

THE SECURITIZATION OF PUSHER STREET:

An inefficient strategy for reducing cannabis
use in Denmark

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Introduction

Since its beginning, Christiania was founded on the principles of freedom of expression and self governance. During its forty-year history, it has been a place of refuge for those on the outskirts of proper Danish society, welcoming the impoverished, foreign, and addicted. Located in the heart of Copenhagen, its bric-a-brac of self-constructed houses stand in stark contrast to the posh neighborhood of Christianshavn.

Today, Christiania is a self-sufficient, sustainable community, home to a daycare, blacksmith, grocery stores, music venues, and the internationally recognized Christiania Bike Shop.

In 2004, Christiania was raided and 45 to 60 known dealers were arrested. This police action was the result of months of surveillance and the culmination of a policy employed by the Liberal Conservative's party to securitize Pusher Street, which they hoped would, in turn, weaken the community of Christiania.¹

To understand the government's approach to Christiania, specifically Pusher Street, and the subsequent increase in drug related violence, this paper will attempt to show how the securitization of Pusher Street results in the enactment of Jean Baudrillard's theorem of the accursed share. By using reports in popular media, such as The Copenhagen Post and the Jutland Post, as well as ethnographic interviews with residents of Christiania and academic papers, I hope to demonstrate that securitization of Pusher Street is an unsuccessful strategy in the management of cannabis use in Denmark.

What is Securitization?

Traditionally, security has been described as military actions employed by the state in an effort to protect its borders from outside threats. In recent years however, theorists have attempted to develop a definition that is not militarily based and is a more useful tool for analysis. Securitization theory is one attempt to widen the concept of security beyond the state / military sphere, for the Copenhagen School, where the theory developed, states this is possible if certain conditions are met².

To start, one can use Ole Wæver's definition of a security problem to define security itself. In his essay, "Securitization and Desecuritization", Wæver states that security problems are "developments that threaten the sovereignty or independence of a state in a particularly rapid or dramatic fashion, and deprive it of the capacity to manage by itself."³ With this as my base, for this discussion I define security as such: the ability of the state to maintain its sovereignty and independence from immediate threats. The nature of the threat to a state's security will determine if the state's response is political, utilizing pre-existing laws of governance, or securitizing, in which case the state can begin a process of securitization.

¹ (Kim, 2009)

² (Weaver, Theories of International Security Studies or Politics of Widening Security, 2011)

² (Weaver, Theories of International Security Studies or Politics of Widening Security, 2011)

³ (Weaver, Securitization and Desecuritization, 1995)

First and foremost, securitization is a speech act. It is using the power of words to initiate a process that places an issue outside the political sphere and into the sphere of security. By doing so, the speaker is allowed to engage in practices that would otherwise be forbidden if the issue remained political in nature. An issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.⁴

Wæver states,

In naming a certain development a security problem, the 'state' can claim a special right, one that will, in the final instance, always be defined by the state and its elites".⁵

"By uttering 'security', a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it"⁶

A clear example of this is the use of wiretapping in the United States in its War on Terror. In everyday life, a police warrant (which has special criteria authorities must meet in order to obtain) is necessary to record citizens' phone calls. However, because the state has been threatened by terrorists, or so says the ruling class, authorities are allowed to work outside normal rules of conduct and conduct wiretaps without pre-approval from a judge. Furthermore, the state can argue that such extraordinary measures are necessary to protect its sovereignty.

Next, a securitization act must contain the following: a referent object, an existential threat, a securitizing agent, and an audience.

The referent object is that that "which has to survive and is claimed to be threatened". The existential threat is the object, population, condition, and so forth, which threatens the referent object. Securitizing agents are those who call forth and initiate the securitization process. Finally, the audience is the group who must support the securitizing agent for a securitizing act to take place.⁷

Returning to the example of the War on Terror, the referent object is America, which must be protected from the threat of terrorism, or to be specific, terrorists are the existential threat to America's security. The securitizing agents are the president and congress who have the authority to declare war. The audience is the American public, who the agents must convince that their security is in danger and in essence, obtain their permission to engage in the extraordinary measures of violent conflict and reduction of personal freedoms.

Securitization can thus be defined as the attempt to eliminate an existential threat through a series of speech acts, which justifies the use of extraordinary measures.

⁴ (Weaver, Theories of International Security Studies or Politics of Widening Security, 2011)

⁵ (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998 p.54)

⁶ (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998 p.55)

⁷ (Weaver, Theories of International Security Studies or Politics of Widening Security, 2011)

Threats within the state

In the previous example, the state was the referent object and the existential threats were outside forces that threatened the sovereignty of the state. In the case of Christiania, the referent object is still the state however, the threat is internal, being the Danish citizens of Christiania. One of the objectives of securitization theory is to move beyond a state / military definition of security and for this, Ole Wæver's concept of societal security is necessary to understand the processes of securitization taking place between the state of Denmark and the society within Christiania.

the security of a nation will often increase the insecurity of the state - or more precisely if the state has a homogenizing 'national' programme (France), its security will by definition be in conflict with the societal security of national projects of sub-communities inside the state (Corsica). The more Corsicans feel Corsican, the less success for the French project⁸

In other words, the more an intrastate society identity differs from the state sanctioned definition, the more the state's security is threatened. Conversely, the more homogenizing the state's definition of citizen becomes, the more the society's security is threatened. This oppositional relationship exists because states and societies have different definitions of security. Earlier, I defined security for a state as the state's ability to maintain its sovereignty and independence. In the case of societies, security can be defined as the society's ability to maintain its identity. Wæver states, "Sovereignty is the name of the game of survival for a state - if it loses its sovereignty, it has not survived as a state [...] Survival for a society is a question of identity, because this is the way a society talks about existential threats."⁹

Identifying the threat of Christiania

As previously stated, securitization is a speech act where language is used initiate a process where threats are identified and extraordinary measures are justified to protect the state. An examination of the language used to describe Christiania will reveal how it is portrayed as threat to the audience, the Danish public. Due the limited nature of this essay, a thorough discourse analysis is not possible, but examples from news sources as well as quotes from authority figures will be sufficient to illustrate the position of Christiania in relation to Danish society.

Der er et kronisk problem på Christiania. Og det skal man gøre op med ved samme lejlighed som Info-huset. Derfor vil det bedste være at lukke fristaden i sin nuværende

⁸ (Weaver, Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe, 1993 p.26)

⁹ (Weaver, Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe, 1993 p26)

form og lade hele området indgå i en samlet plan,« siger Dansk Folkepartis næstformand Peter Skaarup¹⁰

(translation) There is a chronic problem in Christiania. And it must be dealt with while the Info-house is being dealt with. Therefore the best thing would be to close the freetown in its present form and let the entire area be a part of an overall plan, "says the Danish People's Party vice-chairman Peter Skaarup

'We can no longer tolerate the illegal and open cannabis trade that has become a part of everyday life out there,' said Møller. 'If Christiania is to be allowed to survive, then it has to become as law abiding as every other community in Denmark - and if it doesn't, then we'll close it down.'¹¹

New riots in Christiania; Police clashed with stone-throwing ruffians while residents worked to keep the peace¹²

“There was a violent reaction, so we turned up the power,” Jakobsen added¹³

He [finance minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen] believes that parts of Christiania are dominated by a rocker “sharia-law” that has such “frightening prospects” [...]“I am worried by how much power organised crime has in Christiania¹⁴

“Sharia law”, “stone throwing ruffians”, “there is a chronic problem in Christiania” are all phrases used by the media when discussing Christiania. The words chosen invoke feelings of anxiety and, of course, fear that something is amiss in the community that needs to be rectified immediately lest it fester and spread to other parts of the city. The language used show that residents’ affiliation with Christiania and the identity they share, which rejects the values of integration and homogenization, are threats.

This society within a state openly challenges Danish authority by establishing a separate system of governance, communication, and currency. Furthermore, the long-standing presence of an illegal drug market illustrates a direct refusal to follow the laws of the land residents find undesirable.¹⁵

As the society of Christiania grows and stabilizes, the more it is perceived to threaten the security of Denmark, which justifies the use of extraordinary measures.

¹⁰ (Termansen, 2002)

¹¹ (Cannabis Showdown in Christiania, 2002)

¹² (New Riots in Christiania, 2011)

¹³ (New Riots in Christiania, 2011)

¹⁴ (Fears of Christiania becoming a biker gang haven , 2011)

¹⁵ (Amouroux, 2007)

Extraordinary Measures

Since the beginning, the activists and politicians have enjoyed a relationship that has ranged from hostile to cooperative. Earlier governments tolerated the community and in the early 1970's, the Social Democrats declared Christiania a social experiment. While some measures were suggested to normalize the area, the community was largely left to its own devices. This changed when the Liberal Conservative party came into power and the new government began a more aggressive campaign to bring the area under greater governmental control. The growing influence of the Dansk Folk Party, with a rejection of multi-culturalism and an increasingly narrow definition of "Danish" meant that people of Christiania had to conform and be absorbed into greater society.

The former Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, introduced the Normalization Plan shortly after the election, whose main goal was to destabilize the squatter community and transform the area into a space more in-line with the neighboring upscale area of Christianshavn. Christian Amouroux states, "The Normalization Plan began by identifying three key transgressions that placed Christiania "outside" of society: refusal to pay property and other taxes, selling, and building communal houses and collective businesses on public lands".¹⁶ By labeling the residents outsiders, the ruling party hoped to gain the authority needed to destroy the homes of citizens and the plan included the demolition of several properties and the displacement of the occupying tenants.¹⁷ However, the public reacted negatively to the state's actions and, with the exception of a few houses, structures that were set for demolition remained untouched.

The Danish public did not support the state in its proposed course of action for they did not view Christiania as an immediate threat to their security. The lack of support from the audience meant that securitizing agents were not given permission to pursue more aggressive tactics. This forced a change of course and securitization practices were focused more on Pusher Street while the debate about the larger community moved from the security sphere to the political one.

Extraordinary measures for Pusher Street

Unlike the generally law abiding residents of Christiania, the businessmen of Pusher Street are criminals. Due to the fact that they openly act outside of the law, politization (the use of pre-established rules and laws) is not an option and a large enough segment of the population supported the securitization of Pusher Street in an effort to protect the Danish state.

While an open cannabis market in a country where the drug is illegal is, by its very existence, unusual, this practice has been a part of Christiania's history, thereby making it acceptable for that community.

In the past, police officials allowed residents to settle disputes with little intervention. They were reluctant to enter the area and turned a blind eye to the open drug market.

¹⁶ (Amouroux, 2007 p.6)

¹⁷ (Amouroux, 2007)

Respondents stated that they have experienced difficulty in receiving assistance from police to solve matters that they could not resolve themselves. One person spoke of an incident where the residents identified a heroin dealer that they wanted removed from the area. Calling the police to come and arrest the person proved futile, so they stripped the person naked and forced them out of Christiania and into the streets of Christianshavn. The residents then called the police to file a complaint of indecent exposure, knowing that they would be more responsive.¹⁸

Pusher Street was not part of any formal plan for Christiania. Instead, it developed in response to the growing heroin trade that was adversely affecting the inhabitants. Due to the destructive nature of addiction, heroin was incompatible with the lifestyle many residents hoped to achieve. Because of the police's unwillingness to assist in ridding the area of the drug, residents made a deal with pushers and users. Addicts were forced to either enter treatment or move out. Dealers would be allowed to sell the soft drugs of hash and marijuana if they worked with the community to keep the heroin dealers out of the area. By allowing a cannabis market to flourish, dealers were still able to generate income, while simultaneously helping the residents protect their community.¹⁹

This shows that what is ordinary in Christiania is the absence of a police presence, even in times of distress. Therefore, one can infer that any marked increase in police activity, especially if it is aggressive, in the area would constitute an extraordinary measure.

The change in government in 2001 preceded a change in drug policy in 2003, and the closing of Pusher Street was included in the controversial Normalization Plan put forth by the former prime minister. 2004 saw a drastic increase in the penalties for both selling and possession of small quantities for personal use. In early 2004, dealers burned the makeshift stalls they sold from in a great fire. This was because the residents believed they were under surveillance, and microphones had been placed in the booths to record criminal activity.²⁰ Their fears were realized shortly after and the months of police surveillance culminated when

police raided 'Pusher Street' and arrested 60 dealers and their helpers along with 20 people accused of forming an organized lookout corps. After the initial raid police implemented a zero-tolerance zone in the area and targeted users in a deterrent effort issuing a total of 4834 fines in a year. Maintaining the zero tolerance zone has so far involved 12 big confrontations with the inhabitants of Christiania. 114 police officers have been injured and 29 formal complaints of police conduct have been lodged with the State Attorney.²¹

¹⁸ (respondent 1, 2011)

¹⁹ (respondent 1, 2011), (respondent 2, 2010)

²⁰ (respondent 1, 2011)

²¹ (Kim, 2009)

In addition to the large-scale raid, in which an estimated ten percent of the community's adults were taken into custody, the police employed a strategy that also targeted and punished users as never before. Random police searches were conducted in and around Christiania. Punishment for possession of small amounts of hash changed from a warning to fines that are currently about 2,000kr (270€).

The zero-tolerance policy also included regular police searches and raids, which participants described as an almost daily occurrence. The constant police presence "made everyone paranoid"²² and disrupted the lives of the residents.

Police raids have continued to today and I had the opportunity to witness one unfold in November of 2010. Below are my field notes that I wrote shortly after.

Yesterday, I witnessed a police raid of Christiania. It was crazy!!! My friends were hanging out when we heard "Politi! Politi!" and saw everyone starting to run and scatter. We were sitting on a bench in front of the old hippy bar Woodstock, right off of Pusher Street and were unsure what to do. Someone said that we didn't have anything to fear since the police were only looking for the dealers. I said that I'd rather not stay where we were and test that theory. So we started to walk towards the lake when I saw about 6 HUGE police officers in riot (?) gear walking towards us [...] But they just walked past us as if we didn't exist. We weren't on their radar. We watched as officers lined all the entrances to Pusher Street and pick specific people from the crowd. It was dark and surreal since the fires that line Pusher Street were all extinguished so the only light was the one escaping the walls and doorways of the various bars.

We made our way to the bridge and conversed about the night's events. The whole operation was organized chaos.

In bulletproof vests and carrying large plastic shields, the police of the raid resembled military personnel much more than police officers. They have yet to permanently close Pusher Street, but to the tourist who finds him or herself in middle of such an event, it serves as a strong deterrent to patronize the dealers there. Such a show of force is highly unusual, but is accepted, along with the reduction of personal freedoms, restriction of movement, and most recently, the use of tear gas in the area around Christiania due the danger Pusher Street occupies in the minds of the Danish public.

Better the Devil You Know Than the One You Don't

The immediate result of the raid of 2004 was the disruption of the cannabis market in Christiania and temporary closing of Pusher Street. The residents were forced to choose sides, either stand with the pushers or support the police. This lack of cohesion and reduction of tourist

²² (respondent 2, 2010)

money helped to weaken the society,²³ which, as a threat to the state, is exactly what officials had hoped.

The destabilization however, was neither permanent nor did it result in the complete or even nearly complete eradication of cannabis sales. Instead of stopping the drug trade, the raid and aggressive police action resulted in an increase of violence associated with it as groups moved in to exploit the newly opened market. The market transformed from a centrally located, clearly visible, and highly organized operation to one that was unpredictable, much more dangerous, and diffused throughout the city. This, I argue, is an enactment of the theorem of the accursed share.

Jean Baudrillard defines it thusly,

Any structure that hunts down, expels, or exorcizes its negative elements risks a catastrophe caused by a thoroughgoing backlash, just as any organism that hunts down and eliminates its germs, bacteria, parasites or other biological antagonists risks metastasis and cancer [...] Anything that purges the accursed share in itself signs its own death warrant. This is the theorem of the accursed share²⁴

By destabilizing the market in Christiania, officials caused the cells to travel and establish unstable markets around Copenhagen. One year after the raid, police and politicians admitted that the market for cannabis was still thriving. But turf wars had erupted, often between marginalized immigrant groups and individuals with ties to organized crime, as the two groups fought for greater market share. The years immediately following the closing of Pusher Street were marked by a rapid increase in the illegal use of firearms and violent confrontations.

In 2005, a young man was shot and killed during a dispute police attribute to outsiders attempting to force their way into the destabilized hash market in Christiania.²⁵ In 2006, another person was brutally beaten to death, with friends of the victim confirming that they attempted to sell hash in the area before being chased away by locals.

In the larger Copenhagen area, residents complained of their inability to avoid dealers and the constant harassment they faced in the open market that developed on the streets. Residents from the Kogens Enghave and Nørrebro areas held public meetings to voice their concerns about the toll the new dealers were having on their homes. Dealers sold in areas frequented by young children and most felt unsafe walking in their neighborhoods at night.²⁶

The new dealers outside of Christiania differed from the older ones working within the Freetown, not just in their violent tendencies, but also in that they failed to follow the same code of ethics. The refusal to sell hard drugs has been cited as a source of pride among the pushers of

²³ (Amouroux, 2007)

²⁴ (Baudrillard, 1993)

²⁵ (A 25-year-old man has been arrested for the random , 2005)

²⁶ (Arven efter Pusher Street, 2005)

Christiania. Additionally, pushers refused to sell to minors. A respondent stated that when a young girl who appeared to be about 12 tried to buy from him, he told her would only do so if she brought her parents with her. She returned with both parents the next day and they not only gave their consent, but also became his customers for the next two years. Dealers working outside of Christiania however, did not have the same impetus to be selective and early reports claim that they recruited young children to assist in drug sales.²⁷

Only the strong survived

Increased police interference raised the bar of entry to the lucrative hash market. This meant that only those with sufficient financial and social capital became sellers. Because of the high cost needed to become a seller, dealers are much more willing to resort to violence to protect their investment. Stopping short of curing an organism of an invading bacterium, securitization worked like an inefficient antibiotic by leaving only the most virulent strains. “A major difference between now and then is that the dealing is now controlled by the hardest groups of pushers, who have managed to withstand the regular raids”.²⁸

Respondents who identified as former hash dealers stated that they stopped selling “because it stopped being fun”²⁹. Older residents described the days prior to the raid as laid back and relaxed. “If I had a brick of hash and I needed to make a little money, I could just go down and sell to my friends. Now, it’s not fun”.³⁰ The constant threat of arrest, coupled with higher monetary risks, changed the profile of dealers in the area. The free loving hippies have been replaced by profit driven businessmen.

Conclusion

By using the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the aggressive tactics used to disrupt the illegal hash market of Christiania. The provocative language employed by media outlets and politicians to describe the residents was just one step in a multi-part process to depict the dealers of Pusher Street, along with the residents of the area, as existential threats to the security of Denmark. The audience accepted the rhetoric about the threat of Pusher Street, but not the entire community of Christiania. Therefore, the former ruling party, the Liberal Conservatives, was only permitted to use extraordinary measures on the criminal society of Pusher Street. The extraordinary measures of repeated police raids, random searches, extensive surveillance, and the use of tear gas resulted in a temporary disruption of the cannabis market.

²⁷ (Arven efter Pusher Street, 2005)

²⁸ (Jury still out on government’s hash, 2005)

²⁹ (respondent 3 2010)

³⁰ (respondent 4, 2011)

Total elimination of the market was not achieved. Instead, the destabilization of the highly developed market of Pusher Street resulted in drug centers developing throughout the city of Copenhagen like a cancer, thus enacting the theorem of the accursed share. Now, seven years after the great raid of 2004, Pusher Street is opened, but in an altered form. The older, peace loving hippies have been replaced by a younger generation that is more likely to resort to violence to protect their investment. By these standards and more, the tactics have been largely unsuccessful.

In his book, *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard discusses the tendency many groups have to eliminate all that is considered negative. He argues that what is considered negative is often needed, for their removal would be fatal to the community or organism that attempts to do so. Perhaps legislators and newly elected politicians will heed Baudrillard 's warnings and learn from previous errors when dealing with Pusher Street by devising a plan that keeps the market stable and localized within Christiania. America's 40-year War on Drugs, in addition to its prohibition of alcohol in the 1920's, have shown that banning the use or possession of drugs does not decrease their use in the general population. It does however, increase the associated violence. Sellers will always find a way to supply the demand for mind-altering substances.

As the heroin injection rooms of Germany, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Australia have all demonstrated, providing a safe environment for drug users is much more effective in reducing the societal costs of drug use. In regards to marijuana and hash consumption, the associated dangers mostly stem from sellers fighting for control over markets. The highly organized community of Pusher Street is clear example of a safe drug market, made dangerous when its stability is threatened. I argue that a much more effective strategy for Denmark would be to understand the organization that has developed in response to the increased police action and create social policies that maintain that stability. The alternative, as I have demonstrated, results in an increase of violence and the appearance of more prolific, yet less organized, drug operations all over Copenhagen, and beyond.

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