

Name of the student:	Mathias Finn Thisted Hierl
Title of the thesis:	<i>Securitization Theory and Danish Discourse during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-2021)</i>
Reviewer:	Dr. Abel Escribà-Folch (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

## 1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis applies securitization theory to public discourse in Denmark during the COVID pandemic. Particularly, it contrasts the position of the government with that of the so-called extreme-opposition. The understanding of political dynamics during crises, in this case a health one, is certainly a relevant topic and doing so from a narrative perspective enriches our understanding of how actors frame political challenges strategically.

In my opinion, the most interesting part or question in the thesis is the reaction part discussed at the end, namely, how the government reacted to the rise in opposition and so-called counter-securitization. This indeed has the potential to generate interesting insights.

The one part of the research objectives that is problematic, in my view, is the one concerning the public's perception of the securitization narrative. This is a complete different question that requires a complete different framework of analysis and design. In other words, with the approach and methods adopted, the author cannot provide a satisfactory answer to this question, and he does not indeed.

Discourse analysis is not meant to do it.

Further, regarding the main research question, which is presented in the methodology section, there are conceptual issues to be taken into account. The question reads as follows: "How did the primary securitization actor - the Danish Prime minister Mette Frederiksen change her securitization narrative in response to the counter-securitization of her government's COVID-19 measures under the protest group Men in Black?" Nota that, the way of writing it makes the assumption that securitization already existed in the PM narrative, and then it assumes that it changes, so it is just asking how. It also assumes the presence of counter-securitization.

This is my main concern with papers using securitization as framework. There are always many assumptions involved and no falsification is ever possible. Then, analyses revolve normally about the question of how much or intensity of securitization, which in the end is difficult to establish, as it is based on a qualitative assessment. Global crises will always entail some degree of securitization, so it is not strategic after all, it might just be a normal response to unexpected shocks and uncertainty. A security threat is thus not necessarily being constructed in this case.

Based on all this, a more critical discussion of the securitization theory would be necessary in the literature review section.

## 2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

It strikes me that the literature review section is immediately followed by a methodology section, without a theoretical discussion and contribution in between. So no original framework is developed that aims at generating insights on the dynamics of narrative construction, and government-opposition competition, etc. There is then no real new or original argument being developed. For example, securitization in the context of covid is only discussed in one brief paragraph at the end of this section.

Discussion of the methods applied, discourse analysis seems appropriate, although it is difficult for me to assess it, since I'm very unfamiliar with it. In any case, I wonder why not further data is looked in to and also why not conduct interviews with relevant actors to further clarify the frame of their discourse and unbundle the process of narrative construction and perception of threats and measures being adopted. It seems to me that the sources used are in fact quite limited and generate an insufficient amount of "data" for the analyses to yield strong conclusions. Most importantly, considering that one of the key research questions is the government's reaction to the rise of opposition to COVID measures, I do not think the data used can actually address this question. The

same goes for the emergence of the counter-securitization (as the author calls it), given that from the Men in Black, only its manifesto is used. The dynamics of adjustment and interaction get definitively obscured and difficult to assess. The author should discuss more at length the appropriateness of the data sources and do so more critically, and acknowledge the limitations. The same goes for the “reliability” subsection, which is very brief and underdeveloped. The author should also pay more attention to case selection justification, and how the selection is theoretically informed.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The author should be more cautious in presenting some of the the alleged findings and conclusions. For example, he asserts “Mette Frederiksen successfully securitized the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020”, yet, I do not think the analysis allows for such a claim, especially as it contains subjective evaluation on the level of success which is difficult to establish empirically. Most importantly, there is no discussion of the policy implications of the thesis or the implications that the Danish case could entail for a broader range of polities.

### 4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is, in general, nicely written and uses scholarly language. The author uses footnote citations, and then a reference list at the end of the paper too. The style should be consistent in the footnotes, and address the issue of repeated references. Moreover, in the reference list, many references are incomplete and not properly cited. That affects books, book chapters, etc. It all looks rushed and poorly and not carefully presented.

### 5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

This thesis has several weak points:  
-Formal issues regarding citations.  
-Lack of critical perspective and theoretical development.  
-Scarcity of materiel and data to actually assess the research questions.

<b>Grade (A-F):</b>	C (72)
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>
January 13 <sup>th</sup> 2023	 Abel Escribà-Folch

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

**Assessment criteria:**

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.