to re-enter the story by securitizing the extraction of uranium, the only actantial role available will be that of the *opponent*. The era of being an ambiguous actant is over.

This overreaching counter-narrative is not explicit in the policy documents themselves, but it is abundantly present in the socio-cultural formation of statements given by Greenlandic politicians in the press. Here, the connection between independence and uranium in the Greenlandic contemporary discourse was articulated by former Greenlandic Premier Aleqa Hammond before the election in the autumn of 2013, stating her goal as independence “within my lifetime” (see Breum 2015, 24) preceded shortly after by Naalakkersuisut lifting the ban on uranium mining the 24<sup>th</sup> of October. Less than year later in early 2014, Hammond’s symbolic statement was followed by the establishment of the commission to investigate Greenland’s colonial past.

*The Danish deep narrative: Greenland as a means for geopolitical power*

In our analysis, we observed how Greenland is absent from the contemporary Danish narrative and its grand strategy for foreign policy. This absence is clear in the 2016 strategy whitepaper on *Danish Diplomacy and Defence in Times of Change. A Review of Denmark’s Foreign and Security Policy*, also known as the Taksøe-report. Here it is stated that “The Kingdom of Denmark is a major Arctic power as well as a small European nation” (Danish Government 2016b, 5), while effectively toning down the fact that the only reason the Kingdom is an Arctic power is because of Greenland and that Greenland with its recent status of self-governance is the actual power.

It is noticeable that while the Arctic is mentioned more than 50 times in the report, Greenland is only mentioned 32 times. It is also worth drawing attention to the context in which Greenland is mentioned. Most references to Greenland specifically mention “the *people* of Greenland” (our italics). When referring to the territory, the report is keen on making an explicit connection to ‘The Kingdom’ rather than to Greenland. Thus, the report (2016b, 13) states that: “[w]e must take advantage of our position as a major Arctic power to influence developments in the Arctic to the benefit of the Kingdom of Denmark, the region and the peoples of Greenland and the Faroe Islands”. The story presents Denmark as a *subject* which is almost synonymous with ‘The Kingdom’ in its relation to the position as an Arctic great power (the desired object). In this narrative, Greenland and its aspirations for the future is both silenced and subordinated to the Danish master plot. In this narrative, the old colonial possessions are important only to the extent that they can provide Denmark with geopolitical influence.

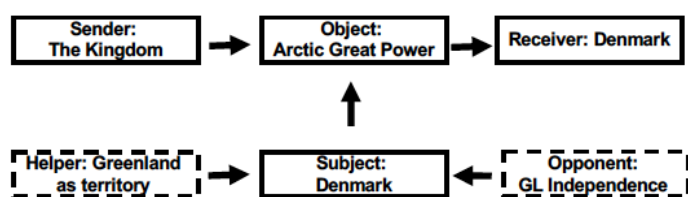


Figure 3. The Danish aspiration as a great Arctic power

While the two Danish risk narratives remain thematically detached at the surface level of the policy documents, a report from the Danish security and intelligence service makes an explicit link to “China” and “mining” as a potential threat to Danish interests in the Arctic region: “Due to close ties between Chinese raw materials companies and the Chinese political system, major investments in Greenland face a certain level of risks as large-scale investments impact significantly on small economies such as the one in Greenland. Therefore, investments in strategic resources are potentially prone to political interference and pressure” (DDIS 2015, 34).

But how does China become a threat to Danish foreign policy goals? We argue that the key to this riddle lies in the experience Denmark has with “major investments in Greenland” and the benefits of its “impact” in terms of “political interference and pressure”. By replacing “China” with “Denmark” in the quote, it becomes clear that the threat is China’s potential for assuming the *giver* and the *helper* role in the Greenlandic narrative. This would effectively write Denmark out of the narrative, and in turn the status of being an Arctic great power.

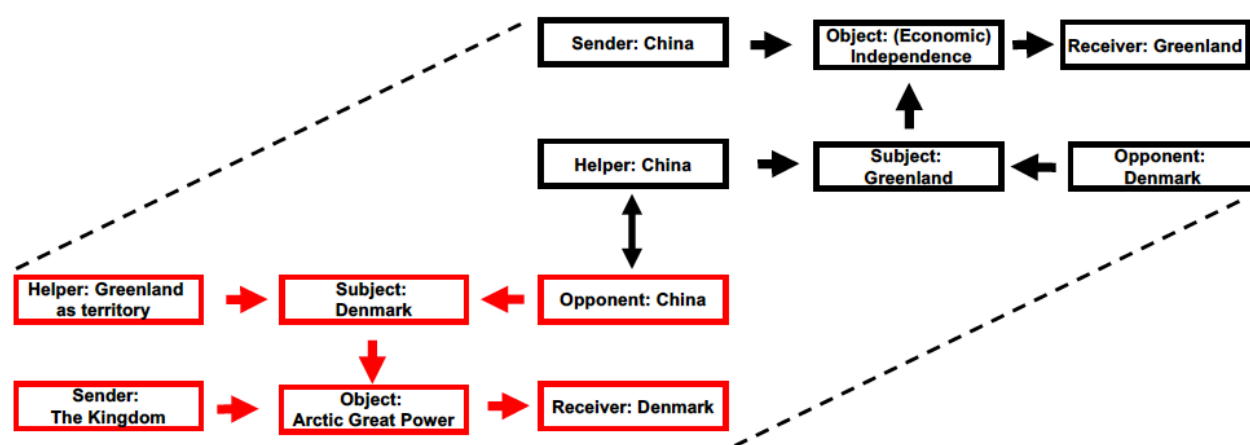


Figure 4. Reversing the post-colonial roles: from helper to opponent

The deep narrative structure in the intelligence report reflects how the foundation for the securitization controversy is to be found in the conflict between the Greenlandic and the Danish narratives. China is an *opponent* in the Danish narrative because it is a potential *helper* in the Greenlandic narrative. The way the grand narrative from colonial Denmark

represents Greenland as its own worst enemy may serve to legitimize (at least domestically) the paternalism that is implicit in the intelligence report. However, we argue that the grand narrative creates a blind spot concerning the obvious hypocrisy manifested in the report. It is obvious that China is a threat to Denmark's position as an Arctic great power, but it is less obvious that this is a threat to Greenland's aspirations for future independence.

#### Discussion and conclusion

The final official resolution of the uranium struggle was reached in 2016 by the joint adoption of the *Agreement between the Danish Government and Naalakkersuisut regarding the foreign and security political issues pertaining to extraction and export of uranium and other radioactive materials in Greenland* (Danish Government Naalakkersuisut 2016). In this agreement, Greenland reiterated its sovereignty in regard to issuing licenses; but, Copenhagen retains the responsibility for controlling export vis-à-vis international uranium safeguard regimes. While this agreement marks a provisional closure, it cannot be seen as the end of the securitization controversy. It appears to be a pragmatic, albeit temporary, solution to a fundamental conflict of interests. By not making an ultimate decision, both parties can benefit from working together even though they don't share the same long-term goals. Denmark can benefit from Greenland as a means to realize its foreign policy ambitions and Greenland can benefit from Denmark as a means to realizing its ambitions of independence. The question that now remains is whether Denmark is actually helping Greenland.

Our analysis shows that the aspiration of becoming an Arctic great power is an important part of Danish foreign policy. But it is also an aspiration that shares many traits with the traditional mindset of a colonial power. Our analysis of the specific securitization controversy concerning uranium is just one of many examples of how the colonial mindset collides with Greenland's aspirations for independence. By repeatedly pointing to a potential securitizing move, the Danish government establishes a legitimate platform for maintaining some control in Greenland. Yet, when making this latent threat, Denmark is balancing on a knife-edge since it threatens to hollow out the self-governance in Greenland and unleashes a public out-cry amongst political elite in Greenland. This was visible in the mishaps of late 2016 regarding the abandoned military base, Grønnedal. Here, Chinese company General Nice Industries Ltd. made a bid to take over the base, approved by Naalakkersuisut. In the last minute, the Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen rejected the Chinese bid and let Denmark's defense take over responsibility for "reopening" the closed base at a low maintenance level. No explanation was given as to why the Chinese company was rejected, but speculations were made by a leading observer that strategic national interests were at the heart of the decision (Breum 2016).

Securitization is a tempting solution to the paradox faced by Denmark in its relationship with Greenland. In the long run, both countries cannot assist each other in

their conflicting ambitions. Paving the way for Greenland's future independence will be the end of Denmark's status as an Arctic great power. Yet, as Gad (2016) has argued, to avoid a hasty Greenlandic exit of the Danish Realm, Denmark must do anything in its power to accommodate Nuuk's wishes, including more formal moves towards independence and a revision of the Danish Constitution. We argue that securitization is a problematic solution for maintaining Danish control over a joint Danish-Greenlandic foreign policy as it bears the risk of being de-masked as a new face of colonialism. In the securitization controversy of uranium, Denmark cleverly avoided showing this face, gently assisted by Greenland's initial desecuritization move. When Denmark shows this face, however, it nurtures Greenland's ambitions for independence.

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