

**MAPPING THE TRAJECTORIES OF POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY: AN
ECOFEMINIST STUDY OF ADAM PRICE'S DANISH WEB SERIES BORGEN**

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Abstract

Through a study of Adam Price's Danish Web Series Borgen, this paper aims to establish linkages between domination and exploitation of women and the nonhuman world in the context of Denmark and its erstwhile colony Greenland. The impact of colonization can still be seen in the suffering of the indigenous community of Greenland who grapple with a way of life which is distinctly foreign to them. The series speaks to the viewers across the world by bringing to light the highly competitive worlds of politics and media. The sensitive portrayal of women struggling to make their mark in these fields makes it open to feminist interpretation whereas the exploitation of the nonhumans as in the traditional practice of whaling, which continues till date, along with the artificial methods employed in pig farming broadens the scope of interpretation to ecofeminism. The exploration of oil in the Greenland region makes the study all the more contemporary in the given scenario of global oil requirement.

Key words- Ecofeminism, human, nonhuman, power, exploitation

This paper explores the idea of responsibility towards both the human and the nonhuman worlds in conjunction with power vis a vis Borgen, a contemporary Danish web series. The series examines the complexities of life in the context of women who dare to dream. Such women find themselves at the pinnacle of success, their efforts bolstered by that of their friends and family. However, once the pinnacle is reached the harrowing journey of the political life begins compounded by the game of numbers of the parliament and other pressing issues both political and personal in nature. These women however, refuse to compromise on their ideals and bear their roles. One such woman that the paper focuses on is the Prime Minister of Denmark, Birgette Nyborg, as represented in the series.

In the event of the power wielding authority being a male familial support is easily forthcoming as the conventional role of women relegates them the background, confined to the home and hearth, doing the best they can do in order to augment the wellbeing of their hardworking spouse and the family.

In case of women, the scenario becomes oddly different, with the power equation inverted, the journey for the woman is uphill. Heavily dependent on her family, particularly her spouse, a woman is rendered powerless when the support system crumbles and the delicate balance between the personal and the political is tipped in favour of the personal. Though she refuses to accept defeat, taking on more responsibilities than most, administering justice true to her nature, as does the central figure of the series Borgen, Birgitte Nyborg, her journey is arduous, and raises pertinent questions regarding societal and familial expectations from women.

Ecofeminism

As per Encyclopedia Britannica, in 1974 the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term Ecofeminism with reference to the branch of feminism that engages with the connections between women and nature, utilizing the principles of feminism, espousing equality between genders, in favour of 'non-patriarchal and nonlinear societal structures with a world view that respects organic processes and holistic connections.' The philosophy drawing further value from the 'spirit of commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature and the treatment that they receive at the hands of the patriarchal social set up.' The Ecofeminists particularly help examine 'the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature'. This initiative is taken with a view to contend that these norms 'lead to an incomplete view of the world' with its practitioners advocating 'an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity's dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable.' (Miles 2015) Ecofeminists contend that the social arrangement results in a hierarchical structure that grants power to men and allows for the exploitation of women and nature, particularly insofar as the two are associated with one another. Thus, early ecofeminists determined that solving the predicament of either constituency would require undoing the social status of both. The practitioners of ecofeminism being 'sensitive to the sources of power in culture, language, and history' seek 'to intervene constructively in formations of domination with a view to promoting egalitarianism.' They subscribe to the common belief that the oppression of women and ecological degradation are connected as they 'both arise within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination' (Ruether 1975 qtd. by Carlassare). Although environmental issues have been addressed by philosophers since Ancient Greece, Western environmental philosophies did not take shape until the early 1970s, Karen Warren points out the alarming empirical data that has surfaced concerning human mistreatment of nonhuman animals as in factory farming, harming nature through clear-cutting old growth forests, and destructive human-nature relationships (Warren 2015) The modern ecofeminist movement also examines ways in which feminism and environmentalism could be combined

to promote respect for women and the natural world given that the notion there was a long historical precedent of associating women with nature that had led to the oppression of both with women and nature often depicted as chaotic, irrational, and in need of control, while men were frequently characterized as rational, ordered, and thus capable of directing the use and development of women and nature. (Miles 2025).

The Context- Borgen

Borgen refers to the Christianborg castle in the capital of Denmark Copenhagen, it means 'the Castle'. Borgen has been seen as the seat of power for more than eight centuries and houses the Danish parliament, the King and the Prime minister's office. The imposing structure exudes power. The web series derives its name from this castle as the series is political in nature and shows the rise of the woman politician Birgitte Nyborg Christensen, a happy wife and a mother of two to that of the first female Prime Minister of Denmark. Written by Adam Price the series ran successfully for three seasons from 2010 to 2013. It made a comeback again in 2022. The series not only provides a crucial insight into the war torn turf of domestic and international politics but the aggressive nature of media as well fraught with deadlines and other challenges along with that of civil servants. In the latest season Birgitte Nyborg returns as the Foreign Minister in a new coalition and is seen as launching a party of her own when she is not accepted by the leader of her previous party having taken a hiatus from politics for a time.

Dismantling the Male Bastion- Power and Prejudice

As Birgitte Nyborg becomes the Prime Minister she is confronted with a demanding professional arena. She juggles between political issues and is able to give little time to her family. Her husband, Philip Christensen is unable to bear the pressures of managing the family and seeks a way out with great urgency. Emotionally moored to her family and her spouse, Birgitte is unwilling for a divorce but has to bow down to the relentless pressure.

As the family breaks apart, the children bear the brunt of separation with the eldest child, a daughter, Laura finding herself unable to deal with the unexpected developments. In the given scenario Laura suffers from panic attacks and requires medical help. Having brought the political machinery of the state to smooth functioning and conscious to the needs of her family, particularly her daughter, Laura, Birgitte takes leave from her work to fulfill her responsibility as a mother.

The commitment shown by a woman prime minister towards her familial responsibility raises sensitive questions regarding gender roles, prejudice and discrimination from the opposition regarding women holding crucial posts as that of the Prime Minister. Characteristically, Birgitte fields the question wisely, however laying bare the Patriarchal assumptions regarding the supposed inferiority and compromised position of women given their role as a nurturer. It would also be pertinent to note that the efforts of the PM in order to provide better

representation to women in industrial set ups comes across much resistance as women are not seen as up to the role and the PM is threatened by the largest stakeholder in the country that he would take his business elsewhere rather than give in to such policies issued by the government revealing the deep seated prejudice against women. Men are seen as naturally capable and superior to women for holding key positions whether it be business or government roles wielding power and authority.

Borgen can thus, be seen as providing a parallel to the ideas of radical ecofeminists who bring to light the prejudice against women in patriarchal societies contending that such a society equates nature and women in order to degrade both, 'associating them with negative or commodifiable attributes while men have been seen as capable of establishing order' (Miles 2025). M. Mellor drives home a point while citing patriarchal system that the system of predominantly male ownership of the means and forces of production leads to a male-biased allocation and distribution of a society's economic resources systematically putting women to a disadvantage economically and exploiting nature (Mellor vis a vis Warren 2015).

Mapping Responsibilities

With the hospitalization of Jeremy Welsh following dinner with Birgitte, and his allergy to penicillin, Borgen also brings to light the artificial methods employed in the farming of pigs in order to deal with the rising demand for pork. It establishes that such practices victimize both the humans and the nonhumans¹, the consumers of pig meat and the pigs, thereby addressing the use of antibiotics to grow animals for human consumption. Studies indicate that in the US alone there are at least seventeen classes of antimicrobials that have been , approved for farm animal growth; these include many families of antibiotics which are critical for treating human disease as penicillin, tetracycline, and erythromycin. Their impact on human health is of the bacteria becoming more resistant to antibiotics. Also, the resistant genes that emerge in the antibiotic treated poultry and animals can also be swapped between bacteria (An HSUS Report: Human Health Implications of Non-Therapeutic Antibiotic Use in Animal Agriculture). That those involved in pig farming choose to consume organically grown pigs rather than their factory counterparts also adds to the idea of the farmers being conscious of the risk and hazards of unauthorized use of antibiotics who close their eyes to the issue as it would impact their business. The series also shows high profile people as owners of these farms. Analysing the stance of the ecofeminists towards nonhumans being farmed in factories as food Marti Kheel's, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Noël Sturgeon observes:

Kheel connects these holistic abstractions to various problems: an incorporation of feminized beings into a universal masculine Self; a master narrative in which a masculinist self is constructed through killing animals and conquering nature; and the consistent

devaluation of animals, particularly domesticated and “meat” animals, rather than an approach which apprehends animals as individual beings with their own rights, desires, and independent existences. She argues that ecocentric philosophies have in common “the idea that maturity consists in transcending the biological realm through the construction of a transcendent identity” (4), and points out that sexism and the devaluation of other-than-human animals are closely intertwined with this central idea, relying as it does upon masculinist constructions of rationality, universality and autonomy that are counterposed to feminized emotion, embodiment, particularity, and relationality.

Birgitte emerges as a conscientious PM effectively dealing with the matter by rooting for stringent and timely inspections of the farms. In the article “Antibiotic use in swine production” Casey Zangaro observes that when using feed-grade antibiotics additional value was attached performance benefits which reduced wasted nutrients, overall farm waste and farm labor requirements. However, with the consumers becoming more informed and concerned about the quality of food products reaching their table, an increased interest in on-farm antibiotic usage and its potential secondary effects on human health led the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to conduct investigations in 2017 for the evaluation of the potential risk of antibiotic residues and antibiotic resistance. Based on their findings, new regulations eliminated over-the-counter status for in-feed and required additional veterinary oversight for on-farm applications by requiring a Veterinary Feed Directive for in-feed or in-water applications of those antibiotics. This preventive measure led to a decline of forty three percent in the sales of medically necessary antibiotics in 2017 as compared to 2015.

Oil Extraction, Whaling and Suicides in Greenland

The fourth season of Borgen particularly concentrates on oil extraction, suicide rates and school drop outs in Greenland. Greenland is a constituent of the Kingdom of Denmark though with the Home Rule Act in 1979 and Self Rule Act in 2009 it was given the legislative and executive power to manage all natural resources of the region. Although Greenland left the European Union in 1985 to secure the access and management of its fish stock, it remains heavily dependent on Denmark economically (Long & Jones 2021). Seismic studies were conducted in 1970s here as it was widely believed that Greenland had petroleum resources in the waters surrounding the island. The exploration was also spurred by the sudden hike in oil prices in the early 1970s and various oil companies were provided with leases. Though drilling took place in the years 1976 and 1977 all the five wells bored were found to be dry. Another effort was made in 2000 which led to the same result. (Østhagen 2012)

Around 90% of the population of Greenland comprises of are Greenlandic Inuits. Their culture is rooted in nature, community, interdependence, and tradition, however, the colonial past has led to drastic societal changes as the Inuits have not been able to adjust to the cultural changes thrust on them. Lack of progress has added to the grim scenario.

As per studies even as Denmark provides roughly €500 million in subsidies, covering half of Greenland's entire budget the industry's revenues are insufficient to sustain Greenland's government. Greenlanders receive free healthcare, free education and security under Denmark's defense umbrella. As Greenlanders attempt to deal with the colonial past the journey has been arduous. Forced resettlements took a toll on the traditional Inuit lifestyles. Families accustomed to hunting seals close to their homes were relocated to prefabricated apartment complexes. As adaptation was difficult the fishery dependent community chose to carry heavy sea animals to their apartment for butchering rather than giving up their way of life. The cultural clash between the modernized parts of Greenland with that of others was glaring, so were the long-term effects of this displacement. The fall out of colonization and partial modernization translated to high suicide rate including high school dropout rates, alcohol abuse and domestic violence(Wenger 2025).In 2023, suicide accounted for 7.4% of all deaths in Greenland, and the territory consistently ranks among the highest for suicide rates worldwide. (The Lancet Regional Health – Europe) Borgen shows a suicide point from where the citizens prefer to jump off rather than be a burden on the family if they are unable to provide for it or make any kind of meaningful contribution.Carolyn Merchant's observation in *The Death of Nature* as noted by Greta Gaard is pertinent here as it underscores scientific logic and economics as the driving force behind the domination of indigenous people, women and nature, 'With her intersectional linkage of racism, speciesism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, and the mechanistic model of science-nature via the historical co-occurrence of the racist and colonialist "voyages of discovery" that resulted in appropriating indigenous peoples, animals, and land' (Gaard 28).

A striking visual of the fishing and the subsequent cutting up of a whale by many people with piles of meat stacked up on snow also draws attention to the killing of whales in Greenland considering many varieties of whales are endangered species. The episode problematizes the issue of Makah Whaling. Makah are the indigenous tribe of Greenland which have borne the brunt of colonization. Due to colonization, they believe, they have been robbed of their cultural practices and have been forced to live a way of life that is distinctly not theirs. They attribute the low esteem, alcoholism and despair that has come to characterize their people as an outfall of severance from their traditional way of existence which included fishing seals and whales among others. The issue has become contentious due to the endangering of the gray whales. Defending the rights of the nonhumans in this context Greta Gaard observes:

In sum, then, an ecofeminist perspective on the ethical content of the Makah whale hunt reveals this proposal as one that advances the dominant perspective of a marginalized culture at the expense of certain women (the dissenting Makah elders) and animals (the gray whales). Just as some white feminists have focused on their own gender oppression and thereby overlooked their racial privilege and their role as

oppressors, so too have some native people focused on their racial and cultural oppression and thereby overlooked their potential role as oppressors of other humans and animals. (17)

A report of the Animal Welfare Institute cites that in the 64th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), Denmark—on behalf of its territory, Greenland—sought to renew and increase the existing aboriginal subsistence whaling quota for Greenland natives. ‘The quota request was submitted under an IWC exemption that allows the hunting of large whales to satisfy indigenous peoples’ subsistence and cultural needs. In response, many countries raised concerns about the extensive commercial use of whale meat in Greenland, as well as its poor compliance with IWC regulations.’ When despite these concerns, Denmark and Greenland refused to compromise the entire request was voted down with Greenland’s whaling quotas expiring when 2012 came to a close.’ The report also makes a point that in order to deal with such situations the IWC rules contain a procedure wherein a country can call for a special meeting or request a postal ballot to revisit the quota rejection rather than opting for self-allocation which would amount to pirate whaling. (AWI Quarterly Archive / Winter 2013).

As the Finance Minister of Denmark Birgitte Nyborg exercises her power to negotiate a deal that would not allow oil extraction in Greenland at the cost of marine life, she strikes a balance for survival of the humans and nonhumans, various countries of the world claiming their stake for the rich natural resource while finding for herself a future career without compromising on her ideals, morals and responsibilities.

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