

‘Trumping’ the Danish Self-Image

Danish Ontological Security and Colonial Complicity in the
Geopolitical Contest over Greenland



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Abstract

As Trump's pursuit of Greenland escalated throughout 2025 and into 2026, the Danish government has faced mounting pressure to justify its authority over the territory, both on the international stage and within its domestic sphere. This thesis examines how Danish officials discursively construct and legitimize that authority in response to repeated threats from Trump. Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological framework and ontological security theory as its main theoretical lens this thesis analyses two data categories of official political Danish discourse, official speeches and statements by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen responding directly to Trump on an international stage, and new policy initiatives and symbolic governance text addressing the Danish-Greenlandic relationship within a domestic framework. The analysis finds that Danish legitimisation operates through an external and internal level, where externally Denmark is constructed as a rational, democratic rule-based actor, in line with literature on Nordic exceptionalism. Internally, the narrative of shared history and collective belonging reinforces emotional attachment and produces a shared identity. Understood through a lens of ontological security, both levels are attempts to stabilize the Danish ontological security at a geopolitical moment of crisis, where an established biographical narrative is being challenged.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, ontological security, Greenland, Denmark, national identity, postcolonialism, Nordic exceptionalism, legitimisation

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1. Introduction

In early 2025, President Donald Trump reiterated his wish that the United States hold “ownership and control” over Greenland and refused to rule out the use of force to secure American interests in the Arctic. These statements were, in contrast to the first comments made in 2019, shifting from a narrative of “purchasing Greenland”, to, “asserting control over Greenland” (see NPR, 2025; The Arctic Institute, 2025). Coupled with a series of informal visits to Greenland by Donald Trump Jr. and several Republican politicians, Trump is signaling a strong U.S. interest in the island. As a result, discussions about Greenlandic sovereignty, Arctic security, and Denmark’s authority over Greenland have received more attention, domestically and on an international stage. This has not only heightened Danish anxieties about international competition in the Arctic but also placed renewed attention on the complexities of the Danish–Greenlandic relationship.

This raises fundamental questions about sovereignty and legitimacy in a post-colonial landscape: What does it mean for a country to hold authority over another territory in 2025 – and how do Danes understand and justify their position of legitimacy over the United States? Literature on Danish identity show that national identity is built on a strong narrative of Nordic exceptionalism, that emphasizes values of progressiveness, egalitarianism, humanitarianism, and moral distinction from other former European colonial powers (Loftsdottir & Jensen 2016). This self-understanding is placed under pressure when Denmark’s continued authority in Greenland in postcolonial global order is brought to the surface, yet the image of a “good colonizer” remains seemingly largely unchallenged in both national and international discourse.

Trump’s statements have provoked strong reactions in Denmark, but has also started a chain reaction of Danish initiatives towards Greenland. These include a 10% increase in the block grant, additional economic commitments, the introductions of an anti-racism action plan, and more symbolically, PM Mette Frederiksen recent apology to the women affected by the Coil Campaign (*Spiralsagen*) (Vestergaard, 2025). The timing of Denmark's increased initiatives towards Greenland can be understood within the broader geopolitical context and Danish renewed commitment to Greenland, but also as an attempt to reaffirm Danish legitimacy. Notably, Trump acts as a disruption to the Danish biographical continuity, and has set in motion a series of repair strategies for Denmark to uphold a sense of self, in a global and national context. This can be understood through a lens of ontological security, which refers to a subject's self-understanding expressed in articulations of identity and stable sense of self, and

has been used in IR as a way to understand how states not only seek physical security, but also their self-assurance (Diez & von Lucke 2024, 1).

Thus, the research question is concerned with understanding how Denmark negotiates its self-understanding and how this affects Danish ontological security when confronted with its colonial past and complex present on an international stage. It investigates how Danish political and public discourse has responded to Trump's pursuit on the island, and what this reveals about the Danish self-image, colonial anxieties, nation branding, and the attempts to portray Denmark as a benevolent and legitimate sovereign actor. The research question that will be addressed is thus:

How does the Danish government discursively legitimize Denmark's authority over Greenland in response to Trump's pursuit of the island, and how can this be understood through an ontological security perspective?

In order to answer the main research question, the following two subquestions will guide the analysis:

1. Through what discursive strategies does Denmark seek to maintain or restore ontological security in response to Trump's interest in Greenland?
2. How does the Danish government legitimize its legal and political authority over Greenland in official political discourse?

1.1 Structure of paper

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 provides a literature review, situating the study within existing literature on the Danish identity, nordic exceptionalism, the relationship between Denmark and Greenland and its neocolonial implications. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework, clarifying the theory of ontological security and using the framework of Nordic exceptionalism to inform this. Chapter 4 presents the methodological considerations, clarifies epistemological assumptions, operationalizes the use of ontological security theory with Critical Discourse Analysis and explains choice of data material. Chapter 5 consists of the empirical analysis, divided into two data categories, organized into the textual analysis, discursive and social practice. Chapter 6 reflects on findings and limitations, and finally, Chapter 7 attempts to summarize main findings and concludes.

2. Literature Review:

This thesis sits at the intersection between scholarship of Nordic exceptionalism, Danish identity, postcolonial scholarship of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship through the lens of ontological security, as will be further elaborated in the next chapter. This chapter will review the literature of Nordic exceptionalism and more specifically, Danish identity, and then the Danish relationship with Greenland. Finally the study's research gap will be addressed.

2.1 Nordic Exceptionalism

In a Nordic context, theorists have used the concept of Nordic exceptionalism to understand a broader Nordic identity that plays a role in cultural, historical and political dimensions. In Loftsdottir & Jensen's (2016) book *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: Exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, they argue that Nordic exceptionalism can be understood as having two main characteristics. The first is the notion that the Nordic countries played a minimal role in the broader European colonialism and the formation of the global conceptualization of the "West" as it is understood today (Loftsdottir & Jensen 2016, 2). The second, is the idea that the Nordic countries have a self-understanding that revolves around being intrinsically different to, and better than, the rest of Europe. Building from Browning's (2007) understanding of nation branding, the Nordic countries sees themselves as "global citizens", "rational", "conflict-resolution oriented" is central to understanding the Danish self image, and especially the way in which is is marketed to the international audience (Browning 2007, 33).

Browning (2007) understands this self-conceptualisation as rooted in nation branding from the Cold War, where the Nordic countries retained a distance from the conflict and engaged in efforts to act as mediators and "bridge builders" (ibid, 33). This was also founded on an idea of "internationalist solidarism", where the Nordic model attained a highly moral dimension, where Nordic countries also pride themselves on helping the world's poorest and overcoming the North-South divide (ibid, 34). This is also characterized by development aid, where the Nordic countries were the first to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of GDP to Official Development Assistance (ODA) (ibid, 35). Browning argues that such efforts were branding efforts for a collective Nordic identity, but also to export Nordic values for the development of a distinct "Nordic brand".

This self-conceptualization relies highly on understanding the Nordic countries as peripheral to a broader European colonialism (Loftsdottir & Jensen 2016, 2). However, it does not question the Nordics' own involvement in colonial and racist activities. Both in terms of national identity and self-understanding and in the wider global reputation, the Nordic countries are regarded as “free of the burden of guilt” that other Europeans have in regard to colonialism (ibid 29). Keskinen et al (2009) uses the term colonial complicity to theorize the ways in which the Nordic countries have benefitted from and participated in colonial power, while still imagining their identity as being innocent and removed from such histories (Keskinen et al 2009, 1). These images, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the culture and identity of the Nordic countries. However, it also speaks to broader self-understanding of the Nordic countries as being complicit to colonialism, however identifying as intrinsically different to the rest of Europe.

2.2 Danishness and the Danish Self-image

While the literature on Nordic exceptionalism provides a broad framework for understanding Nordic identities and self-conceptualisations, the Danish identity can also be understood as distinct to a broader regional identity that is upheld and performed through dominant discourses on a national level. Agius (2013) examines how Danish identity is sustained and performed using the Danish cartoon crisis in 2006 as a case study (Agius 2013, 241). Agius argues that the Danish identity was performed on two levels, that at the domestic level, Danish identity was asserted through what the politicians coined a “culture struggle”, a discourse that constructed Danish identity as coherent and bounded of values that were under threat from an external Other (ibid, 246). This was accompanied with immigration policies that reiterated identity in hierarchical and exclusionary terms (ibid, 245). External Danish identity was performed via participation in the “war on terror”, democracy promotion and the development assistance, characterized by defending values of progressiveness and freedom for the individual (ibid, 249). Agius argues that all of these became tools that not only defended physical security, but also maintained the image of the nation states (ibid, 242). Tracing definitions of Danishness back to the 18th century and the historical origins of the Danish kingdom, Agius describes how construction of the modern Danish national identity is constitutively dependent on the construction of an Other that marks its boundaries and gives it coherence (ibid, 244).

Jensen (2016) deepens this argument by examining how Danish modernization of Greenland and construction of Danish development aid programs play a big role in shaping Danish self-understanding. Both were framed as despotic, and Danish

intervention was seen as humanitarian, producing a narrative in which Denmark's success as a welfare state appeared as a result of internal processes, entirely divorced from its history of colonial exploitation. This self-image was intensified in the post-war period, when maintaining sovereignty over Greenland in contrast to other European colonial powers, a new humanitarian internationalism served to underline Denmark's international image (Jensen 2016, 109).

In line with this, another important aspect to Danishness is the aspect of colonial memory as constitutive site of identity negation. Blaagaard (2010) argues that Danish colonial history has been systematically concealed in the national social imaginary, producing a guilt-free national self-understanding (Blaagaard 2010, 102).. This is not only the act of forgetting, but the active absence of physical encounter with colonial histories and the silencing in education and journalistic practice (ibid, 103).

However, Nonbo Andersen (2013) offers a small refinement to this colonial amnesia argument, contending that Danish colonial history has not been repressed but rather continuously refigured, imagined in versions that transform history into something more comfortable (Nonbo Andersen 2013, 58). Tracing public memories of slavery and colonialism in Denmark from 1948 - 2012, Nonbo-Andersen demonstrates that the dominant narrative of Denmark as a beginning colonial power has consistently shaped how the colonial past is remembered, framing Danish colonialism as an ultimately civilizing project (ibid, 61). Thus, Denmark neither represses nor fully confronts its colonial past, but continuously retells it in comfortable terms.

Eldar (2024) adds a further dimension by focusing on Copenhagen's commemorative landscape and the 2017 centennial of the Danish West Indies sale to US, Eldar argues that Denmark, like many other European nations, navigates an ongoing postcolonial identity crisis in which management of colonial memory plays a constitutive role. Memories of Danish colonialism are leveraged to negotiate Danish identity and, in an effort, to detach this history from the rest of Europe (Eldar 2024, 1).

2.3 Denmark & Greenland and the Colonial Context

In order to understand the framework for Danish identity performance within the geopolitical situation and Trump's interest in the Arctic island. Jensen (2015; 2018) argues that one of most significant time periods for the shaping of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship was in the post-war period, when Greenland was transformed from colony to an official county of the Kingdom of Denmark (Jensen 2015, 445). This was characterized as the "modernization period" in 1950s and 1960s, that sought to "Danify" Greenland when thousands of Danes came to Greenland to

replace a small community-based culture with an imported industrial, urban-based economy (ibid). Greenlandic historian Jens Heinrich argues that the unequal wages and the overall hasty social development have played a role in the high degrees of apathy, criminality and alcoholism for many people in Greenland (Heinrich, 2014). Greenlanders were paid 25 percent less by the Danish state than Danish people who were employed in the same jobs and various policies were implemented which led to less well-educated Greenlanders to stay in Greenland (Rud 2017, 124). These modernization programs were understood as humanitarian efforts and together with Danish development aid, played a big role in rebuilding Denmark's image as a benevolent coloniser and internationally conscientious nation state after the war (Jensen 2016, 107). Thus, Jensen argues that one cannot understand the Danish self-image without understanding the effect of colonialism in Greenland and development aid projects as the two are intrinsically linked (ibid, 108).

26 years after the colonial status official ending in 1953, Greenland achieved “Home Rule” in 1979 and “Self-Governemnt” in 2009 that granted a legal framework for the Greenlandic government to gradually take over responsibilities from the Danish government and declare independence if wanted. Hansen asks why, despite electoral majorities for independence, it remains part of the Kingdom of Denmark (Hansen 2023, 460). Going beyond materialist explanations that only focus on economic development, Hansen understands the relationship between Denmark and Greenland through a framework of ontological insecurity to show how Danish elites challenge the post-colonial status of Greenland to prevent agency (ibid). He proposes the term “post-colonial” gaslighting to explain how subtle forms of colonialism and domination that Danish elite have actively “distorted” Greenlandic experiences of agency (ibid, 467).

Hansen draws from Untalan (2019) postcolonial approach of ontological security, to embrace Greenland ontological security as in a state of transition, on a path to statehood (ibid, 466). Yu Untalen calls to avoid "normalizing logics of the Westphalian nation states system” and critically center the self and engage in the Other, it meaning that ontological security mechanisms are not only deployed by Denmark to stabilize its own identity, but also function to destabilize Greenlandic identity and forestall independence claims. Danish ontological security is in part maintained at the cost of Greenlandic ontological insecurity (Hansen 2023, 469). Hansen's framework thus provides a direct bridge between the colonial history outlined above and the ontological security analysis that will be further elaborated in the theoretical framework.

2.4 Summary and Research Gap

The literature review across these three sections has established the body of scholarship on Nordic Exceptionalism, Danish national identity, and the historical and colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland. It examines the way in which the Danish self-image is defined by values of rationality, progressiveness and democracy and how this has been historically and politically produced and actively maintained. The Nordic exceptionalism literature reveals a broader regional framework within which the Danish identity operates, establishing the moral dimension of Nordic identity and its relationship with colonial complicity.

Nonetheless, using ontological security as a framework in understanding the Danish identity is underdeveloped, specifically understanding Danish ontological security as challenged by crisis or external disruption. Moreover, seeing as Trump's pursuit of Greenland is a recent event and currently developing geopolitical situation, the way in which Danish identity plays a role in negotiating this climate has not been explored explicitly. Thus, this thesis addresses the gap by using critical discourse analysis and ontological security theory to understand discursive responses to Trump as a project of identity stabilization and authority legitimization.

3. Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts ontological security theory as its primary analytical framework to examine the Danish national self-identity and how it is negotiated and rearticulated when confronted with Trump's pursuit of Greenland. In combination with the concept of Nordic exceptionalism as an identity narrative, these frameworks allow for an analysis of Trump's intervention as a disruption to the Danish self-understanding and the attempts to restore ontological security and legitimize continued authority over Greenland.

3.1 Ontological Security Theory

Originally theorized by Giddens (1991), ontological security refers to subjects “sense of continuity and order in events”, in which an actor possesses a stable sense of self-identity that they are able to grasp reflexively and communicate to others. Ontological insecurity occurs when there is a disruption in the routines, invoking an instability in what is known and consistent about oneself (Giddens, 1991). Whereas Giddens focused on the individual actor, subsequent IR scholarship has brought it up to the collective and state level, arguing that states need to protect not only their territorial integrity, or physical security, but also their stable sense of self and security of “being” (Diez & von Lucke 2024, 1). Ontological security scholarship focuses on how state actors seek to uphold and maintain their sense of self and identity in the realm of the non-material dimension to national security (Karp 2025, 1). This “healthy sense of self” allows states to have a biographical continuity and ontological security. Thus, states engage in security-seeking practices that through biographical continuity, rely on routines that provide consistency and that confirm identities (Agius 2017, 111; Bachleitner 2023, 1).

Scholars have differed in how such biographical continuity is achieved – and the concept can be understood a few different ways. Mitzen (2006) sees it as largely based on routines, arguing that identity is formed and maintained partly through relationships in which actors routine with others (Mitzen 2006, 342). Even conflictual relations can become embedded into routine and become a source of ontological security (ibid 2006, 343). Steele (2008) on the other hand, sees biographical continuity as emerging from an inward-looking perspective, and emphasizing the centrality of maintaining stability and consistency in one’s self-identity narratives and inconsistency may foster anxiety (Steele 2008). Kinnvall is more concerned with what

ontological security, or perhaps ontological insecurity, means to more individuals and the autobiographical narrative (Kinnvall 2004; Kinnvall & Mitzen 2017). Here ontological insecurity refers to a state of disruption where individual or collective lose sense of security and ability to sustain a narrative about themselves (Kinnvall & Mitzen 2017, 7).

Browning & Joenneimi (2010) argue that identity is not static but continuously upheld through security-seeking practices. These ontological-seeking strategies are adopted when states see their security to be threatened, such as in the assertion of collective identities and stories and carving out an external Other (Browning & Joenneimi 2010, 5). Nations use “structural arrangements” to develop preferred self-narratives that they become attached to, developing practices that strengthen and affirm them (Karp 2025, 3). When structures change, identities are no longer secure, states experience stress, anxiety and perhaps even crisis.

A key distinction within ontological security scholarship has emerged between two approaches to how states maintain self-identity. As Kinnvall and Mitzen (2017) outline, some scholars take an inter-subjective or external approach, arguing that states maintain self-concepts in international society especially in and through relations with others — focusing on how identity is constituted and secured relationally, through recognition from and routinized engagement with other states (notably Mitzen 2006) . Others take a more internal or intra-subjective approach, that argues that states seek to fulfill particular notions of self-identity by defining it primarily from within, with focus on autobiographical narratives (notably Steele 2008). Rather than choosing between these approaches, this thesis draws on both, this will be further elaborated in the Data material section (section 4.5) . As Agius (2013) demonstrates empirically in the Danish context, these two dimensions are not separate but mutually constitutive: the performance of identity outward depends on and reinforces its consolidation inward (Agius 2013, 244). The internal/external distinction therefore serves not as a binary opposition but as an analytical framework for examining two dimensions of a single ontological security-seeking process.

Applying an ontological security lens allows for a nuanced analysis that considers identity as relying on a biographical continuity, that reaffirms and maintains a coherent narrative in which the state understands and presents itself, both nationally and internationally. Importantly, the focus for this thesis is not to measure the degree of ontological security that Denmark, or individuals in Denmark *feel* or *are*. Instead, this thesis aims to understand the extent in which political actors articulate and discursively construct Danish ontological security in reaction to Trump's intervention in Greenland, and how discourse is used to legitimize Danish political authority over Greenland. Thus, from this perspective, Trump's intervention can be understood not as just a geopolitical incident, but also as an external disruption that challenges Denmark's

ontological security and established narrative about its relationship with Greenland. Furthermore, using the concept of ontological security-seeking practices, this thesis will examine the negotiation of the Danish identity as an adoption of strategies to protect ontological security, such as the assertion of collective identities and the emphasis on an external Other (Browning & Joenneimi 2010, 5 ; Steele 2008, 23).

3.2 Nordic Exceptionalism as an Identity Narrative

In order to understand identity narratives and how Denmark builds biographical continuity and stabilizes self-understanding, this thesis draws on literature on Nordic exceptionalism as a framework to understand the Danish identity. Building on texts such as Benedict Andersen's argument that nations are *Imagined Communities* whose identities are based on selective interpretations of historical events that create feelings of community, Jensen & Loftdottir (2016) understand Nordic national identities as social constructions (Andersen 1983; Jensen & Loftdottir 2016). Nordic exceptionalism describes the Nordic identity as constructed on a self-understanding that sees itself as morally exceptional and peripheral to the history of colonialism in Europe (Jensen & Loftdottir 2016, 2). This is based on values such as “global citizens”, “rational”, “conflict-resolution oriented” and models of egalitarian social democracy that is intrinsically different from, and better than the rest of Europe (ibid). As Browning (2007) argues, this self-conceptualization is particularly rooted in the moral dimension, positioning themselves as internationally conscientious and concerned with the world's poorest, projecting the Nordic model as one that should be followed by the rest (Browning 2007, 35). Moreover, Keskinen et al (2009) argues that Nordic exceptionalism is also characterized by colonial complicity, taking distance from colonial histories while benefitting from colonial power structures (Keskinen et al 2009). Thus, this thesis understands exceptionalism not only as a reputation, but as an identity narrative that is maintained and sustained to stabilize ontological security.

The combination of this concept with ontological security allows for a deeper understanding of the identity that Denmark is trying to uphold in a moment of geopolitical insecurity with Trump's interest in Greenland. Thus, using ontological security theory as a primary lens of understanding the way in which nations have a need to a coherent sense of self, in combination with the conceptualization of Nordic exceptionalism as a framework to understand the Danish self-image in a historical and broader geographical manner, allows for a deeper analysis of Trump's interest in Greenland as a disruption and therefore understanding the ways in which Danish ontological security is negotiated and how legitimacy is discursively constructed.

4. Method

4.1 Methodology & Epistemological Approach

In order to operationalize ontological security and Nordic exceptionalism, this thesis uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how Danish ontological security is constructed and upheld in political discourse and further, how discourse constructs Danish legitimacy. This thesis adopts a primarily constructivist epistemology, informed by elements of critical realism. Thus, this research assumes that Danish political discourse surrounding Greenland is not an objective truth, but actively constructs the realities it appears to describe, maintaining Danish identity and ontological security, in line with constructivist tradition (Pernecky 2016, 18). Nonetheless, Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, adheres to a critical realist epistemology, that acknowledges the non-discursive, directly observable, elements of social structures (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 71; Pernecky 2016, 131). Drawing on Fairclough, this thesis also insists that the material conditions of Danish legal and political authority over Greenland, are treated as real and consequential independent of how they are discursive framed (*ibid*). The epistemological implication of this position is that the findings of this thesis do not claim to reveal objective truths about Danish identity or the Danish-Greenlandic relationship, but rather to offer a critically grounded interpretation (Pernecky 2016, 18).

Through using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary methodological approach, the analysis can have an explicit focus on power dynamics and ideology, and how these play a role in the process of how discourses work to legitimize and justify identities. Fairclough views discursive practice as something that shapes the way the social world is perceived but is also shaped in return. This dialectical relationship between discursive practice and structures is crucial and therefore allows for both hermeneutic analysis of communicative events and structural conditions and effects (Fairclough & Chouliaraki, 1999, 30). The aspect of power, and whether and how a communicative event is reproducing or challenging structures of power within a system of practice is especially relevant for the analysis, when it comes to internal and external power dynamics and practice, including gendered, racial and colonial relations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, 24).

4.2 Faircloughs 3-Dimensional Model

There are three aspects to every communicative event, namely the text itself, the discursive practices surrounding it, and the social practice it is relating to – thereby combining both linguistic and social analysis (Fairclough, 1995 188). All practices involve configurations of different elements, and a particular practice therefore brings together different elements in specific and local forms (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, 21). CDA takes a dialectical view of practice, meaning that it does not stress structural determinism, nor does it put all emphasis on concrete activity (ibid, 22). It is therefore important for the approach that social life is not reduced to discourse, making the distinction between material practices and social practices (ibid, 28).

For the first dimension of textual analysis, one looks at aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, textual structures. This may be passive or an active voice, the transitivity, modality, the wording of the text and so on. This functions to identify the content of the text and construction of social identities (ibid, 83). For the second dimension, one looks at the discursive practices of text, looking at the context of its production and consumption. Thus, it examines the intertextuality, meaning how the text draws on other texts and how and the interdiscursivity of the text, meaning how the text combines or includes different types of discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 75). Finally, for social practice there are two dimensions, firstly, contextualizing the relationship between the discursive practice and the order of the discourse, secondly, mapping the non-discursive, social, cultural structure that constitute the wider context (ibid, 87). This means that looking at how the discourse contributes to the maintenance of the status quo, and the ideological, political and social consequences of the discursive practice (ibid, 88).

4.3 Operationalizing CDA & Analytical framework

This analysis uses Fairclough's 3-dimensional model and the theory of ontological security to examine how Danish political actors discursively legitimize Denmark's authority over Greenland in the response to Trump's pursuit of the island. This section attempts to operationalize the 3 levels of analysis for this thesis.

At the textual level, analysis focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, metaphors, and framing strategies used in political statements and speeches. Using a range of tools, it aims to understand how discourse textually is constructed and provide backing for a particular interpretation (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 83). These include

looking at wording, grammar, interactional control, ethos, modality and transitivity (ibid). One grammatical element, modality, concerns how texts construct authority and legitimacy through language by looking at the speaker's affinity with their statement (ibid). Additionally, transitivity looks at how a sentence is structured to connect events/processes to subjects/objects (ibid). All of these give insight into the ways in which texts treat events and social relations and thereby construct particular versions of reality, social identities and social relations

At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examines how these texts are produced, consumed and distributed. This looks at where the text is available, and what discourses it belongs to. Fairclough distinguishes between two main elements when analyzing the discursive practice, intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Intertextuality is the idea that a text draws upon preexisting texts, meaning that are to some extent embedded in the next text. Intertextuality therefore focuses on the influence of history on a text, but also the text's influence on history and contribution to historical and social development (Fairclough 1992, 102). Fairclough describes two main types of intertextuality, *manifest* and *constitutive intertextuality*, which he also defines as *interdiscursivity* (Fairclough 1992, 117). Manifest intertextuality refers to when a text openly and explicitly draws upon other texts, directly citing to them or when they are reproduced following a predictable pattern embedded in the discourse type (Fairclough 1992). When a text incorporates elements from other texts they can be seen as links in an intertextual chain (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 74). Constitutive intertextuality, or *interdiscursivity*, is when different discourses and genres are articulated together in a communicative event (ibid).

Finally, at the level of social practice, these discourses are situated within wider political contexts and non-discursive realities. For this level, the concrete Danish political and legal authority over Greenland is considered a the non-discursive realities that constitutes the wider discourses of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. Although Greenland is formally recognized as a self-governing entity under the 2009 Self-Government Act, this autonomy is partial and conditional. Denmark retains authority over key areas such as foreign affairs, defense, security, and constitutional matters, and continues to represent Greenland internationally. This is crucial to include in the analysis to understand the process of legitimization. Moreover, this level focuses on how the texts draw on and reproduce broader narratives about Denmark's identity, its complex colonial relationship with Greenland, and its role in broader international politics and global branding. This is the level in which ontological security theory is used to understand and examine the self-understanding of Denmark in the context of security.

Through an ontological security theory, this thesis attempts to understand how the statements made by Denmark in response to Trump's pursuit of Greenland belong

to a wider discourse of Danish self-identity, including colonial legacies, and narratives of Nordic exceptionalism. This will be further elaborated below in the *Analyzing Ontological Security through CDA* section. Through this multi-layered approach, CDA allows the thesis to examine how political discourse contributes to the reproduction of understanding of Danish national identity and legitimacy.

The table below shows each level of analysis, the theoretical approach for understanding the level in this thesis, and the main characteristics and tools used for analysis.

Table 1: Analytical framework as Faircloughs 3 levels of analysis and main characteristics and tools

Level of analysis	Theoretical understanding	Characteristics and tools
Textual analysis	<i>Linguistic and semantic characteristics</i>	Fairclough's tools for textual analysis (1992) • Interactional control • Ethos • Metaphors • wording • grammar • modality • transitivity
Discursive practice	<i>Production, consumption and distribution of text</i>	• Audience • Text type and genre • Intertextuality • Interdiscursivity
Social practice	<i>Non-discursive and material realities:</i> Danish legal/political authority over Greenland	• Legal framework between Denmark and Greenland • Historical and political context • Policy initiatives from Danish government considering Greenland
	<i>Wider political/social/cultural context & ideology</i> Ontological security theory (Steele 2008; Mitzen 2006; Browning & Joenemmi 2010; Agius 2013).	Nordic Exceptionalism as an identity narrative: • Denmark as “good citizens’, peace-loving, conflict-resolution orientated” (Jensen & Loftdottir 2016) • Colonial complicity (Keskinen et al 2009) • The moral dimension of the Nordic model (Browning 2007)

4.4 Analyzing Ontological Security through CDA

Ontological security is a growing field in IR, however, is yet to be operationalized consistently and covering a larger dataset (Diez & von Lucke 2024, 1). However, this thesis uses a discursive understanding of ontological security and studies that way in which it is discursively articulated and upheld. As mentioned, this thesis does not aim to determine whether Denmark is objectively more or less ontologically secure. Rather the focus on Denmark as ontological security-*seeking* and how Danish political actors construct and articulate narratives that present Denmark as a coherent and stable political subject. Ontological security is therefore understood as something that can be examined through discursive articulation that works to construct “fantasies” of a specific identity or narrative.

This approach is inspired by Diez and von Lucke (2024) that suggest a discursive approach to analyzing ontological security. Their study of debates in the European Parliament argues that ontological security should be examined at the level of discursive articulations of identity rather than measured as a static condition. They suggest that ontological security in collective actors emerges through the reproduction of broader identity narratives and “metanarratives” that stabilize the political community’s understanding of itself. They draw from Laclau & Mouffe (1985) in identifying “discursive nodal points” that act as an anchor to stabilize the contested meanings in discourse (Diez and von Lucke 2024, 5). Within this framework, ontological security is conceptualized as discursively grounded self-understanding. Rather than attempting to assess levels of anxiety or insecurity among political actors, the analysis focuses on how political discourse constructs narratives that sustain a sense of identity stability.

4.5 Data Material:

The data material for this thesis consists of the official political discourse produced by the Danish government in response to Trump's escalating pursuit of Greenland. I define this as beginning with the statements made before taking office in January 2025, in which he refused to rule out the use of military or economic force to acquire Greenland (Wax & Caulcutt, 2025). Given that the research question focuses specifically on how Danish political actors discursively legitimize authority over Greenland, the data is sourced exclusively from Danish government institutions and official political channels. Thus, two main categories of data material were identified to address the

research question: 1) *Official Statements & Speeches by Mette Frederiksen*, 2) *Policy Initiatives and Symbolic Governance*. These will be expanded below.

First, *Data Category 1: Official statements and Speeches by Mette Frederiksen*, consists of statements in official response to Trump from the prime minister in the time period (January 2025 - January 2026). As head of government and the primary diplomatic representative of Denmark, and the Danish Kingdom, Frederiksen is the most authoritative and visible political voice in Denmark's response to Trump, making her discourse a relevant and appropriate site to examine how Danish identity and authority is performed. Three texts were selected for this category according to the following criteria: the text must be delivered or authored by Frederiksen, published through official government channels, and focused specifically on the relationship between Denmark, Greenland and the United States in the context of Trump's threats. The texts were identified through the Danish government website and the website of the Social Democratic Party and vary in type and length, including press conferences speeches and official write statements.

This category aims to capture Denmark's immediate and explicit outward-facing rhetorical response to Trump's pursuit of Greenland, articulated on an international stage in direct communication with the White House and broader international audiences. The aim with this category is to analyse the external ontological stabilization mechanism as identified in the theoretical framework, looking at how Denmark brands itself discursively on an international stage, under geopolitical pressure. The following table shows the texts that were selected including the date, the title, and the source in which the text was retrieved.

Table 2: Data category 1: Official Statements and Speeches by Mette Frederiksen (presented in order according to date)

Text	Date	Title of text	Setting	Source
1.	03/04/2025	Speech at press conference in Greenland	Nuuk, Greenland	Mette Frederiksen Official Facebook post (Frederiksen 2025) (see Appendix 9.1)
2.	04/1/2026	Statement from Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen	Christiansborg, Copenhagen Denmark	Prime ministers office website (Statsministeriet, 2026) (see Appendix 9.2)
3.	13/01/26	Press meeting the 13th of January	Christiansborg, Copenhagen Denmark	Prime ministers office website (Statsministeriet, 2026)(see appendix 9.3)

The second category, *Data Category 2: Policy Initiatives and Symbolic Governance* focuses on the chain of Danish initiatives and events targeted towards Greenland and Greenlanders, that emerged from the government following the escalation of Trump's threats. This category consists of concrete policies and symbolic political actions taken by the Danish government. Three cases are chosen as primary data, representing two types of government action. First, concrete *policy initiatives*: 1) the announcement of an anti-racism plan to combat discrimination against Greenlandic people in Denmark and 2) the announcement of a “Realm Week” in Danish elementary schools to teach children about the Danish Realm. The second type of government action is what I have labelled as *symbolic governance*, or political acts that carry primarily discursive significance rather than official legal and structural changes.

This consists of Frederiksen's official apology speech for the Coil Campaign (also referred to as *Sprialsagen* or the Spirial Case) that she held in September of 2025. The inclusion of both types of government action is to include a range of discursive strategies through which Danish authority over Greenland is performed and how Denmark negotiates this in a critical geopolitical moment. It therefore explicitly addresses the aspect of the research question concerning *Danish authority over Greenland*. Where the first category captures Denmark's outward-facing diplomatic response to an international audience, this category aims to capture a more inward-facing process, the way in which the Danish government discursively constructs the relationship between Denmark and Greenland through governance, symbolic gestures and reconciliation. This links to a more internal stabilization process, where identity coherence is maintained through the reproduction of biographical narrative (Steele 2008). The table below shows the texts chosen for this Data category on the next page.

Table 3: Data category 2: Policy Initiatives and Symbolic Governance

Text	Date:	Title of text	Setting/online	Source
1.	24/09/25	Apology speech to victims of the Coil Campaign (<i>Spiralsagen</i>) by Mette Frederiksen	Kulturhuset I Nuuk, Greenland	Prime Ministers Office 2025 (see appendix 9.4)
2.	27/01/25	“The government will combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark with 12 new initiatives.”	Published on government website	Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration (2025) (see appendix 9.5)
3.	25/02/26	“A new theme week will help strengthen children’s and young people’s knowledge of the Danish Realm.”	Published on government website	Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2026) (see appendix 9.6)

All texts were uploaded into NVivo and coded referring to each of the three levels in Fairclough’s analysis, based on the analytical characteristics identified in *Table 1* . In addition, overarching themes were also coded and annotated, particularly those related to themes of Nordic exceptionalism. All texts were originally produced in Danish and, seeing as I understand and speak Danish at the same level as English, they were analyzed and coded in Danish to ensure validity and preserve linguistic nuance throughout the analytical process. The exception is the text titled “*Speech at press conference in Greenland*” from April 3, 2025 which was originally delivered in English by Mette Frederiksen in direct address to Donald Trump (Frederiksen 2025).

4.6 Limitations:

There are several limitations inherent to this study's design and theoretical framework that are worth addressing. These include the limitations that arise with using CDA as a methodology, the limitations of the data selection and the theoretical shortcomings of combining CDA and ontological security theory. First of all, in line with other studies of constructivist epistemologies, this thesis does not aim to achieve generalisable results that are transferable to other empirical contexts (Marsh et al., 2018). In line with this, it is also important to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of constructivist methods, that builds on the assumption that knowledge is co-produced and shaped by the

researcher's values, experiences, and interpretive frameworks (Pernecky 2016, 158). This means that there is a need for constant reflexivity and closely taking into consideration how my subjectivity shapes the findings.

This connects directly to the question of positionality. As a Danish researcher myself, my subject position is shaped by the cultural and cultural context in which I am embedded, and is the same national and cultural context that produced the discourse under analysis in this thesis. A potential advantage that I have nonetheless, is that I did not grow up in Denmark, and therefore may not fully share assumptions and framings that appear natural or self-evident to those who have been socialised fully in the Danish context. At the same time, I still occupy a position of privilege as a white, Danish person, and I am therefore still embedded within the border cultural and political structures. This proximity to the material can be a double-edged sword, because while it provides linguistic and contextual familiarity, it also carries the risk of reproducing blind spots that are themselves products of the discursive environment being studied. This tension has been a continuous point of reflection throughout the analysis. Although acknowledging positionality does not resolve these issues, it is nonetheless necessary in order to remain reflexive and critically aware of one's role in the research process, particularly within qualitative and interpretative work.

Seeing as this study works with publicly available sources and does not involve participants, it therefore does not raise the ethical concerns typically associated with other types of research. However, seeing as it engages critically with the Danish-Greenlandic relationship and subjects that can be politically sensitive, such as the Coil Campaign and ongoing debates about Greenlandic independence, the analysis approaches these subjects with care and reflexivity. I am aware that they are not just abstract subjects for analysis, but grounded in real life experiences.

Further limitations regarding CDA and the combination with ontological security theory as a framework are addressed in the discussion (Chapter 6).

5. Analysis:

Both categories consist of 3 primary texts, all of which have been analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, 1) textual level, 2) discursive practice and 3) social practice, as established in Chapter 4. The analysis is structured accordingly: first, it presents the textual and discursive analysis of Category 1: *Official Statements and Speeches*. Each text is introduced briefly through a short contextual description, followed by the textual analysis and then the discursive analysis. Then the two levels from both data categories are brought together to examine the social structures that these discourses inform and sustain, for the Social Practice Level. The same structure is then applied to Category 2: *Danish Policy and Symbolic Initiatives*. In the final analysis section 5.5, the non-discursive and material realities are examined, that in this analysis is defined as the Danish authority over Greenland.

5.1 Category 1: Official Statements and Speeches by Mette Frederiksen

5.1.1 Text 1: Speech at press meeting in Greenland (03/04/2025)

This speech was delivered during Frederiksen's visit to Nuuk in April 2025, alongside Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens Frederiksen Nielsen and Greenlandic Foreign Minister Mute Egede. The speech followed the visit by U.S. Vice-President JD Vance to a U.S. air base in Greenland and his subsequent criticism of Denmark's defense efforts there (Little, Foeger, & Bose, 2025).

Textual analysis:

A key feature of this speech is the construction of the relationship between Denmark and the US as friendly, yet hierarchical, framed through a metaphorical sibling-like relationship in which the US is positioned as the "older" and more powerful actor, and Denmark as the "younger" one. This can be seen in this quote in the opening of the speech.

The US is a big country, and Denmark is a small one. We have looked up to you, and you have inspired us because, since the Second World War, you have defended the free world and helped create prosperity, progress, peace, and freedom. (Frederiksen, 03/04/2025, see Appendix 9.1)

Using wording such as “big”, “small”, combined with “looked up to you”, establish a clear hierarchy between Denmark and USA, positioning the US as an admirable and influential power. Frederiksen's use of personal and collective pronouns further constructs a relationship and affective tone that serves to humanize the diplomatic relation between the two states. Frederiksen describes Denmark as “a friend you have always been able to rely on” in the following passage:

In us, you have a friend who has always kept our word—a friend you have always been able to rely on. There is nothing I want more than for our friendship to continue. Because if we allow ourselves to be divided as allies, then we do our enemies a favor. (ibid)

Frederiksen explicitly constructs a collective Western identity with the use of inclusive pronouns such as “we”, “our” and “us”, while also producing an implicit adversarial Other with reference to “our enemies”. This establishes an “us vs them” binary, when the Other is constructed to threaten Western ideals of “prosperity, progress, peace, and freedom.” This tension is further emphasized in the following passage:

But when you demand to take over a part of the Kingdom of Denmark's territory—when we are met by pressure and threats from our closest ally—what are we to believe about the country we have admired for so many years? (ibid)

The phrase “closest ally” underscores this break in trust between Denmark and Greenland, while signalling broader anxieties about the stability of the Western world order. This is made explicit in the statement:

And this is not only about Greenland or Denmark. This is about the world order that we have built together across the Atlantic over generations. (ibid)

The construction of the collective Western identity and shared international world order is made clear from Frederiksen lexical choices.

The speech heavily employs objective modality to assert moral and legal authority. Modality, also known as affinity, is used to clarify the extent to which the producers of texts commit themselves to their propositions (Fairclough, 1992). According to Fairclough, objective modality often demonstrates some form of power and authority, expressing the statement as universal (ibid). Frederiksen uses objective modality in the following statement:

You cannot annex another country—not even with an argument about international security. (Frederiksen,03/04/2025, see Appendix 9.1)

Modality in grammar is associated with the use of modal auxiliary verbs such as must, may, and should. Here, the modal verb like “cannot” and declarative phrases such as “I have to state clearly” expresses certainly, obligation and non-negotiable stance based on international law. This is also clear in this quote:

That is why I have to state clearly: national borders, the sovereignty of states, and territorial integrity—these are principles rooted in international law. These are fundamental principles. (ibid)

Using objective modality strengthens the sense of obligation and universality in Frederiksen's speech, and this serves to strengthen the construction of Denmark's position as grounded in universal legal norms.

In terms of transitivity, one examines how the structure of sentence constructs how processes and events are connected to subjects and objects in a text, and how agency is distributed (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 84). In this speech, Frederiksen deploys transitivity to distribute agency in ways that acknowledge American power and assert Danish dignity. A significant transitivity pattern in Frederiksen's speech is a sequence of parallel conditional clauses in which the United States is consistently positioned as the grammatical subject and active agent, while Denmark is constructed as the responsive and compliant actor:

Therefore, when you ask our businesses to invest in the US, they do. When you ask us to spend more on defense, we do. And when you ask us to strengthen security in the Arctic, we are on the same page. (Frederiksen,03/04/2025)

Here the US is clearly set up to be the active agent, it does the asking, it initiates, it requests, it sets the agenda. Denmark is the passive agent, it responds, complies and confirms. This grammatical structure reinforces the sibling hierarchy identified in the wording analysis not merely at the level of metaphor but at the level of grammar. The repetition of the structure "when you ask... we do" creates a rhythmic pattern of compliance that emphasizes Denmark's reliability while simultaneously encoding its subordinate position in the relationship. However, a significant transitivity shift occurs with the slight lexical change in the passage:

But when you demand to take over a part of the Kingdom of Denmark's territory—when we are met by pressure and threats from our closest ally—what are we to believe about the country we have admired for so many years? (ibid)

The shift from "ask" to "demand" marks the precise point in the speech where Frederiksen represents the relationship between USA and Denmark as being at challenge. Frederiksen uses passive constructions to highlight Denmark's position as subjected to external pressure rather than as an initiating agent. The use of the passive voice in "are met by" removes Denmark as an active subject, positioning it as the recipient of actions from the USA. This contrasts sharply with the active constructions used when Denmark is described as fulfilling its obligations: "we do", "we uphold our commitments".

Discursive practice:

The speech was delivered at a press meeting in Nuuk during Frederiksen's visit to Greenland. The setting itself is discursively significant; by delivering the speech in Nuuk rather than Copenhagen, Frederiksen physically performs a unity between Denmark and Greenland that is referenced to in the speech. The speech was disseminated through official government and media channels, in Danish and in English. As a statement delivered in the immediate aftermath of Vance visit and criticism of Danish defence efforts, the speech is a direct response to a specific geopolitical provocation. The genre of text is a political press statement and Frederiksen addresses multiple audiences, Danish citizens, Greenlanders, the US (and Trump directly) and broader international observers.

The speech is embedded within a chain of interrelated political communication between US and Denmark and Greenland. It draws on explicitly on intertextually prior political discourse, including statements by US officials that criticize Denmark's defence efforts and protection of Greenland from China and Russia. Frederiksen

references NATO several times thereby drawing on broader historical and political texts related to Western alliance and democratic values. The reference to the Second World War functions as a particularly significant intertextual move, embedding the current crisis within a much longer historical narrative of Western democratic solidarity and shared sacrifice. By referencing this historical context, Frederiksen draws on an established political discourse in which the post-war liberal international order is constructed as the shared achievement of Western allies. This contributes to constructing Denmark as committed to long-stranding transatlantic commitments and ideals.

The text also engages in multiple overlapping discourses. Most significantly, it engages with the discourse of liberal internationalism and the rule-based world order, invoking international law, sovereignty, territorial integrity and NATO as principles of the post-war international system. By referencing “prosperity, peace and freedom”, Frederiksen is clearly drawing lines to Denmark and the US as part of the same shared civilization project and Western democratic values. The reaffirmation of the Danish self-understanding is further articulated in the resolute statement:

“You know us. You know what we stand for. And you know that we do not give in.”

This brief and declarative statement explicitly asserts Denmark as steadfast, rule-based and committed to international peace.

Moreover, the speech explicitly draws on a more relational and personal discursive tone, one of loyalty and friendship. This was constructed through vocabulary of trust, reliability and a broken promise. This interdiscursive blend is rhetorically significant because the diplomatic authority is humanized by the friendship discourse, and the friendship discourse is strengthened by placing it in value-based and moral frameworks.

5.1.2 Text 2: Statement at Christiansborg, Copenhagen Denmark (04/01/2026)

This short statement was posted on the Prime Minister's Office website as a press release on the 4th of January 2026, and addresses Trump directly in response to a rapid escalation of American pressure over Greenland. The timing of the statement is significant because the day before the publication, Katie Miller, wife of President Trump's deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller, posted an image of the American flag covering Greenland on X, captioned with the word “SOON” (Calitri, 2026). The

following day, Trump stated in an interview that “we do need Greenland, absolutely, We need it for defense” (Scherer, 2026). Unlike the Nuuk speech, which was delivered in person and addressed multiple audiences simultaneously, this text is a brief and direct written statement.

Textual analysis

Frederiksen language frames Denmark as a rational and legitimate actor, contrasting it with the portrayed of the United States as unreasonable and threatening. By using categorical phrasing that claims objectivity, she constructs her claims as objective truths, thereby removing subjectivity. This can be seen in the opening passage:

I have to say this very directly to the United States. It makes absolutely no sense to talk about it being necessary for the United States to take over Greenland. The United States has no right to annex one of the three countries in the Kingdom of Denmark.” (Statsministeriet 2026b, see Appendix 9.2).

The phrase “absolutely no sense” is categorical and leaves no room for negotiation or alternative interpretation. Positioning USA as a highly irrational actor, works to place Denmark as a “voice of reason” in this context. The original Danish text makes this legal register even more explicit: the phrase “*USA har ingen adkomst*” uses the legal term “*adkomst*”, that refers to a legal title or claim. This is more precise and formally juridical than the English translation “no right”.

Furthermore, the description of Greenland as “one of three countries in the Kingdom of Denmark” is a significant discursive moment. Frederiksen invokes the full Danish Realm, Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Island, asserting national unity, while also emphasizing the territorial scope of Danish authority. The NATO reference reinforces this invocation with an the support of institutional legitimacy:

The Kingdom of Denmark—and thus Greenland—is part of NATO and is therefore covered by the alliance’s security guarantee. (ibid)

The syntactic ordering places Denmark before Greenland, subtly referencing a hierarchy within the Danish Realm. By embedding Greenland within the NATO alliance, Frederiksen signals that any threat against Greenland implicates not just Denmark but the entire Western alliance. In the closing passage of her statement,

Frederiksen balances confrontation with diplomacy, while alluding to a threatening tone:

I would therefore strongly urge the United States to stop the threats against a historically close ally and against another country and another people, who have very clearly stated that they are not for sale. (ibid)

The phrasing “strongly urge” mitigates direct accusation, while still conveying strong firmness. The use of “threats” introduces a critical stance, but in a slightly subdued way that avoids explicitly stating “you are threatening us.” The phrase “not for sale” introduces a more emotive register, rejecting the commodification of the country and its people. This makes the issue not only a legal one, but also a question of human dignity and self-determination. With the phrase, “who have very clearly stated”, Frederiksen also incorporated Greenlandic agency into her statement, speaking alongside Greenland rather than on behalf of Greenland.

Frederiksen employs modality strategically throughout the text to assert authority, assign responsibility and frame her position as objective and rational. She uses strong and categorical formulations that express a high degree of modality, using the type of modality that Fairclough refers to as “truth” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 84). Throughout the text, she commits herself completely to the statement with a high degree of certainty, such as her opening statement, “I have to say this very directly to the United States”. Using the phrasing “have to”, emphasizes the urgency and firmness. At the same time, she also uses softer modal verbs like “would” to balance her firmness with a diplomatic tone, “I *would* therefore strongly urge.”

Discursive practice:

Unlike the Nuuk speech, which was a spoken press conference, this text is a short written statement published directly on the Prime Minister's Office website. The institutional context of the Prime Minister's Office website lends the statement governmental authority. The statement is produced in Danish. The statement is embedded within an immediate chain of intertextual events, responding directly to Trump's interview statement and the Katie Miller social media post. The rapid response and short declarative nature of the statement also expresses the sense of urgency written in the statement given the geopolitical pressures.

Similarly to the speech in Nuuk, Frederiksen draws on overlapping discourses of legal authority, Western rationality and diplomatic responsibility. The invocation of international law, NATO and existing defence agreement is significant as it assigns

institutional legitimacy and embedded the Danish position in a broader Western alliance. The phrase “not for sale” introduces a different discursive register, one of human rights and self-determination, invoking Greenlandic agency (Statsministeriet 2026b). Using this as a closing statement is significant as Frederiksen briefly shifts from the discourse of state sovereignty to the discourse of people rights and human dignity. This interdiscursive blend strengthens the statement of moral authority and frames it as beyond national self-interest.

5.1.3 Text 3: Mette Frederiksen’s speech at press meeting about situation between Greenland and Denmark, Christiansborg, Copenhagen (13/01/26)

This speech was delivered by the Prime Minister in the Mirror Hall at Christiansborg Palace on January 13, 2026, the day before the scheduled meeting with Denmark, Greenland and the US at the White House in high level working groups to discuss the situation (Schwartz & Stokols, 2026). Greenlandic officials, including prime minister Jens Frederik Nielsen were also present at the meeting.

Textual analysis

A central feature of this speech is the construction of a strong collective identity between Denmark and Greenland through the sustained and rhythmic use of the first person plural pronoun “we”. Rather than framing Denmark, Greenland, and the US as three separate entities, the speech positions Denmark and Greenland as a united entity opposing the US, creating a clear “us vs them” binary. This theme of *togetherness* is established immediately in the opening statement and permeates the entire speech:

“Welcome everyone. For more than a year, Greenland and Denmark have had to deal with a very unusual and difficult situation. We have managed this together. We have taken the initiative to further strengthen security in the Arctic. We have strengthened the ties between us within the Kingdom. We have built even closer alliances with partners and allies around the world.” (Statsministeriet 2026b, see Appendix 9.3)

The use of short, separate clauses each beginning with “we”, creates a rhythmic and almost incantatory tone. The accumulating “we” statements construct a sense of solidarity and shared achievement that appeals to feelings of loyalty and collective identity. The rhetorical pattern continues:

“Tomorrow, Greenland and Denmark will meet with the United States. We come together, we stand together, and we leave together. We want dialogue and we want cooperation. We are not seeking any conflict.” (ibid)

The triadic structure “we come together, we stand together and we leave together” is a strong rhetorical move, similar to a slogan. The contrast between “dialogue” and “cooperation” on one side, and “conflict” on the other constructs a clear binary, where Denmark and Greenland represent a constructive engagement, and the US is implicitly positioned as the source of conflict. Using such words as “democracy”, “world order”, “responsibility” Frederiksen is explicitly alluding to the broader theme of Western cooperation and Danish morality. This is made clear in the following statement:

And that is why many allies are doing the same in the Nordic region, in Europe and in the rest of the world. We stand up not just for ourselves, but for the world order that the generations before us have built, our democracy. (ibid)

By referencing the border collective identity, extending beyond the Danish Realm, but also Europe and the rest of the international community, Frederiksen embeds the Danish position into a global order. The reference of “generation before us” positions this in a long historical arc and connects the geopolitics context in a post-war order.

The speech uses strong declarative modality throughout to present principles of international law and democratic values as objective truths and moral imperatives.

This is not only about Greenland or the Kingdom. It is about the fact that borders must not be changed by force. That you cannot buy another people. And that small countries should not have to fear large countries. (ibid)

The emotive yet authoritative tone presents principles of international law and democracy as un modal constructions here: “must not”, “cannot”, “should not have to” express high modality framing the statements as universal and non-negotiable. The short, declarative sentences that follow each other in rapid succession create a rhythmic, manifesto-like quality that strengthens their moral authority.

Agency is strategically distributed through transitivity choices. Denmark is constructed as an active agent initiating cooperation: “we have managed this together”, “we have strengthened the tie between us”, in contrast to the USA that is associated with negative actions. Here the use of normalisations is strategic in deleting agencies and turning processes into entities. For example, “security” is a normalized concept

throughout the speech, “strengthen security in the Arctic”, because it does not describe specific actions (defending, protecting, militarizing), but just uses the single noun. As Fairclough argues, nominalization deletes agency and transforms processes into conditions, presenting them as objective states rather than contested political choices (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 83).

Discursive practice:

The speech was delivered by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen in the Danish Parliament on January 13, 2026. As a press conference speech, it is designed for immediate media dissemination, targeting both domestic and international audiences. The speech is in direct response to the heightened geopolitical context, and Trump's intensifying interest in Greenland. This broad intended reception and geopolitical context influences discursive choices, balancing authority and diplomatic sensitivity.

Frederiksen's speech is a communicative event embedded within a broader chain of political communication between Denmark and USA. The speech also references a network of intertextual references to established international security discourses by mentioning NATO, Russia, China and the Baltic countries. These references align Denmark and Greenland with narratives about collective defensive and regional alliances. Like the other statements, the phrase “Greenland is not for sale” has become symbolic in discourses surrounding Greenland's geopolitical status. It is unclear who said it first, but it became a popular slogan in protests in August 2019, following media reports of Trump's interest in purchasing the island and Greenland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs official account said on X, “We’re open for business, not for sale” (see Reid, 2019; Greenland Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). By incorporating this cultural and politically charged slogan, Frederiksen's speech aligns itself with a broader socio-political movement in Greenland.

The speech draws on multiple discourses, and similarly to the other texts, the interdiscursive blend of liberal internationalism and the Nordic and Western identity, with the discourses of human rights and self-determination.

5.2 Social Practice: Data Category 1

Having examined the text on the textual level and the discursive practice, this section turns to the wider social practice of which these dimensions are part. According to Fairclough, social practice analysis operates on two levels: first, the relationship

between the discursive practice and its order of discourse, meaning, looking at the network of discourses that it belongs to and the wider social and cultural meanings that are embedded (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 87). Second, the non-discursive, material and structural relations that constitute the wider context of the discursive practice, of the social matrix of discourse (Fairclough 1992, 237). This section carries out the social analysis for *Data category 1*, examining the broader social and cultural structures they draw on, the structural and ideological consequences with help of theory. The social matrix and non-discursive realities, that in this analysis is defined as the legal and political authority that Denmark has over Greenland, will be described in a separate section at the end of the analysis in Section 5.3, as they are relevant for both data categories.

This data category consists of official speeches and statements responding directly to Trump, addressing him and international audiences. Seeing as they are in direct response to Trump's interest, this analysis sees it as a process of *external* ontological stabilization: that is, attempts to reaffirm Denmark's identity to audiences outside the state, in response to a challenge originating from an external actor (Agius 2013, 244). Trump's pursuit of Greenland can be understood as a disruption to Denmark's established self-understanding and international identity. Steele argues that one of the main components in shaping ontological security seeking behaviour for states is crisis assessment, when states are confronted with threats to their identity (Steele 2008, 50). Crises are not neutral or objective facts, but are socially and discursively constructed as "crises", depending on how it responds to state identity narratives (Steele 2008, 70). States therefore want to maintain biographical narratives with stories about who they are, what values they represent and how they act in the world (ibid, 73). Narratives are performative, thus by articulating an identity publicly, states commit themselves to acting consistently that identity (ibid, 74). The threat of losing Greenland and Trump's challenging of Denmark's role in Greenland can be understood as a crisis, not only territorially, but also symbolically and ontologically. Thus, Frederiksen's official speeches and statements can be understood as attempts to stabilize ontological security through maintaining biographical narrative.

5.2.1 Denmark as Rational, Democratic and Rule Based:

Throughout the text, Frederiksen consistently constructs Denmark through discourses of legality, diplomacy, democracy and rationality. Rather than responding to Trump's threats with militaristic or nationalist rhetoric, Frederiksen invokes cooperation, democratic values and international norms, thereby reproducing the Danish image as a trustworthy, loyal ally. This aligns with a broader discourse of Western rationality and

logic, which plays a key role in identity construction. Such discursive articulations reflect a deeper European self-understanding, rooted in values of rationalism and reason. This discourse can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries and the Enlightenment, which was central in constructing Europe as the bearer of progress, rationalism and civilisation (Pagden 2002; Said 1978). Frederiksen's discourse can therefore be interpreted as drawing upon these historically embedded understandings of Europe as politically mature, rational, and morally legitimate in contrast to the implicitly irrational or aggressive Other.

Significantly, Frederiksen's articulations also draw on a broader discourse of Nordic exceptionalism and the Nordic model. Browning (2007) highlights the "moral dimension" of Nordic exceptionalism as a self-understanding, in which a huge pillar of the Nordic model was founded on the idea that the nordic countries were conceived as "morally superior" on the international stage, grounded in on egalitarian social democracy, welfare and solidarity with the Global South (Browning 2007, 35). This branding was essentially built around being "better" than the rest, but also marketed as a brand of rational/modern society and international order that they believed should be projected onto the international scene as role models (ibid, 36). This tone of moral authority can clearly be seen in Frederiksen's articulations of Denmark, with a strong construction of a Danish "voice of reason" that values rationality, loyalty and cooperation. This contributes to stabilizing biographical continuity and maintaining the image as rational, democratic and rule-based.

5.2.2 The Construction of a Collective Western Identity

A further central characteristic in Frederiksen's speeches is the discursive construction of a collective Western identity, through which Denmark anchors its biographical narrative within a stable and morally grounded "we". Throughout all three texts, Frederiksen repeatedly invokes collective pronouns, themes of *togetherness* and references to shared democratic values, positioning Denmark within a broader moral and Western political community. This can be seen in the references to NATO, European allies, and transatlantic partnership that all function to embed Denmark within a collective identity. This works to construct its authority and legitimacy as deriving from shared civilization values, and not from national self-interest.

The carving out an "us" versus "them" binary has been identified by multiple ontological security scholars as a central ontological security seeking mechanism during periods of uncertainty (Browning & Joenemmi 2010, 8) (Steele 2008, 18). Trump's rhetoric surrounding Greenland is not only a challenge geopolitically, but also a disruption to Denmark's expected position within a stable Western alliance system.

Frederiksen's repeated emphasis on loyalty and friendship, such as with the sibling metaphor in Text 1, functions to reaffirm Denmark's attachment to an external collective Western identity. Ontological security theory describes how identity is intersubjective and largely maintained through relationships with others, also conflictual relations (Mitzen 2006, 342 ; Kinnvall & Mitzen 2017, 7). The betrayal that Trump's demands represent is therefore ontological and it destabilizes the relational foundation on which a significant dimension of Danish self-understanding has built on.

5.3 Data Category 2: Policy Initiatives and Symbolic Governance

5.3.1 Text 1: Apology for victims of the Coil Campaign speech by Mette Frederiksen, Nuuk, Greenland (24/09/2025)

This text is an official apology speech delivered by prime minister Mette Frederiksen in Nuuk on the 24th of September 2025, and represents a very significant official acknowledgement of colonial injustice in the history of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. Frederiksen apologizes to the Greenlandic victims of the Coil Campaign, that was a state-led birth control program implemented in Greenland in the 1960s, where approximately 4500 Greenlandic women and girls were fitted with IUD, or birth control coils, often through coercion or persuasion and most without the consent of the women, girls or their parents (Pilegaard Petersen & Klint, 2022).

In 2022, Denmark and Greenland agreed to launch an independent inquiry into the coil campaign covering the period 1960 to 1991. The inquiry's final report was published in September 2025, and it was in direct response to this report that Frederiksen delivered her apology speech in Nuuk (Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health, 2025). In December 2025 the Danish parliament agreed on a compensation scheme entitling affected women to claim DKK 300,000 each from a reconciliation fund (Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health 2025b.)

Textual level:

Frederiksen employs a range of rhetorical and linguistic strategies in her apology speech to the victims of the Coil Campaign (*Spiralsagen*). These strategies function simultaneously to acknowledge historical injustice and position Denmark as accountable and morally responsible, while also constructing Frederiksen herself as emotionally and personally engaged and empathetic. Frederiksen uses heavily affective language to invoke emotion for the audience and the listeners. Using words such as “betrayal”, “injustice”, “wrong”, “pain”, “guilt” and “shame” create a strong emotional tone that is important in constructing Denmark as a moral authority (Statsministeriet 2025, see appendix 9.4).

A central textual strategy is the repeated use of personal pronouns and direct address, which serves to personalize the historical injustice and emphasizes individual experiences. She addresses the victims directly by name, and shares their story:

Naja Lyberth, you were only 14 years old when you had an intrauterine device inserted. A device designed for women who had given birth. You have said that it felt like having knives inside you. That the state took your virginity. (ibid)

The repeated use of the second-person pronoun “you” creates intimacy and emotional proximity between Frederiksen, the victim and the audience. This direct address transforms the speech from an official political apology into a relational and affective encounter. Frederiksen further employs as a strategic alternation between pronouns, using “you (plural)” directly addressing the victims as a group, “I”, signalling personal and emotional engagement, “we” invoking collective responsibility, and “us” creating a shared identity between Denmark and Greenland. For example:

Here, more than 50 years later, you still find it difficult to talk about it. I understand that. (...)

Many of you have lived with physical and psychological consequences. And some of you lost the ability to have children altogether. I can hardly imagine anything more tragic. (ibid)

The strategic switch between directly addressing the victim and personally acknowledging the experience works to position Frederiksen in a relationship of mutual understanding and empathy, strengthening her credibility and ethos as a speaker.

This is further reinforced by her gendered self-positioning. By emphasizing that she understands the tragedy of not being able to have children, she empathises not

only as another human, but also as a mother and woman herself. This can be seen in the following passage:

And something that no—no!—girls or women should ever be deprived of. Namely, the right to decide over one’s own body. And here lies a striking paradox. For most of us, contraception is a sign of freedom. Especially for us women. (ibid)

The repeated use of “us women” situates Frederiksen within the same category as the victims, constructing a form of relational proximity through a shared gendered experience and shared identity. By doing so, she uses her gender to create empathetic appeal. Frederiksen makes extensive use of repetition and parallel syntactic structure as a rhetorical device to intensify emotional and moral impact. For example:

Where were the health authorities? Where was the state? Where were the adults who were supposed to take care of me? (ibid)

The repetition of the “where was/were” creates rhythmic emphasis, emotional escalation and momentum. It functions to strengthen the tone of moral urgency and accountability. Similarly, to maintain the rhythm, the speech is also characterized by the use of short sentences and straightforward syntax and simple statements such as “And that was wrong.”, “It harmed you.”, “We do so now.”, “We no longer do that.” (ibid). This simple syntax enhances emotional resonance and accessibility, making the speech resonate with a broad audience.

Discursive Practice:

This speech was held in September 2025, disseminated on various governmental social media channels, official government websites, and covered largely in the media and news (see Danmarks Radio, 2025; Altinget, 2025). The speech was held at a ceremony in Nuuk together with Jens Frederik Nielsen, with many of the victims present.

The speech articulates various types of overlapping discourses and has a high level of interdiscursivity. Firstly, it draws on human rights discourse, particularly in relation to body autonomy and consent. This is evident in statements such as:

Namely, the right to decide over one's own body. And here lies a striking paradox. For most of us, contraception is a sign of freedom. Especially for us women. (ibid)

This also belongs to a broader feminist discourse, particularly reproductive justice discourse, important is strengthening legitimacy and credibility for Frederiksen as a speaker (see Ross & Solinger, 2019). This interdiscursive blend aligns Frederiksen with globally recognized norms of human rights and also with feminist values. This can also be understood with her gendered positioning as part of a collective identity of “woman”, as discussed earlier.

The speech also belongs to a broader discourse of reconciliation and the colonial history of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland. However, midway throughout the speech there is a significant shift. While the first part focuses on individual victims and a direct account of their personal experiences, the latter part transitions toward a broader geopolitical framing and tone. This shift becomes evident in statements such as:

Our past is shared. For better and for worse. [...] This apology is not only about the past. It is about our present. About our shared future. (ibid.)

So as we stand here together today — Jens-Frederik and I — it is with a shared promise. That we will work together for a new era. With more respect. More equality. More solidarity. For your sake. And for future generations. (ibid.)

The repeated invocation of the “together”, “shared”, “mutual”, “relationship”, “future generations” presents a discursive shift from a past-oriented acknowledgement of injustice, towards a future-oriented plan of a *shared future* between Denmark and Greenland. By equating the idea of a “shared past” to a “shared future” she uses this historical relationship to advocate for Greenland's continued participation in the Danish Realm.

The focus on a “new time” and “coming generations” is not an ideologically neutral statement, but underscores the Danish political agenda to maintain sovereignty over Greenland in some form. This emphasis on a *shared future* can thus be interpreted as a part of a broader discursive strategy aimed at maintaining political legitimacy in the authority over Greenland.

5.3.2 Text 2: “The government will combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark with 12 new initiatives.”

This text was published on the Danish government's official website on the 27th of January 2025, less than two weeks after Trump's inauguration and in the immediate aftermath of his renewed and escalating declarations about acquiring Greenland. The initiative was produced by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration and presents twelve concrete measures aimed at combatting racism and discrimination against Greenlanders living in Denmark.

Textual level:

This text explicitly acknowledges racism against Greenlanders as an important problem to be addressed. The repeated characterization of racism as “a serious problem” serves to foreground the issue and signal governmental urgency and commitment. However, a particularly significant lexical feature is the recurring use of terms such “prejudice” and “discrimination”. While these terms recognize the issue, they also work to subtly individualize racism by framing it primarily as a matter of personal attitudes and interpersonal behavior, rather than as a structural or institutional issue.

Significantly, the emphasis of the word *prejudice* minimizes the role of the state and systemic inequalities, and shifts attention towards individual beliefs. This lexical choice effectively distances the state from the issue and constructs it as a social problem separate to state institutions and colonial histories. This distancing is evident throughout the text, where the Danish state is separate from causing the problem , however the primary agent responsible for solving it:

Many Greenlanders residing in Denmark unfortunately experience prejudice, racism, and discrimination. The government seeks to address these issues and is therefore introducing 12 concrete initiatives aimed at combating prejudice and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark. (Government of Denmark, 2025, see Appendix 9.5)

The Danish state is clearly constructed as the moral authority and benevolent protector. This construction is further reinforced by the statement by Minister Immigration and Integration, Kaare Dybvad Bek:

"I fundamentally believe that all citizens in Denmark have a duty to speak out against racism, and as a government we have a particular responsibility to safeguard social cohesion. (ibid)

The phrase "I fundamentally believe" invokes a strong moral stance as well as a personal engagement. The use of the first-person singular pronoun personalizes the issue, presenting the ministers as ethically and emotionally investing. At the same time, the shift from "I" to "we" allows him to move from a personal morality to an institutional authority. Bek continues:

Denmark and Greenland share a very special relationship, and for that reason racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark constitute a distinct problem. (ibid)

The phrase "special relationship" is a central rhetorical device. It invokes ideas of mutuality and shared history, thereby framing Danish-Greenlandic relationship as uniquely close and positive, creating a tone of collective responsibility and national unity. The causal structure of this sentence is also noteworthy as racism against Greenlanders is presented as a "distinct problem" precisely because of this "special relationship." This implicitly acknowledges the specificity of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship without explicitly naming colonialism or structural inequality as constitutive factors. Here, the minister is alluding to the structural power dynamics and colonial histories at play, however is not fully acknowledging them in relation to racism towards Greenlanders in Denmark. Bek further employs affective language to humanize the governmental response:

It is important to the government that Greenlanders are able to live in Denmark without encountering prejudice, which unfortunately is not the reality today. Therefore, I am very happy that we now have a foundation for addressing a significant problem. (ibid)

Words such as "important" and "happy" construct the minister as personally and emotionally invested, reinforcing the image of the states as compassionate, responsive and morally engaged. The emotive register strengthens the government's ethos and reinforces its construction as a benevolent protector.

The text as a whole employs high-modality language, characterized by strong declarative statements and moral imperatives. Formulations such as "the government will put a stop to this", "the government recognizes that" and "the government is

allocating" all express strong institutional commitment. This linguistic style reflects governmental authority and positions the Danish state as an ethical leader and guardian of social cohesion.

At the same time, the affective language used by the Bek introduces a softer and more personal modal register. The use of the phrasing "I fundamentally believe" and "we have particular responsibility" expresses a personal register that humanizes the government's commitment. The combination of these two modal registers work to enforce and legitimize one another.

In terms of transitivity, the distribution of agency in this text follows a consistent pattern. The Danish government is consistently constructed as the active grammatical subject of the text, "the government is now presenting...", "the government recognizes that...", "the government is allocating...". Such constructions position the state as the central agent, framing the Danish government as the one taking action, driving the process in the sentence. On the other hand, the Greenlanders are mostly constructed as the passive recipients, as they are the ones that are "experiencing" racism and discrimination in Denmark. This dynamic is partially disrupted when Greenlandic voices are incorporated into the text. For instance, Aaja Chemnitz, Greenlandic member of the parliament, states:

The action plan against racism is an important tool for speaking out against and reducing racism—not only against us Greenlanders, but also against other ethnic groups. I am proud of the result we are holding in our hands today. I know that this is deeply important to me, to many of my valued colleagues, and to the government. Thank you for your efforts. Now the real work begins, and I look forward to it. (ibid)

Chemnitz's statement disrupts the passive positioning of Greenlanders by constructing them as active political subjects who have participated in and endorsed the plan. Her use of "we" inclusively across ethnic groups, positioning Greenlanders as one among several groups affected by racism is a notably different framing than the Danish government's focus on Greenlanders throughout the rest of the text. A more radical disruption can be seen in Høegh Dams statement:

We must continue to share our experiences. We must stand together, speak out, and seek help. We must insist on improvements and no longer accept injustice. We are not a burden on the system—rather, many of us have been burdened by the system. (ibid)

This rhetoric clearly stands out from the technocratic tone of the broader text. The repeated use of “we must” creates a strong sense of collective agency, solidarity and resistance. Here, the Greenlanders are constructed as active political subjects and not only recipients of support from the Danish government. Her assertion that Greenlanders have been “burdened by the system” is particularly significant. It directly challenges deficit-based narratives that portray Greenlanders as dependent on Danish institutions. More importantly, it points toward systemic and historical forms of inequality, implicitly invoking the colonial and institutional structures that have shaped Greenlanders’ experiences in Denmark.

Discursive practice:

The text is published on the Danish government's official website, giving it high institutional authority and positions it as an official governmental communication to the public. As a public-facing announcement, the text's target audience is a broad audience, including civil society actors, international observers and general public and specifically minority groups and Greenlanders living in Denmark. The text and the initiative is produced by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration. The placement under the Ministry of Immigration and Integration is significant given the ambiguous positioning of Greenlanders within Denmark, highlighting the tension between being immigrants or citizens of the Danish Realm.

The text draws on a chain of prior political discourse of growing public discussion about racism against Greenlanders in Denmark, also in the geopolitical context of Trump’s interest in Greenland (see also Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2026.) The inclusion of statements from politicians function as what Fairclough terms manifest intertextuality, where the voices are explicitly quoted in the text (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 73).

A discursively important element is the designation of Greenlanders as “*herboende Grønlandere*”, which directly translates to “Greenlanders living *here*”. The original term *herboende* carries discursive weight, because rather than acknowledging Greenlanders as full citizens or equal members of the Danish Realm, it subtly frames them primarily as foreigners residing “here”. This phrasing is consistent with the Immigration Ministry framing and represents a discursive tension in the text: the blurry boundary between national belonging and immigrant status for Greenlanders.

The text draws on several overlapping discourse, and very significantly, a strong discourse of anti-racism, equality and inclusion. This intersects with a broader discourse of Danish values and responsibility, in which Denmark positions themselves as morally authoritative. Looking at the 12 initiatives, they blend multiple layers of

discrimination and intersecting discourses. For example, one of the initiatives concerns the right to a Greenlandic passport, which belongs to a broader discourse of citizenship, national belonging, and legal status. In supplementary materials published on the government's website, the initiative is further contextualized with the statement:

The passport is a clear marker of one's origin and thus one's national identity. The government has a strong understanding of the distinct sense of Greenlandic identity and has therefore made it possible for nationality in Greenlandic passports to be stated as Greenlandic going forward. (Regeringen 2025)

This articulation revolves around national identity, acknowledging Greenlanders' distinct identity. However, the initiative is primarily symbolic, as it does not represent a structural change nor change the legal status of Greenlandic citizens. Its discursive placement alongside discussions of discrimination and racism is significant because it does address direct anti-racism efforts, but rather points to deeper systemic inequalities of national belonging. This suggests an acknowledgement of Greenlandic identity that is ultimately confined to a symbol, non-structural level.

Taken together, the text constructs racism against Greenlanders as a serious social issue while simultaneously framing it in ways that individualize its causes, depoliticize its structural dimensions and position the Danish state as a benevolent and morally authoritative protector.

5.3.3 Text 3: "A new theme week will help strengthen children's and young people's knowledge of the Danish Realm."

This text was published on the official website for the Danish Ministry of Children and Education on the 25th of February 2026 as a press release to announce a new themed week in schools to strengthen children and young people's knowledge of the Danish Realm. According the text, this is a political effort to strengthen shared identity within the Kingdom of Denmark and make Greenland and Faroe Islands more present in Danish education

Textual analysis:

A key lexical choice in this text is the repetition of positively charged and affective vocabulary that allude to *togetherness* and *community*:

Children and young people in Denmark should have a better understanding of the Danish Realm and the shared history of its three countries.

Our democracy and freedom are under pressure, which means that we must do more to safeguard the shared values and history of the Danish Realm. Therefore, the Minister for Children and Education aims to strengthen children and young people's familiarity of the Danish Realm and provide them with a better understanding of the community between Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark through four new initiatives. (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2026, see appendix 9.6)

The repeated use of “shared history”, “shared values” , “understanding” , “familiarity” and “community” evokes harmony and mutual understanding in the Danish Realm. This works to create a sense of *togetherness* between Denmark and Greenland, politically legitimize the Danish Realm and naturalize it. The emphasis on shared history and values is particularly interesting, as it reframes colonial histories into “shared” history, taking distance from responsibility and the legal authority of Denmark. This also serves to naturalize the Danish Realm, making it appear as a natural phenomenon with a shared responsibility, rather than a colonial dynamic. Moreover, the frequent use of inclusive pronouns such “our” and “we” works to construct a collective identity.

Similarly, the word “strengthen” appears across several initiatives: “strengthening knowledge”, “strengthening democratic resilience”, “strengthening the Realm”, “strengthening relationships”: This repetition serves to present the Realm as something that exists in a coherent and established entity but is under pressure from the outside - requiring collective action. This construction of the Realm is made clear throughout the text, in which the use of positive words such as “democracy”, “freedom”, “knowledge” and “cultural enrichment” are consistently used to describe the Danish kingdom. In contrast, the external world is presented as unstable and threatening:

‘The current global situation is placing democracy under pressure. The unrest in the world reminds us that solidarity is not something we can take for granted, but something we must actively maintain. There is a need to strengthen the Danish Realm, and that work begins in schools,’ says Minister for Children and Education Mattias Tesfaye. (ibid)

This creates a clear binary opposition between the internally cohesive realm and the insecure external world. The structural nature of the sentence also serves to construct this binary, creating a cause and effect structure: the cause being the “unrest” in the external world, the effect being “strengthening solidarity”, “beginning in schools”.

The text relies heavily on declarative sentences, which presents claims as factual and uncontroversial. Modal verbs such as a “must” convey obligation while “will” signals institutional commitments and are central to this authoritative tone.

Moreover, agency within the text is unevenly distributed, in which the Danish state is consistently positioned as active agents. The state “introduces”, “allocates funding”, “strengthens”, and proposes, constructing Denmark as the actor. Greenland and Faroe Island are consistently referred to, however are primarily represented as passive recipients, presented as educational topics or destinations for high school students. Whenever collaboration with the other nations is referenced, the wording remains vague:

Educational inspiration materials and related resources will be developed in close dialogue with relevant stakeholders who have expertise concerning Greenland and the Faroe Islands. (ibid)

The "relevant stakeholders" are not elaborated, they are not named nor defined. This vagueness limit preserves the Danish state's role as the decision-maker and the actor..

Discursive practice:

This text is produced by the Ministry for Children and Education, published on an official government website with broad public accessibility. This institutional context confers formal authority to the text and signals a top-down approach to the implementation of the theme week initiative. The primary intended target audience for the text includes educators and students, while an implicit secondary audience includes the general public.

The text is located under the “new” section of the website, which contains press releases and official updates from the ministry. Additionally, the webpage contains hyperlinks to related texts, including information about International High Schools In Denmark, curriculum renewal processes, updates regarding students from the Faroe Islands and Greenland in Denmark, as well as a piece about summer school in Greenland.

Throughout the text, there are also direct quotations from the minister Mattias Tesfaye, known as manifest intertextuality with explicit intertextual references, functioning as an authoritative voice that reinforces the message. Moreover, the text explicitly references “Uge Sex” (Sex Week, the week where students in Denmark learn about Sexual Health), as a model for inspiration in designing the theme week. This

intertextual linkage aligns the initiative with an established educational program, suggesting a normalisation of the Commonwealth Week with the education system. The invocation of the Sex Week program creates familiarity and legitimacy, and frames the theme week as something easier for audiences to accept and adopt.

One of the phrases that stand out in the text is “spiritual rearmament” (*åndelig oprustning*). The metaphor of “rearmament” draws on military discourse and draws on wider discourse within Danish politics of a need for a nation-wide rearmament of morality, culture and democracy, that Mette Frederiksen has mentioned multiple times since early 2025 (Brinkmann, 2025). Mattias Tesfaye, Minister for Children and Education, emphasizes that this must start as early as in schools:

The Danish Realm Week is intended to increase Danish children's and young people's knowledge of the Danish Realm through education. It will help students gain a deeper understanding of both contemporary and historical conditions within the Danish Realm and contribute to their civic and spiritual rearmament (Danish Ministry of Children, 2026, see appendix 9.6)

This concept of *åndelig oprustning* has become a significant discursive element of the Social Democrats political agenda, to the extent that the party has appointed a dedicated spokesperson for *spiritual reenarmament*. These concepts centre on the importance of “knowing our story” and “speaking about our values”, as stated by the Social Democratic spokesperson Ida Auken in a public statement (Auken, 2025). The term was first introduced by Mattias Tesfaye in January 2025 in an interview with Danish newspaper *WeekendAvisen* (Bennike, 2025). In the interview, Tesfaye explains that in a time with global instability, military rearmament must be accompanied by a parallel spiritual or moral renewal in order to safeguard the sovereignty and security of Denmark, Europe and the West.

He emphasized that democracy is not merely institutional, but also exists as a collective “we”, founded on patriotism and a shared sense of national identity among citizens (Bennike, 2025). According to Tesfaye, this must start in schools, so that children gain a cultural and historical education with more emphasis on language, the arts and the humanities, in order to contribute a sense of Danish collective identity, but also a broader European one. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has also spoken on the concept on several occasions. In her Constitution Day speech at Rødding Højskole she described spiritual rearmament as something “deep within ourselves” and a “democratic mindset and sense of human solidarity” that is crucial in times of global insecurity and threats from USA and Russia (Prime Ministers Office, 05/06/2025).

Therefore, using such concepts in this text about the new theme week about the Danish Realm clearly explains that the education about Greenland and Faroe Island is an important part of the Social Democrats political agenda to create a stronger sense of national identity across the kingdom. Within this framework, the initiative is not merely an educational intervention, but belongs to a wider discourse of strengthening a shared “we” across the Danish Realm and contributing to an ongoing process of identity formation.

5. 4 Social Practice: Data Category 2

This data category focuses on *Policy Initiatives and Symbolic Governance*, which this analysis understands as representing a form of *internal* ontological stabilization, that is, discursive construction of Danish-Greenlandic relationship without direct address to Trump, but within a domestic and internal framework. While the texts in this category can be understood as responses to Trump’s threats when read in their geopolitical context, their primary orientation is inward: rather than projecting a Danish identity outward to international audiences, they work to strengthen narratives of *togetherness* within the Danish Real by reinforcing emotional attachment and reaffirming a shared identity. This can be understood as ontological stabilization through identity reproduction.

The initiatives that were chosen for analysis for this category exist among a web of other policies regarding Greenland that were initiated after Trump's threats to Greenland. These include financial contributions from the Danish state to a hydropower project at Buksefjorden in Greenland (The Ministry of Finance, 8 January 2025); a new approach to child welfare cases involving families with a Greenlandic background (The Ministry for Social Affairs and Housing, 17 January 2025); an allocation of DKK 180 million increased preparedness in Greenland (The Ministry of Resilience and Preparedness, 25 February 2026). Thus, these texts must be understood within the context of a variety of new initiatives from Denmark to Greenland after Trump’s threats.

5.4.1 Shared Histories = Shared Futures

One of the most prominent themes throughout the texts is the construction of a *shared identity* within the Danish Realm, mainly articulated through the emphasis on the shared history and a shared future. The recurring invocation of “community”, “shared values”, reconciliation, and collective responsibility frames the relationship between

Denmark and Greenland as historically and emotionally interconnected. History is not represented as a neutral recounting of past events, but functions as an active and political process of identity construction. Steele (2008) argues that ontological security is deeply intertwined with memory and history, as history is both used in and consumes a biographical narrative, producing a linear story about who a state is (Steele 2008, 55). States can selectively recall and narrative historical experiences in ways that create continuity and coherence. The references to Danish and Greenland history throughout the texts can thus be understood as a way to construct a narrative that aligns with the Danish self-understanding.

Framing the Danish-Greenland history as *shared* and one of mutually, the discourse removes colonial responsibility for Denmark and does not acknowledge any negative consequences of colonialism on Greenland. This aligns with Keskinen et al's concept of colonial complicity within Nordic exceptionalism, in which Nordic countries have participated in and benefited from colonial power structure while still maintaining a self-image as being innocent and a moral distance from colonial histories (Keskinen et al 2009,1). Memories of Danish colonialism are mobilized to negotiate Danish ontological security in ways that detach this history from broader European colonial legacies (Eldar 2024, 1). The language of "shared" history thus constructs an emotional connection, while simultaneously naturalising a relationship that is structurally unequal.

The Coil Campaign apology represents an interesting articulation of Danish-Greenlandic history. Steele argues that traumatic histories destabilize linear narratives, but can also be used as "chosen" resources through which agents to "synthesize" a particular narrative, making historical narration itself a political act (Steele 2008, 57). Thus, creating a "sense of history" and acknowledgement of a difficult past can serve as a way to restore ontological security, because it organizes groups behavior into a coherent whole (ibid, 57). Rather than the Coil Campaign becoming a disruption to the Danish image as a moral authority, it attempts to reintegrate a difficult *shared* history into a broader narrative of democratic progress, moral responsibility, and collective belonging. The apology becomes evidence of Denmark's capacity for accountability and growth, reinforcing rather than undermining the biographical narrative. The symbolic timing of the apology, the geopolitical context of Trump threats, works to amplify this function, as the gesture of reconciliation deepens emotional attachment between Denmark and Greenland when it's under pressure.

5.4.2 The Naturalization of Danish Realm

Another dimension of the *togetherness* theme is the construction of the Danish Realm as a natural and emotional community. The Realm is normalized as a space of collective belonging, where Greenlandic cultural differences are incorporated as a part of a larger “we”. Browning and Joenemmi argue that while elements of sameness and homogeneity are often important in creating a collective identity, communities are often brought together by their existence of different identities *internally*. This, however, is only if such identities complement a broader identity, where internal “others” can be incorporated into a broader “we” (Browning & Joenemmi 2010, 10).

Thus, the idea of a Danish collective identity includes Greenlandic people, because it fits into a broader identity of the Danish Realm. The need for an “åndelig oprustning” or spiritual rearmament is an interesting metaphor for this, as it acknowledges the need for stabilizing a Danish togetherness and identity. Here ontological security is not achieved by creating a threatening external Other, but through the inclusion of Greenlandic people into a Danish “we”.

5.5 Non-discursive and Material Realities: Denmark’s Legal and Political Authority over Greenland

The discursive construction examined across both data categories do not exist in a vacuum, they are embedded within and made possible by a concrete set of legal and political structures that constitute the material conditions of the Danish authority over Greenland. According to Fairclough, contextualizing the textual and discursive analysis needs the mapping of a social matrix of discourse (Fairclough 1992, 237). This means an analysis of the institutional and economic conditions that the discourse exists within, that both enables and constrains what can be said and done (Jørgensen & Phillips, 87).

This analysis sees this matrix as defined by Denmark’s legal and political authority over Greenland, that lays the groundwork that the discursive articulation of ontological security operates within. Thus, this section will outline the main legal and political structures that are embedded in the relationship between Greenland and Denmark.

5.5.1 The Legal Framework:

Greenland is a constituent country within the Kingdom of Denmark, and while the 2009 Self- Government Act granted a significant autonomy over domestic affairs, Denmark retains authority in key political areas. This includes foreign policy/affairs, defense, exchange rate/monetary policy, supreme court decisions and police/criminal law (Prime Ministers Office, n.d) . Seeing as Denmark represents Greenland in foreign affairs, the Danish state, Mette Frederiksen as current prime minister, has been accepted as the primary diplomatic actor and representative to represent the Danish Realm during Trump's threats to Greenland. The Self-Government Act contains a provision regarding access to Greenlandic independence. Should the people of Greenland decide in favour of independence, negotiations between the Danish Government and Naalakkersuisut will start. The process requires the consent of Inatsisartut, a referendum in Greenland, and the consent of the Folketing (Danish Prime Minister's Office, 2009).

Tracing back to 1953, where the official status of Greenland as a Danish colony was changed into formally being part of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Danish state has led a “modernization” program, also known as “Danification”, that has formed Greenlandic development (Jensen 2016, 99). Such modernization programs aimed at increasing industrialization, urban resettlement, and a reorganisation of the school system that privileged the Danish language and culture (Graugaard et al 2025, 3). Despite the strong branding as a humanitarian effort to create equal footing, the modernization programs have been characterized by discriminatory policies, such as a formally higher wages for people born in Denmark, named the “birth-place criterion” (ibid, 3). These modernization programs laid the foundation for Danish development efforts and consequently, also the shaping of the Danish self-image and global grand as an international conscientious nation (Engberg-Pedersen & Fejerskov 2021, 125; (Jensen 2016, 111).

An example of the modernization program was the Danish IUD Enforcement Program, also known as the Coil Campaign (*Spiralsagen*) The program was part of a broader family planning program, with concerns about rising birth rates and the consequences of the Danish modernization plans in Greenland. Efforts for population controls were tied to neo-Malthusian fears of over-population and anxieties about threats to civilization. The implementation of non-consensual contraception thus represented not only neocolonial development efforts, but also the establishment of racialized and gendered hierarchies that made Greenlandic bodies into political ground for state interventions and political interests (Rawlinson 2016, 430) (Graugaard 2025, 8). Such material realities have formed the Greenlandic society and relationship with

Denmark, forming the framework for which discursive construction of Danish identity exists within.

5.5.2 Greenland's Economy

Another important aspect to the Danish-Greenlandic relationship is the economic dimension. Greenland's economy remains heavily dependent on the annual Danish block grant that constitutes half of Greenland's national budget (Gad & Barse, 2026). Moreover, Greenland has a narrow export economy, primarily centred around exporting fish and shell fish that makes 92% of total export goods (Hendriksen & Hoffman 2025, 4). As Hendriksen & Hoffman (2025) argue in their article, Greenland's economic conditions cannot be understood separately from the distinction "island operation" conditions, that is, the socio-spatial structures. This includes the small and geographically dispersed populations and lack of transport infrastructure on the island. This means that there is very little opportunity for domestic production, labor distribution and economic diversification (ibid, 5). These economic structures are deeply shaped by the modernization programs, where Danish structures were transferred to the island without adaptation to local conditions. These path dependencies have reproduced forms of organization and economic dependency that shape the conditions for potential Greenlandic independence.

5.5.3 Connecting the Material to the Discursive

Thus, when understanding the non-discursive material realities of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, it becomes clear that the legal political arrangement within the Danish Realm constituted through colonial histories that have produced forms of economic dependency and broader social asymmetries. These material conditions do not only exist alongside discourse but actively shape the social practices within which discourse emerges and get assigned meaning.

Danish authority over Greenland is both institutional and discursive, operating through formal governance structures and policy initiatives, and this is articulated, negotiated and justified through political discourse. This dimension allows the analysis to be understood across concrete realities and grounded in the realities of being a Greenlander or a Dane. In this sense, Danish ontological security in official Danish political discourse are not only symbolic or rhetorical, but grounded in and sustained by concrete governance arrangements that are founded on longstanding historical interventions.

6. Discussion

6.1 Findings

This thesis sought to examine how the Danish government discursively legitimizes its political and legal authority over Greenland in response to Trump's pursuit of the country, using an ontological security perspective. Across two data categories, namely official speeches and statements by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, and the a series of Policy and Symbolic Initiatives, the analysis demonstrates that the Danish government responded to Trump's pursuit of Greenland through a broader discursive reconstruction of Danish identity to stabilize ontological security both internally and externally in attempt to legitimize its continued authority over Greenland. The following discussion will further elaborate and address the main research question and its two subquestions, reflecting on what the findings from both data categories reveal and how they intersect. First the first two subquestions are addressed, before bringing together the findings to answer the main research question.

6.1.1 Subquestion 1: Maintaining and Restoring Ontological Security

Through what discursive strategies does Denmark seek to maintain or restore ontological security in response to Trump's interest in Greenland?

This subquestion aims to understand how Denmark seeks to maintain and restore ontological security through discursive strategies aimed at stabilizing the Danish identity in response to the challenge of Trump's interest in Greenland. Trump's interest in Greenland represents an external disruption and crisis that, in Steele's ontological security framework, destabilizes a state's biographical narrative and self-understanding. The findings suggest that the Danish government reacts through two main responses as reflected in the data categories, an external and internal stabilization of ontological security through the use of reaffirmation of stable biographical and historical narratives, the construction of collective identities, external Othering and identity reproduction.

The official speeches perform external ontological stabilization. Steele describes how during crises, states want to maintain biographical narratives with stories about who they are and what they value, and these narratives are performative by being

articulated publicly (Steele 2008, 70). The speeches and statements analysis for this category are oriented towards international audiences, even Trump directly, they work to reaffirm and project a stable Danish identity. The discourse draws heavily on Nordic exceptionalism as a form of identity resources, where Frederiksen constructs Denmark as the voice of “reason”, rule-based, loyal and morally authoritative and committed to international cooperation. As Browning argues, the moral dimension of Nordic exceptionalism is important in understanding how the Nordic countries brand themselves a “better than the rest”, marked as rational and modern countries that are role models (Browning 2007, 35). Frederiksen's references of the Second World War and the post-war international order further deepens this, embedding Danish identity within a long historical context of Western democratic values.

Another aspect of the affirmation of this biographical narrative with articulation of Denmark as part of a broader collective Western *we*. By repeatedly invoking NATO, transatlantic alliances and shared democratic values, Frederiksen anchors Danish identity to a stable collective Western identity. This can for example be seen in the articulation of Denmark's relationship with the USA, for example in the framing in the speech in Nuuk, with the US as the admired order sibling and Denmark as the younger loyal one, where Frederiksen emphasizes a loyalty and emotional attachment between the two countries. This simultaneously also reveals a part of Danish identity, where Denmark sees itself as a *small* nation that looks “up to” the USA. The speech performs what Steele (2008) describes as biographical continuity: by publicly reaffirming who Denmark is and what it stands for, Frederiksen commits the state to acting consistently with that identity, stabilizing the narrative precisely by articulating it under pressure.

On the other hand, the policy and symbolic government texts perform a parallel but inward-facing process, where there is a process of internal ontological stabilization through identity reproduction. Here the texts work to deepen and consolidate the sense of shared belonging with the Danish Realm and strengthen emotional attachment between Denmark and Greenland. Where the speeches in Data category 1 address a crisis of external recognition, the text policy text address a crisis of internal coherence, the need to insure that the Danish Realm is naturalized and emotionally grounded.

This can for example be seen in the references to *åndelig oprustning*, or spiritual reenarmament. As the discursive practice analysis demonstrated, this concept highlights the Danish need to strengthen national identity and feeling of belonging, as a moral imperative from within the country, starting in schools with the younger generations. This is an explicit political project that can be analysed from an ontological security perspective, where what is described as “knowing our story” and “speaking about our values”, can be interpreted through Steele's framework as stabilizing a biographical narrative. Through institutionalizing the teaching of a shared

Realm history and values, the state produces and reproduces a collective identity as an ideological political project.

The Coil Campaign apology also represents internal ontological stabilization. As Steele argues, traumatic histories can destabilize biographical narratives but can also be drawn upon as resources through which states synthesize a coherent self-understanding. By acknowledging, publicly and internationally, an historical injustice that has a role in the broader colonial history between Denmark and Greenland, Frederiksen positions Denmark as morally accountable and capable of confronting its own failures. This function strengthens rather than undermines Danish authority, because it absorbs this into a narrative of democratic progress and moral authority.

6.1.2 Answering Subquestion 2: Legitimation of authority over Greenland

How does the Danish government legitimize its legal and political authority over Greenland in official political discourse, including speeches and policy initiatives?

Having established how the Danish government seeks and restores ontological security across both data categories, it becomes possible to examine how they simultaneously function as strategies of legitimizing the legal and political authority over Greenland. The legal and political authority in this case refers to the non-discursive material realities in which the discourse operates, the Social Practice level of Fairclough's analysis.

In Data Category 1, the official speeches and statements, Frederiksen invokes an identity based on international law, NATO membership and values of democracy and sovereignty as objective, non-negotiable truths. As the textual analysis demonstrated, Frederiksen's use of high-modality declarative language such as in statements like "you cannot annex another country" or "these are principles rooted in international law", removes the contested nature of Denmark's position entirely, but presented the Danish stance as a universal moral fact. Constructing Denmark as rational, rule-based and part of a larger collective Western identity, she frames its authority over Greenland in terms of international legal order rather than national self-interest.

In Data Category 2, the policy and symbolic governance category, legitimization operates through a complementary register, within ontological stabilization. Rather than invoking legal authority, these texts invoke emotional and mutual belonging. This can be seen through the repeated use of “shared history”, “shared values”, “togetherness” and “community” across the Realm Week text and the anti-racism plan. These work to naturalize the Danish Realm as an organic community rather than a political construction with colonial history. This way the discourse functions ideologically, as Fairclough argues, discursive practices contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations, known as the ideological effects of discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 64). Thus, the Danish government legitimizes Danish authority over Greenland by replacing legal authority with a narrative of mutual belonging and emotional attachment.

Overall, the two data categories represent how the Danish state discursively legitimize their authority by presenting legal and moral authority outwardly, and emotional and mutual belonging inwards.

6.1.3 Answering the main research question

How does the Danish government discursively legitimize Denmark’s authority over Greenland in response to Trump’s pursuit of the island, and how can this be understood through an ontological security perspective?

Bringing the dimensions from the two subquestions together, namely the ontological security perspective from the first and the discursive legitimization from the second, it becomes possible to answer the main research question while identifying the deeper ideology at play. Overall, this thesis argues that the Danish government discursively legitimizes continued Danish authority over Greenland in response to Trump's pursuit of the island through ontological security seeking mechanisms through 1.) creating biographical continuity and identity reproduction of Denmark as rational, democratic and moral responsibility 2) constructing a collective Danish-Greenlandic identity based on a shared history and emotional and mutual belonging. Thus, the use of stabilization of ontological security works to legitimize political and legal authority over Greenland and construct the Danish realm as a natural and neutral arrangement.

Moreover, the findings reveal a deeper colonial complicity throughout both Data categories, where the Danish-Greenlandic relationship is consistently depoliticized and colonial histories are partially acknowledged, and then absorbed into

more comfortable framings of a collective identity. This is necessary because in order to stabilize the biographical narrative of the Danish identity, the colonial dimension must remain depoliticised to uphold the image as a morally authoritative, progressive and benevolent actor. In line with Keskinen et al's (2009) concept of colonial complicity as a characteristic nordic exceptionalism, Denmark positions itself as a morally progressive actor while erasing the benefits it has enjoyed from histories of colonialism and transforming it into a narrative of mutual belonging.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that Danish ontological security is not only a response to Trump's threats, however also using it as a way to renew and deepen legitimacy within the Danish Realm, consolidate self-understanding as a morally superior actor, and highlight shared experiences in a collective "we" and carving out Trump as an irrational, external Other. This is done through an external reproduction of Denmark as the rational, benevolent protector, and the internal reproductions of an emotionally connected community of shared history.

6.2 Reflections & Directions for Future Research:

There are several limitations of this study that are worth acknowledging. First, the analysis is restricted to a small corpus of 6 texts, all produced after Trump's renewed interest in Greenland. A larger dataset, also from before Trump's interest in Greenland, would have been beneficial in understanding how Danish ontological security is challenged by this geopolitical moment, and how the Danish states discursive strategies shift over time. With only three texts per data category, the findings, while being internally consistent, would benefit from broader empirical grounding to strengthen validity and reliability. Moreover, other types of political discourse such as parliamentary debates, ministerial interviews, diplomatic communications could possibly reveal different or contradictory patterns, and this could be interesting for future research.

A further limitation is, this analysis focuses on only political discourse. Steele argues that in times of crisis, ontological insecurity is shaped relationally through "co-actors discourse strategies", where external actors such as the media, NGOs or international institutions can challenge or reinforce state identities (Steele 2008, 71). Future research could therefore expand the analysis by looking at media representation, international commentary, and other external actors in order to better understand how ontological security is maintained across multiple sites and actors. This would be interesting to see how ontological security is maintained by non-political actors.

Moreover, the analysis is limited to only Danish government discourse and political elite and does not incorporate Greenlandic voices and perspectives. Although this was a methodological choice, as the aim of the thesis was to specifically understand how Danish political actors construct legitimacy and ontological security, it is important to acknowledge the lack of Greenlandic voices critically. By centering Danish political elites and only focusing on the Danish perspective, this thesis risks reproducing aspects of a colonial gaze in which Greenland appears as an object of Danish political narrative, rather than as an actor with agency with subjectivity and separate national identities. Thus, future research could center Greenlandic perspectives more explicitly, including political discourse and media debates, activist voices and other actors. Nonetheless, the decision to focus on Danish actors was also taken due to consideration of Greenlandic the current research fatigue due to a high interest in carrying out research in Greenlandic at the moment (see Nord University 2026; Arctic Hub, 2023). This would also have to be taken into consideration for future research.

Finally, a reflection on the methodological framework itself, in addition to the ones presented in chapter 2. As with all critical discourse analysis and qualitative research, the interpretations and findings of this thesis are inevitably shaped by the theoretical lens and subjectivity of the researcher itself. The combination of ontological security theory and CDA worked not only to explicate the content of the Danish biographical narrative, but also reveal how discourse effects constitute meaning for their action (Steele 2008, 11). Nonetheless, the issue with studying discourse for ontological security, as Steeles describes, is that we can only access discursive consciousness, and not practical consciousness (ibid, 11). This means that with CDA, this thesis can potentially capture how Danish political actors publicly construct and justify identity, but cannot speak to the underlying assumptions or motivation that may never be explicitly articulated. Nonetheless, discourse analysis is useful in analysing political discourse because states must publicly explain, justify and argue that their actions (ibid, 12).

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how the Danish government discursively legitimizes its authority over Greenland in response to Trump's pursuit of the island, and how this can be understood through an ontological security perspective. Through a critical discourse analysis of six texts across two data categories, official speeches and statements by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, and a series of policy and symbolic governance initiatives, the analysis has demonstrated that the Danish government's response to Trump constitutes a coherent and multi-layered discursive project aimed simultaneously at stabilizing Danish identity and naturalizing continued Danish authority over Greenland.

This is done through two parallel mechanisms, an external and internal ontological stabilization. Externally, Frederiksen's speeches and statements work to reaffirm the biographical continuity of Denmark as rational, rule-based and morally authoritative and embedded within a collective Western identity. Internally, the policy and symbolic government texts show that Denmark stabilizes ontological security by strengthening emotional attachment and consolidating a sense of shared belonging within the Danish Realm, reproducing a collective identity between Denmark and Greenland grounded in a shared history and promise for a shared future. Significantly, this thesis argues that these two mechanisms are mutually reinforcing and dependent on each other, where Danish ontological security reinforces to Danish authority over Greenland and ontological security depends on the reproduction of authority.

Both mechanisms operate within a set of non-discursive realities that structure the concrete structure of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, that endures a legacy of colonial history that has shaped Greenlandic society today. In line with the literature on Nordic exceptionalism, colonial history is not openly acknowledged but is transformed and absorbed into biographical narratives that reframe Denmark's colonial past and depoliticize the history of Denmark as a colonial power, using them as resources to demonstrate moral accountability and democratic progressiveness.

The combination of CDA and ontological security allowed for a systematic analysis of how discourse constructs identity and naturalises authority. While drawing from external literature on identity content, such as Nordic exceptionalism, these two frameworks have been useful in showing how nations respond in situations where their ontological security is threatened.

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9. Appendix:

9.1 Category 1 Text 1

Speech at press conference in Greenland (03/04/2025)

I would like to take this opportunity to send a message directly to the United States of America.

The US is a big country, and Denmark is a small one. We have looked up to you, and you have inspired us because, since the Second World War, you have defended the free world and helped create prosperity, progress, peace, and freedom.

And we have tried to give back to you by always supporting you and by showing up every time you called.

In us, you have a friend who has always kept our word—a friend you have always been able to rely on. There is nothing I want more than for our friendship to continue. Because if we allow ourselves to be divided as allies, then we do our enemies a favor. And I will do everything I can to prevent that from happening.

Therefore, when you ask our businesses to invest in the US, they do. When you ask us to spend more on defense, we do. And when you ask us to strengthen security in the Arctic, we are on the same page.

But when you demand to take over a part of the Kingdom of Denmark's territory—when we are met by pressure and threats from our closest ally—what are we to believe about the country we have admired for so many years?

You know us. You know what we stand for. And you know that we do not give in.

That is why I have to state clearly: national borders, the sovereignty of states, and territorial integrity—these are principles rooted in international law. These are fundamental principles.

And this is not only about Greenland or Denmark. This is about the world order that we have built together across the Atlantic over generations. You cannot annex another country—not even with an argument about international security.

Speaking of security, there is a lot that we and you can do now: strengthening our presence, naval ships, long-range drones, and satellite capacity. We uphold our commitments, and more is on its way.

It has always been a shared task to safeguard security in the Arctic. Greenland is part of NATO, and for 75 years we have had a defense agreement with you that gives you wide access to Greenland.

If you want to be more present in Greenland, Greenland and Denmark are ready. And if you would like to strengthen security in the Arctic—as we do—then let us do it together.

Tak.

9.2 Category 1 Text 2

Statement from Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, 04.01.2026 (my translation)

Mette Frederiksen II (2022–), Prime Minister's Office

“I have to say this very directly to the United States:

It makes absolutely no sense to talk about it being necessary for the United States to take over Greenland. The United States has no right to annex one of the three countries in the Kingdom of Denmark.

The Kingdom of Denmark—and thus Greenland—is part of NATO and is therefore covered by the alliance's security guarantee. We already have a defense agreement today between the Kingdom and the United States that gives the US broad access to Greenland. And from the Kingdom's side, we have invested significantly in security in the Arctic.

I would therefore strongly urge the United States to stop the threats against a historically close ally and against another country and another people, who have very clearly stated that they are not for sale.”

For further information: Prime Minister's Office press phone +45 29 10 88 25

9.3 Category 1 Text 3

Pressemøde den 13. januar 2026, Mette Frederiksen (my translation)

Welcome everyone. For more than a year, Greenland and Denmark have had to deal with a very unusual and difficult situation. We have managed this together. We have taken the initiative to further strengthen security in the Arctic. We have strengthened

the ties between us within the Kingdom. We have built even closer alliances with partners and allies around the world.

It has not been easy to stand up against completely unacceptable pressure from our closest ally for decades, but at the same time, much suggests that the most difficult part still lies ahead of us. Along the way, it has become increasingly clear that although it is the Greenlanders who primarily feel the insecurity, and although we across the entire Kingdom have had to listen to many insults, something much more fundamental is at stake. This is not only about Greenland or the Kingdom. It is about the fact that borders must not be changed by force. That you cannot buy other people. And that small countries should not have to fear large countries. That is why we are clearly speaking out. And that is why many allies are doing the same in the Nordic region, in Europe, and in the rest of the world. We are standing up not only for ourselves, but for the world order that previous generations have built—our democracy.

Tomorrow, Greenland and Denmark will meet with the United States. We come together, we stand together, and we leave together. We want dialogue and we want cooperation. We are not seeking any conflict. But our message is clear: Greenland is not for sale.

We have made this clear from the beginning. Just as we have said from the start of all this to the Americans that if this is about security, then there is much more we can and must do together—and we will repeat this at the meeting tomorrow. Of course, we want to strengthen cooperation on security in the Arctic with the United States, with NATO, with Europe, and with the Arctic states in NATO. And just as the Baltic countries, for example, do not stand alone in defending NATO's eastern flank against Russia—because it is a shared responsibility for the entire alliance—the same applies in the Arctic. NATO must protect and defend Greenland just as much as every other millimeter of NATO territory. And that security guarantee is the best safeguard against China or Russia as a threat in the Arctic.

Dear Greenlanders: You should know that we stand together. We do so today, we will do so tomorrow, and we will continue to do so. And with those words, the floor is yours, Jens-Frederik.

9. 4 Category 2 Text 1

The Prime Minister's speech at the apology event for the Spiral Case, 24 September 2025 (my translation)

Dear everyone. Today is a special day. Today, we must put into words a failure that had serious consequences for Greenlandic girls and women.

Some of you are present here today. You are among the thousands of Greenlandic girls and women who, from the 1960s onwards, were fitted with IUDs. Many of you against your will.

Naja Lyberth, you were only 14 years old when you had an IUD inserted. An IUD designed for women who had already given birth. You have said that it felt like having knives inside you. That the state took your virginity. And even though you saw how the girls in your class were called into the doctor's office one by one, you were too ashamed to speak about it with one another.

Hedvig Frederiksen, you have explained that it was the headmistress at your boarding school who sent you to the doctor. In the waiting room, you saw girls coming out crying one after another. You have said that you were afraid. That you did not know what was going to happen. What happened on the doctor's examination table, you have repressed. But you remember the suffocating silence in the dormitory that evening. And the intense pain that followed you for years afterwards.

Now, more than 50 years later, you still find it difficult to speak about it. I understand that. Thank you for sharing your story nonetheless. It is an important testimony. A third of you, Elisa Christiansen, has rightly asked: Where were the health authorities? Where was the state? Where were the adults who were supposed to protect me? The reality was that the society that was supposed to protect you instead harmed you. Several of you have explained that you have carried this pain with you your entire lives. The feeling of guilt and shame. That you lost trust in other people.

Many of you have lived with physical and psychological suffering. And some of you completely lost the ability to have children. I can hardly imagine anything more tragic. What was taken from you back then was something deeply fundamental. Something that no girl or woman should ever be deprived of: The right to decide over one's own body. And here lies a striking paradox.

For most of us, contraception is a symbol of freedom. Especially for us women. The possibility of avoiding unwanted pregnancies. But for some of you, it instead became unfreedom. What you were subjected to was an injustice. It was systematic discrimination. Because you were Greenlanders. And it was wrong.

Some may ask: Why apologise for something that happened more than 50 years ago? What does it even mean? Contraception without consent. Contraception intended for adult women, but used on the bodies of children. That is wrong. That is what we are marking today. An apology cannot change what happened. It cannot remove the pain each of you has experienced. And it cannot give back what you lost.

But it is an acknowledgment that what you were subjected to was a failure. And now we are taking that responsibility off your shoulders.

Many of you have fought for years. For justice. For us to listen. And to take responsibility. We are doing that now. Denmark and Greenland together. The spiral case is a chapter in our shared history that should never have been written. Unfortunately,

we know it does not stand alone. Our shared past contains other stories as well Stories of systematic discrimination And lack of respect.

Today, we apologise to those of you who suffered because of it. The ugly parts of history must not be hidden away. On the contrary. Our past is shared. Both the good and the bad. And I do not believe we can achieve the equal and respectful relationship we wish to have with one another unless we dare to open even the darker chapters. Therefore, the apology we give today is not only about the past. It is about our present. About our shared future. And about the mutual trust that must exist between us. So as Jens-Frederik and I stand here together today, it is with a shared promise: That together we will work towards a new era. With more respect. More equality. More solidarity. For your sake. And for future generations.

9.5 Category 2 Text 2

“The government will combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark with 12 new initiatives.” (27/01/25) (my translation)

Discrimination and racism against Greenlanders in Denmark is a serious problem. The government is therefore allocating an additional DKK 35 million over four years and, at the same time, presenting 12 concrete initiatives to combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark.

Many Greenlanders residing here unfortunately experience prejudice, racism, and discrimination. This is something the government intends to confront.

Accordingly, the government is now presenting 12 concrete initiatives aimed at combating prejudice and discrimination directed at Greenlanders in Denmark.

The government recognizes that part of the solution requires sustained effort and ongoing public debate. Therefore, an additional total of DKK 35 million will be allocated through 2028—on top of the funds already earmarked for initiatives to combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark under the forthcoming national action plan against racism.

Minister for Immigration and Integration Kaare Dybvad Bek stated:

"I fundamentally believe that all citizens in Denmark have a duty to speak out against racism, and as a government we have a particular responsibility to safeguard social cohesion.

Denmark and Greenland share a very special relationship, and for that reason racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark constitute a distinct problem.

It is important to the government that Greenlanders are able to live in Denmark without encountering prejudice, which unfortunately is not the reality today. Therefore, I am very happy that we now have a foundation for addressing a significant problem.

We naturally know that this is not a problem that can be solved with the snap of a finger. That is why I am also happy that funding has been allocated for the coming years to ensure a sustained focus on combating racism against Greenlanders."

Member of Parliament Aaja Chemnitz (IA) stated:

"Recent events have made it abundantly clear that racism against Greenlanders exists in certain circles, particularly on social media. It is therefore important that we politically acknowledge that this racism exists and that it is deeply unacceptable. Only then can we change racist behavior.

The action plan against racism is an important tool for speaking out against and reducing racism—not only against us Greenlanders, but also against other ethnic groups. I am proud of the result we are holding in our hands today. I know that this is deeply important to me, to many of my valued colleagues, and to the government. Thank you for your efforts. Now the real work begins, and I look forward to it."

Member of Parliament Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam (Siumut) stated:

"We Greenlanders have often believed that experiences of discrimination were isolated incidents. But by speaking more openly and acceptingly with one another, it has become clear that this is a widespread problem that requires action.

We must continue to share our experiences. We must stand together, speak out, and seek help. We must insist on improvements and no longer accept injustice.

We are not a burden on the system—rather, many of us have been burdened by the system.

Change takes time, but we can create it step by step. We must believe in ourselves and in our rights. We have always deserved them."

The new DKK 35 million framework for efforts to combat racism and discrimination against Greenlanders in Denmark will be distributed as follows: DKK 5 million in 2025, followed by DKK 10 million annually from 2026 to 2028.

In addition to funding parts of the 12 initiatives listed below, this funding framework will also ensure that resources are available to launch additional initiatives on an ongoing basis. Relevant interest organizations and Greenlandic members of Parliament will be involved in selecting future initiatives.

The 12 Initiatives

1. Establishment of a state body responsible for coordinating the government's efforts to ensure equal treatment of Greenlanders living in Denmark
2. The right to a Greenlandic passport
3. Dialogue with folk high schools regarding conditions for Greenlandic students
4. Mandatory education about the Danish Realm (the Kingdom of Denmark, including Greenland and the Faroe Islands)
5. Partnership to promote the well-being of Greenlandic students
6. Establishment of the Greenland Fund aimed at supporting civil society projects and related initiatives
7. Strengthening interpretation services for Greenlanders in Denmark
8. Exploring ways to improve conditions for interpreters to participate in training courses
9. A study of experienced racism among Greenlanders living in Denmark
10. Access to assistance in Greenlandic for those who experience discrimination
11. Continuation of funding for strengthened employment initiatives for unemployed Greenlanders in Denmark
12. Increased support for the Greenlandic Houses in Denmark

9.6 Category 2 Text 3

New Theme Week to Strengthen Children and Young People's Knowledge of the Danish Realm (25 February 2026) (my translation)

Children and young people in Denmark should have a better understanding of the Danish Realm and the shared history of its three countries. This will be achieved, among other things, through a new theme week in primary and lower secondary schools: *Danish Realm Week*.

Our democracy and freedom are under pressure, which means that we must do more to safeguard the shared values and history of the Danish Realm. Therefore, the Minister for Children and Education aims to strengthen children and young people's knowledge of the Danish Realm and provide them with a better understanding of the community between Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark through four new initiatives.

The Minister for Children and Education encourages primary and lower secondary schools to place greater emphasis on the Danish Realm in their teaching. This will include participation in a new nationwide theme week called *Danish Realm Week*. It is expected that *Danish Realm Week* will be held for the first time in Week 46 of the 2027/2028 school year.

Danish Realm Week is intended to increase Danish children's and young people's knowledge of the Danish Realm through education. It will help students gain a deeper understanding of both contemporary and historical conditions within the Danish Realm and contribute to their civic and spiritual rearmament. The week is inspired by *Sex Education Week*, during which schools across the country focus on sexuality education.

Participation in *Danish Realm Week* will be voluntary for schools. Since the 2023/2024 school year, the Danish Realm has been a compulsory topic in primary and lower secondary history education, as the North Atlantic and the Danish Realm were added to the national history canon. Schools may use *Danish Realm Week* as an opportunity to place the Danish Realm on the timetable.

Educational inspiration materials and related resources will be developed in close dialogue with relevant stakeholders who have expertise concerning Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

DKK 2 million will be allocated in 2026 for the development of the initiative, followed by DKK 1 million annually from 2027 to 2030 to establish and operate *Danish Realm Week*.

"The current global situation is placing democracy under pressure. The unrest in the world reminds us that solidarity is not something we can take for granted, but something we must actively maintain. There is a need to strengthen the Danish Realm, and that work begins in schools," says Minister for Children and Education Mattias Tesfaye.

The North Atlantic Upper Secondary Class Will Be Strengthened

To maintain and expand opportunities for increased knowledge of the Danish Realm among young people in Denmark, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands, an annual special grant of DKK 3 million will be allocated from 2027 to support the continuation of the North Atlantic Upper Secondary Class. This grant will help ensure a stable, sustainable, and long-term educational model within the Danish Realm.

Since the 2019/2020 school year, Gribskov Gymnasium has run a pilot North Atlantic Upper Secondary Class in collaboration with upper secondary schools in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Students spend one to two semesters in each country. This programme offers a unique opportunity for young people across the Danish Realm to get to know one another.

In addition, DKK 2 million annually from 2028 will be allocated to support the establishment and operation of a residential facility at Gribskov Gymnasium for students in the programme, ensuring stable housing. The use of these funds is contingent upon approval for the institution to operate boarding facilities.

More Compulsory Teaching About the Danish Realm

Teaching about the Danish Realm is already compulsory in primary and lower secondary school history classes. However, a further strengthening of education on the Danish Realm is proposed so that it may also be included in the new curricula for selected school subjects.

The Minister for Children and Education will propose to the parties behind the public school agreement that selected subject committees consider whether and how the Danish Realm can be incorporated into the new subject curricula.

Study Trips Across the Danish Realm

From this year onward, it will also be possible for young people from Greenland and the Faroe Islands to participate in study trips to another country within the Danish Realm.

Since 2019, the Ministry of Children and Education has maintained an annual travel fund for study trips to the Faroe Islands and Greenland for students in Danish upper secondary education, vocational education and training, and preparatory basic education (FGU). From 2026, the purpose of this travel fund has been expanded so that Greenlandic and Faroese classes may also receive support. Each country will be responsible for distributing funds to its own educational institutions.

These study trips are intended to strengthen students' knowledge of the Danish Realm. Students will learn about differences in climate, technology, history, culture, and language.

A permanent allocation of DKK 3.3 million has been set aside for the travel fund, with an additional DKK 1 million annually from 2026 onward.

Other Initiatives to Strengthen Children and Young People's Knowledge of the Danish Realm

More Opportunities for Students from Greenland and the Faroe Islands in Student Residences

Under the May 2025 agreement on significantly strengthening vocational education and training, all institutions are encouraged to keep student residences open on weekends when needed.

This agreement was made because institutions with student residences are not currently required to remain open during weekends, holidays, or public holidays. This can create challenges for students who live far from their educational institution, such as Greenlandic and Faroese students.

In addition, an annual grant of DKK 2.5 million from 2026 onward has been allocated to student residences housing students from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, enabling them to remain open during school holidays and public holidays.

Summer School in Greenland for Students from All Three Countries of the Danish Realm

This year's annual summer school in Greenland for upper secondary students will include participants from all three countries of the Danish Realm. Each country will send 8–10 students.

From Denmark, participants will be second-year upper secondary students enrolled in a science programme. During the summer school, students will strengthen their scientific knowledge while meeting young people from across the Danish Realm and becoming acquainted with the different cultures of the three countries.

DKK 300,000 has been allocated annually for the summer school. These funds will cover the costs of Danish participants, including travel expenses, course fees, and accommodation in Greenland. Greenland and the Faroe Islands will contribute corresponding funds for their own students.

Voices from the Danish Realm in the Upper Secondary Literature Canon

The new upper secondary literature canon opens the door to more voices from, among other places, the Danish Realm. This means that upper secondary students will encounter authors who offer perspectives on the Kingdom of Denmark from different viewpoints. The new literature canon is expected to enter into force on 1 August 2026 and will therefore apply to the incoming first-year upper secondary cohort in the 2026/2027 school year. In addition, upper secondary schools will receive more than DKK 100 million for new physical books in 2025 and 2026, which may be used, among other things, to purchase literary works by authors included in the updated canon.