

# Feminist frustrations and covert colonialism in the Danish Commonwealth

## Encountering feminist tools for Greenlandic decolonisation

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Thank you, Julie Edel Hardenberg, for opening my eyes, awakening my senses and for teaching me to trust my idealistic instincts. Thank you, Sharmila Parmanand for being my mentor and for telling me to listen to my feminist frustration as a modus for change.

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the utility of a postcolonial feminist lens in understanding the multi-fold imperial relationships between Denmark and Greenland. While feminist scholars have increasingly applied a gendered lens to colonial relationships elsewhere (e.g. Ajayi 1997, Mohanty 2003, Hai 2000), the Danish-Greenlandic relationship has been largely overlooked from feminist points of view. Drawing on critical feminist scholarship on power, emotions and radical change, I seek to show the importance of engaging with feminism, also in times of heated geopolitics where such inquiries are often ignored. The paper insists that applying a radically different research lens may pave the way for new voices, perspectives and solutions. This has ramifications for the academy and, crucially, for public policy which remains trapped in Hobbesian logics of fear and Machiavellian obsessions with power, control and possession. The paper encourages a fundamental reorientation of the research and policy on Greenland and offers new ways of conducting research inquiries for researchers as well as policymakers.

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## Setting the frame

“GPS for a new path”

Josef Tarrak Petrussen, Qimiinnarl (2019)

In Tarrak’s famous song Qimiinnarl, he calls for a new path. For a new way forward. For new solutions to the many forms of inequality in Greenland. While my purpose is slightly different, the essence remains similar, namely that of shedding light on unspoken realities and truths and finding a new way forward. Indeed, Tarrak must be credited with providing me with the inspiration for such an undertaking. His music and presence, which I experienced through an in-depth interview in 2019, helped me embark on the path of grasping the importance of finding the new path he is singing about. Correspondingly, the line “GPS for a new path” encapsulates accurately what this paper is trying to do. Namely, calling for and suggesting new ways forward for research on Greenland which remains trapped in Dano-centrism, imperial logics and western-centric dogmas (Jensen 2015).

Tarrak’s music reveals many ways in which Danish colonialism shapes Greenland. Nevertheless, conventional political scientists tend to ignore dynamics outside the formal political sphere and thus seem trapped in their own logics by only focusing on what they conceive of as the only politics available. This article seeks to resolve this trap by defending the engagement with radical feminist epistemologies in decolonising practices in the Danish Commonwealth. The article also seeks to fill a gap in the Danish academy, namely that of combining two underexplored methodologies in the Danish context; feminism and postcolonialism.

The feminist frustrations which led to this article took point of departure in fieldwork for my BA thesis conducted at University of Cambridge. Undertaking participant observation in Nuuk, I seemed to stumble across various dynamics, issues and challenges which conventional political science struggles to explain. This involved forms of everyday politics which expressed itself outside of the formal political sphere. Low politics. Every-day politics. Personal politics. Emotional politics. Graffiti on the accommodation blocks in Nuuk from the height of Danish “modernisation”. The label on the back of the Greenlandic beer Qajaq. A gathering of Danish entrepreneurs at a birthday party. A lunch break with students at Ilisimatusarfik. All these examples and occasions are, at large, deemed

uninteresting in more orthodox and normativised inquiries in political science. Nevertheless, they all capture various forms of politics which are important for understanding the current status of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. A relationship that not only expresses itself through formal political institutions but, crucially, also through micro-politics in the everyday. These insights, which were furthered in interviews with Greenlandic activists<sup>2</sup>, directed me towards postcolonial feminist methodologies. In doing so, I found that little was written on feminist epistemologies in Greenland. This forced me to take inspiration from postcolonial feminist inquiries elsewhere. Taking particular inspiration from radical, intersectional anti-colonial feminists such as Audre Lorde and Sara Ahmed, I constructed an anti-colonial feminist methodology to conduct and frame my fieldwork for the thesis. In this process, I stumbled across many ways in which feminist epistemologies may fill in the shortcomings of conventional political science in decolonising practices. These are the foundations and feminist frustrations that have driven me to the purpose of this article. Namely, of expanding the methodology of my BA to a wider argument for the necessity and applicability of feminist epistemologies to research in Greenland.

Since political science remains critical of the role of alternative epistemologies, this paper is a systematic defence for anti-colonial feminist methodologies in the academy as well specifically in the context of research on Greenland. While the paper makes use of ethnographic material in the shape of quotes from my research, it is mainly a theoretical contribution to the existing research on Greenland. It is a theoretical critique of hegemonic and colonial practices in the academy and a proposition for an alternative methodology in its place. The focus of my critique is primarily the discipline of political science since the discipline is closely tied to the mechanics of Danish colonialism. Indeed, the discipline's involvement with Danish politics on Greenland makes it apt to engage with its shortcomings and inherent problems. Nevertheless, I hope that the arguments and insights will inspire decolonial feminist practices beyond the narrow disciplinary boundaries of political science. Indeed, as Olufemi (2021) argues, anti-colonial feminism is not only a theoretical framework, it is a practice and a lifestyle. Thus, I hope the insights and ideas in this article will inspire more radical research agendas in Greenland beyond political science.

I will make use of various quotes from my interlocutors. A special thanks is extended to Julie Hardenberg and Josef Tarrak Petrussen who in various ways provided me with extensive

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<sup>2</sup> Important to note that the term "activist" is contested in the Greenlandic context. For analytical purposes I make use of the label here.

ethnographic material for my BA dissertation which they both had a chance to read and amend before it was finalised. Their work, activism and critique inspire this work too and I am forever grateful for the many ways in which they illuminated the shortcomings of conventional political science epistemologies and helped me realise the importance of radically challenging research methodologies in the Danish political science academy.

### **Overview of the paper**

The first section reflects on the lack of feminist literature in the Danish political science academy and argues for the importance of breaking this silence by engaging with feminist epistemologies. The second section discusses the shortcomings of feminist epistemologies and argues for the importance of broadening the hegemonic understanding of “gender studies” in order to apply its tools to more broadly conceived areas within political science. The section also reflects critically upon the colonial legacies within traditional gender studies and argues for the importance of an anti-colonial feminist lens to make adequate use of feminist tools in decolonising practices. The third section argues for the benefits of applying an anti-colonial feminist lens to understanding dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth. It does so by showing the limits of existing traditional political science research and suggests ways in which feminist epistemologies may overcome these. The final section presents killjoy research as a tool to ensure anti-colonial research practices in Greenland. This involves using one’s privilege and positionality as a researcher to actively engage in unsettling silences and disturbing colonial hegemonies. Finally, the article concludes by encouraging more radical research that draws inspiration from anti-colonial feminist epistemologies.

### **A note on the terminology**

I make use of the term colonial rather than postcolonial since Greenland continues to be colonised in various ways. The postcolonial label is often used without noting or acknowledging the many ways in which Greenland continues to be colonised by Denmark (Jensen 2016b, Graugaard 2013). This produces distorted and flawed understandings in research as it contributes to upholding the fallacy that Greenland is not a colony but a postcolony. Nevertheless, as many scholars have pointed out, the trajectory of Greenland from colony of the Danish Empire to part of the Danish Kingdom has many overt as well as covert colonial aspects (Andersen, Jensen and Hvenegård 2016). Additionally, though Greenland attained Self-Government in 2009, Denmark maintains the ultimate sovereignty (Jensen 2016b). This makes the Greenlandic trajectory remarkably different from countries that are otherwise described as “postcolonial” in the Global South (Jensen 2014). Thus, to avoid confusion about Greenland’s status, I make use of “colony”, “colonised” and “colonial” to describe dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth. This is also why I make use of the term “anti-colonial” rather than “postcolonial” to describe the desired theoretical approach to dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth. Finally, I use the term “the Danish Commonwealth” rather than the “Danish Realm” to foreground the colonial continuities at play. This is following my Greenlandic interlocutors who criticised the use of “the Danish Realm”, *Rigsfællesskabet*, as it mistakenly connotes a sense of mutual equality and community in the Danish Kingdom. Following insights from the anti-colonial feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2004), words matter because they “stick”. This means that it is of utmost importance to carefully choose appropriate discourse to realise research that counters rather than reproduces colonial dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth.

### **A note on Politics and IR**

This article dedicates itself to a critique of many of the major orthodoxies in the disciplines of political science and International Relations (IR). While political science and IR historically have been conceived of as different fields of inquiry, many of the western- and state-centric logics in IR build on similar assumptions in political science. Additionally, many of the canonical texts and concepts in IR, such as Hobbes, Machiavelli and Kant’s liberal peace thesis, were taken from the study of national political domains and brought into the international sphere. Likewise, more recently, concepts and theories referring to international politics are imposed on national politics. This involves looking at

the locality of international phenomena (Sylvester 2011b). This makes it difficult and ambiguous to properly distinguish between political science and IR. This ambiguity is furthered by postcolonial and feminist scholars who criticise the local-global, national-international binaries and call for research that moves beyond the disciplinary blindfolds (Tickner 2006). Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I will make use of the term “political science” as an overarching term that covers political science as well as IR.

### **The fairy tales of Danish gender equality**

“There is no gender inequality in Denmark, only free women and their free choices”

Philosopher Rune Selsing (2021)

Approaching my fieldwork with an open mind, I had not in my wildest fantasy imagined that a feminist method would come to direct, frame and guide my research. As a white, middle-class, Danish woman, brought up in the medium-sized provincial town Herning in the middle of the neoliberal stronghold of Central Jutland, I had always been told that feminism was passé. That feminists had achieved what they wanted and more. Indeed, I did not even consider myself a feminist until long after coming of age. By contrast, I was brought up and believed to be somewhat of an anti-feminist because feminist issues seemed to be non-issues in the Danish world I was brought into. This is well-captured by Dahlerup (2018) who describes how the issue of gender equality has become “a closed case” in Denmark. She argues that the Danish self-understanding of having achieved gender equality has constructed the illusion that feminist questions are non-issues and that feminism is outdated and irrelevant. It was in this anti-feminist reality that I was brought up. In Herning, the neoliberal success story of industrialism, embodying the Danish dream as the liberal fabric of social life, I believed that, as a woman, I was the only one responsible for my happiness and success.

This seems to be a reality and understanding shared by the wider public as well as academics and philosophers. Selsing’s (2021) quote certainly epitomises that I was not the only one believing that feminism had outrun its purpose. As a right-wing philosopher, Selsing represents a segment of Danish society which is strongly anti-feminist. Nevertheless, numerous studies suggest that this attitude resides beyond conservative groupings in Denmark and shapes the wider public opinion. Indeed, it seems that there is a widespread tendency to discredit feminism and issues related to gender in

Denmark. This is well-captured by Orange and Duncan's (2019) survey of feminism in Denmark. Discussing various anti-feminist traits in the Danish public, they describe Denmark as the "least feminist nation in the world" and highlight that even the Minister of Equality at the time, Karen Elleman, did not consider herself a feminist. Indeed, feminism seems to have hit a wall in the Danish Kingdom.

Moreover, this non-feminist tendency in the public seems to be connected to a general disengagement with gender and feminist issues in the Danish Academy (Nielsen 2016). This is well-captured by Blaagaard and Andreassen (2012) who argue that there are many ways in which gendered issues are overlooked by mainstream scholarship. Under the mantle of Scandinavian equality and exceptionalism, Denmark has long prided itself on its elaborate equality principles (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2021). It seems that these narratives of exceptionalism continue to mantle over stark gendered inequalities and prevent scholars and private actors alike from utilising feminism in enacting change.

Nevertheless, it seems that the tide is turning. While Denmark was one of the countries in Europe that had the lowest approval rate for the #metoo movement, it seems that the country has begun to engage with gendered issues and feminism following Sofie Linde's #metoo speech at the Zulu Comedy Galla in 2020 (Ellerman and Pedersen 2019). Narrating her own experience of sexual harassment in the Danish Broadcasting Service, Linde's speech spurred an intense debate around sexual harassment, gender inequality and sexism. While Denmark managed to avoid the first #metoo wave in 2017, it seems that Denmark finally caught the tide in 2020. For the context of this article, it seems the Danish public and academy are finally engaging with feminism<sup>3</sup>.

This places this article at a convenient time, contributing to a long-overdue engagement with feminist inquiries. The necessity of countering the Danish rejection of feminist issues and methodologies became acutely apparent when I saw Julie Hardenberg's iconic work "Enough". Her work captures many levels of colonial dynamics which the academy seems unable to express. Indeed, the image of a Greenlandic girl straitjacketed by the Danish flag seems to show the many ways in which Danish colonialism is a deeply personal and emotional experience. Feminist methodologies have historically had a tradition of attending to such workings of power and politics. After seeing Julie's work, I could

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<sup>3</sup> See Mogensen and Rand (2020) for an analysis of misogyny in the Nordic countries.

not un-see the need for feminist epistemologies in understanding Danish colonialism in Greenland. The experience made me a radical feminist researcher with an anti-colonial research agenda.

### **Reflections on the shortcomings within feminist epistemologies**

“In one sense, gender is a socially imposed and internalized lens through which individuals perceive and respond to the world. In a second sense, the pervasiveness of gendered meanings shapes concepts, practice and institutions in identifiable gendered ways”

(Spike V. Peterson 1992;194).

This section seeks to situate my methodology in the wider field of gender studies. A field in which there is a widespread tendency to conceptualise the study of gender as the study of “women’s issues”. This is a tendency that also pertains to feminist engagement with the Arctic. An engagement that is both sparse and has tended to focus on more traditional feminist pursuits. An example of this type of work is Arnfred and Pedersen’s (2015) exploration of gender dynamics in the intersection of colonial and pre-colonial gender conceptions in Greenland. This research is an invaluable contribution towards understanding the different ways in which the Danish colonial administration made use of gender and sexuality to control and dominate the Greenlandic population. However, it is, as Anderson (1995) argues, also important to question the hegemonic understanding of feminism. In turn, Anderson (1995) suggests that we move beyond the predominant understanding of feminist epistemology as “feminine ways of knowing” in order to unleash the potential of feminist epistemology to pose deep internal critique in all kinds of mainstream research across a range of disciplines.

Such an approach draws its inspiration from Butler’s (1989) work on gender as a discourse and follows Peterson’s (1992) definition of gender. It insists that gender is not fixed nor in nexus with sexuality. Rather, it is a fluid performance that shapes our thinking, conduct as well as our politics, institutions and systems of thought. It does not look at bodies as gendered but rather at how the gendered body comes about<sup>4</sup>. In political science, such an approach is particularly helpful as it encourages us to ask radically different questions to known and unknown dilemmas. It insists on an intricate connection between the micro- and macropolitical and forces us to consider the many ways

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<sup>4</sup> See also Beauvoir’s reflections on becoming a woman (1949).



in which we ourselves operate and engage with dynamics of power. This is particularly helpful when working in fields distorted by power imbalances, epistemic injustices and inequalities as it forces the researcher to consider their own position in producing, reproducing and challenging these. This, in turn, creates an impetus on the researcher to be transparent with their process, agenda and conduct as well as to acknowledge and critically reflect upon their positionality in the field. This is particularly pertinent in the Greenlandic context where research continues to be dominated by colonial dynamics, imperial blindfolds and Dano-centrism (Jensen 2015).

This establishes the importance of operating with anti-colonial feminism when applying feminist epistemologies in the Nordic context. This point is cemented by Kuokannen (2015) who argues that the failure to decolonise Nordic feminisms and to include indigenous perspectives, perpetuates colonial realities. Accordingly, Kuokannen (2015) translates Mohanty's (1988) call for decolonising white feminism to the Nordic context. In her now classical essay "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty (1988) argues that a "failure to critique the US empire allows feminist projects to be used and mobilized as handmaidens in the imperial project." This is highly necessary in the Danish context (Jensen 2010). What is also necessary for the Danish context is Mohanty's (2003) call for transnational feminism beyond western typologies, biases and epistemologies to move beyond the white liberal legacy of feminism. Mohanty (2003) established that feminism has a place in anti- and postcolonial settings, yet insisted on the importance of ongoing reflexivity and decolonisation as cornerstones in feminist epistemology. Thus, following Mohanty (2003) and Kuokannen (2015) in the Nordic context, it is crucial that feminist inquiries are reflexive upon their own participation in colonial structures, systemic biases and western-centric typologies. This involves an explicit engagement with positionality and firmly establishes that feminist inquiries on Greenland must disregard the white, colonial legacies of western feminism and instead take point of departure in anti-colonial feminism. This, in turn, ensures that the researchers themselves do not unacknowledgingly take part in colonial processes and allows non-western traditions of feminism to shape the research agenda.

Finally, it is apt to elaborate on how feminist epistemologies may provide acute insights into questions of Danish colonialism in Greenland. This is not only because anti-colonial feminism and postcolonialism are in natural affinity (Spivak 1988). It is also not only because feminist epistemologies can offer new insight into the workings and effects of Danish colonialism. It is particularly important because there are many ways in which the disengagement with feminist

epistemologies and questions are interrelated with what Loftsdóttir and Jensen (2012) call Danish denialism on racism, colonialism and structural violence. Indeed, as Leine, Hvenegaard and Sen (2019: 181) argue, the nationalist myth of gender equality and Danish gender exceptionalism generates “racist, reactionary and suppressive ideologies on violence, racial discrimination and social inequality.” To be sure, this means that the continued disengagement with feminist epistemologies risks upholding racialised and colonial hierarchies of power. This makes it both timely, relevant and apt to engage with feminist epistemologies in dismantling Danish colonial amnesia and denialism.

### **A case for feminist epistemologies in anti-colonial research on Greenland**

“Many Danes just don’t listen”

Julie Hardenberg (interview 2019)

In Enloe’s (2004) elaborate work on feminist epistemologies in political science, she describes how the discipline seems to fall short of a key skill, namely that of listening. Working with military wives and women involved in warfare in all ways imaginable, she demonstrates how asking different questions and applying a radical politics of listening may help provide novel understandings as well as new answers to longstanding dilemmas in political science. Particularly, the question of listening seems to be deeply rooted in the Danish Commonwealth as well captured by Julie Hardenberg. I heard her experience repeated again and again during my fieldwork in Nuuk. It seems that Danes and Danish researchers are particularly poor at attending to Greenlandic experiences, realities and views. In describing the many ways in which certain truths are heard above those of others, Hardenberg illuminates a key problem in western-centric research, particularly apparent in colonial contexts. Indeed, the biases, the imperial blindfolds and colonial logics in conventional political science seem to cover rather than uncover colonial realities. This is well captured by critical postcolonial scholars such as Stepan’s (2002) work on the state and it calls for the importance of applying radically different research tools in order to ensure decolonial research practices.

Postcolonial feminists have a long tradition of ensuring radical decolonising research practices and moving beyond the colonial biases in orthodox research. However, political science remains critical of the role of feminist as well as postcolonial epistemologies in understanding and uncovering dynamics in the field. This may be one of two important reasons why the Danish academy has not

engaged elaborately with gendered discourses in colonial practices in the Danish Commonwealth. The other may be tied to the many ways in which radical feminist research tools are often perceived to present a threat to the status quo and are thus perceived to be a “dangerous” undertaking at times of power politics (Elshtain 1993). Research in the Danish Commonwealth seems to suffer from a similar androcentric bias. It seems that the “Scramble for the Arctic” has generated a lot of traditional geopolitical research that fails to acknowledge its own participation in the production of this very scramble<sup>5</sup>. The problematic nature of such theoretical pursuits is well-captured by Tickner (2006) who carefully describes how the academy perpetuates and reproduces masculinised practices by applying its androcentric premises and by failing to engage with feminist epistemologies. This makes it vital to disengage with traditional lenses and instead urge researchers to engage with what is framed as “softer” forms of inquiry that attend to gendered narratives and feminist epistemologies.

A feminist approach to political science challenges the presumed “neutrality” and the myth of “objective expertise” (Gregg 1987). With a feminist point of departure, the myth of objectivity is substituted with a detailed and nuanced look at the process through which the research comes about. This means that the exploration of the position of the researcher versus that of their research field and practice becomes an important piece of material in itself (Vanner 2019). This turns the traditional understanding of a researcher on its head as it insists that the researcher inevitably engages with power dynamics in their research. This diverts considerably from traditional politics epistemologies that implicitly presume the possibility of an objective spectator distanced and disengaged from their research field (Gregg 1987). While such presumption is misleading in all research, it is particularly problematic when operating in colonial contexts since it fails to acknowledge power imbalances and thus tends to reproduce the asymmetrical status quo (Spivak 1988). By contrast, a feminist approach acknowledges that the eyes through which the research field is perceived, frame the research outcomes. This is an important first step to ensuring reflexive research practices on Greenland that refuse to accept and reproduce the status quo. Indeed, as Butler (2011:42) argues, “to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination.” This is particularly pertinent in the Danish Commonwealth where the majority of research on Greenland continues to be carried out by white Danes.

Additionally, framing the researcher in an entirely different light, a feminist approach enables researchers to engage with different epistemologies (Ackerly 2006). Political science has an

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<sup>5</sup> See Sale and Potapov (2010), Jensen and Huggan (2016)

overwhelming tendency to rely on top-down epistemologies which tends to superimpose pre-existing notions of politics and fails to attend to diversified realities, complex dynamics and micro-politics (Sylvester 2013, Tickner 2001). To counter the limitations of top-down epistemologies, feminists have made important endeavours to incorporate more bottom-up epistemologies in politics and IR. Such example is Enloe's (1983, 1990, 1992, 1993) work on feminist IR which shows the importance of attending to non-conformist actors in IR. Making a powerful case for feminist ethnography in IR, she shows how bottom-up methodologies may provide insights into alternative logics and systems of thought. Presenting the figure of the "curious feminist", Enloe (2004) also provides the field with concrete tools to carry out holistic, attentive feminist ethnographic work. She argues that being a curious feminist researcher combined with "a politics of listening" may uncover hidden dynamics and provide novel insights into long-standing dilemmas and conflicts. This may be helpful in the Greenlandic context where a feminist insistence on qualitative methods, empathy-driven methodologies and interdisciplinary research tools may alter orthodoxies and pave the way for more nuanced and heterodox research.

Moving away from the disciplinary blindfolds and the narrow methodological repertoire in political science, a feminist approach helps move beyond and below the dogmatic building blocks that the field tends to be excessively obsessed with (Peterson 2004). Such example is the study of the state, its institutions and processes. Although the nation-state is a relatively recent construction (Gellner 1964), state-centrism dominates the study and practice of politics. This approach leads to a number of issues that also prevails in the study of politics and power in Greenland. State-centrism often fails to appreciate how the state itself is deeply embedded in and involved with colonial dynamics and ignores the complex workings of power and politics taking place outside the realm of the state (Stepan 2002). This means that researchers have a tendency to overlook more diffuse and disorganised workings of power and resistance (True 1996: 239-60). Movements which are often both influential and powerful in changing the structures and dynamics of societies. Indeed, the state-centric blindfolds that too many political scientists continue to use, tend to create distorted perceptions of a reality that is often much more complex, diverse and dynamic than traditional state-centric analysis allows for (Peterson 2004). In order to conceptualise the complexity of Greenlandic power and politics, it is important to move both beyond and below this recurrent insistence on state-centrism in political analysis.

In turn, moving beyond state-centrism allows for a more holistic research agenda that challenges the essentialism, binarism and tendency to describe social phenomena as static (Peterson 1992). A feminist approach acknowledges that social processes are always in flux and may be helpful in conceptualising the many different imperial processes at play in Greenland. It may allow the researcher to investigate the many ways in which imperialism manifests itself simultaneously. This changes the focus from whether Greenland is shaped by colonial, postcolonial or what Gad (2009) calls post-postcolonial dynamics and instead allows the researcher to conceptualise how colonial and postcolonial dynamics co-exist in the Danish Commonwealth. Such nuanced and curious approach may in turn help researchers understand why Greenland exhibit what traditional political science calls “independence” whilst still experiencing dependence and colonisation. Correspondingly, a more attentive feminist approach moves the existing research field beyond its fixation on binary research outcomes and out of its self-perpetuating and self-created academic conundrums which remain far removed from lived realities. Indeed, insisting on illuminating the complexities in the Danish Commonwealth, a feminist approach may help create deeper modes of understanding and move towards solving longstanding dilemmas in Danish-Greenlandic politics.

Undertaking the task of a curious feminist also implies an insistence on different research goals, agendas and conducts (Enloe 1993). This is particularly important in the Greenlandic context where the study of traditional political artefacts tends to reify colonial biases. Such an example is the quantity of studies of the Greenlandic state, Greenlandic party politics and Greenlandic foreign policy. This research, primarily carried out by Danes, is heavily embedded with Danish and Western colonial logics since it repeatedly compares the Greenlandic state, party politics and foreign policy to a westernised notion of ideal statehood. Rather than unpacking the layers of coloniality in Greenlandic politics, such research has a tendency to reify the coloniality of the Greenlandic state whilst it typically ignores any Greenlandic interpretations of politics. This creates flawed research that superimposes westernised understandings of politics upon a Greenlandic reality and epitomises the problem of the supposedly “objective researcher”. Indeed, in orthodox research, the researcher tends to produce more politics and power than they fulfil their goal of objectively observing and describing politics.

## Alternative research artefacts

“Colonialism resides in our bodies”

Josef Tarrak Pedersen

interviewed 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2019

Moving beyond a traditional western-centric research agenda, a feminist approach allows non-traditional artefacts as objects of political value. It allows for more diversified research entities, building from the premise that different artefacts do not need to legitimise themselves in relation to any presumed more real realm of political science or IR (Buckley 2010). This is particularly helpful in colonial contexts as this may help escape reproducing the colonial machinery of the state and instead offer novel understandings of the political processes taking place outside of the state (Jensen 2016a). In colonial contexts, it may especially be outside the realm of the state that alternative voices, visions and realities can be found. This is not to say that the realms outside of the state are not shaped by and embedded in colonial dynamics. However, it helps the researcher stay attentive to formations of politics which do not take the shape of traditional western dogmas.

Such an example may be the study of the body as a political interlocutor. In Tarrak’s statement, he makes it evident that the body is an important part of colonial dynamics and thus an essential target for decolonisation. However, with an orthodox political science approach, the body would tend to be ignored and excluded. Indeed, traditional political science has relied overwhelmingly on “political thought” and tended to exclude the body as an object of political inquiry. Feminists inspired by Butler’s (1990) reflections on the body have departed from the Cartesian legacies in the academy and insisted on understanding the role of the body in politics, power and political processes (Bordo 1986, 2013). In the Greenlandic context, feminist epistemologies may help attend to the complex role of the body in Greenlandic decolonisation. This involves understanding the use of the body in agency and resistance as well as the production of the body in the colonial machinery of the Danish state. In a similar fashion to how Butler (1990) is interested in how the gendered body comes about, a feminist lens attending to the body in Greenland might help uncover how the colonial subject is produced along Dano-centric lines. It might also help us understand the complex ways in which the body is colonised, yet, simultaneously, used to resist those very dynamics in itself.

Allowing the body to enter research also means finding a place for emotions in political analysis. Traditional IR has had an overwhelming tendency to completely exclude and overlook emotions from political analysis (Sylvester 2011). Similar to how the body is subjugated to the mind, emotions have been neglected in the myth of rational political science (Fricker 1991). This highly gendered exclusion of emotions means that there continues to be an extensive marginalisation of feelings, emotions and lived experiences in IR (Sylvester 2011). This is a major fallacy since it fails to acknowledge how politics is heavily involved with emotions in both its production, conduct and practice (Mackenzie 2011). What is more, this exclusion has tended to privilege certain lived experiences over others (Harding 1980, Wittig 1980). Namely, those that align with the myth of rationality and western masculine views and experiences (Wilcox 2009). In the Greenlandic context, this means that traditional political science research has tended to represent and advance Danish views and experiences. In the meanwhile, alternative voices and lived experiences have been marginalised. This is well captured by Sara Ahmed's (2004) work on emotions and feminist epistemologies. By placing emotions at the heart of her research agenda, she reveals how the politics of emotions is often used as a colonising tool. This makes it apt to focus on the work on emotions in the Danish Commonwealth and calls for more research that engages with the many ways in which emotions, emotionality and affect are used and constructed in the Danish Commonwealth. Taking emotion and affect seriously in research, conduct and practice seem an apt undertaking in understanding Danish colonialism and decolonial processes as well captured by Tarrak in his song Qimiinnarl from 2019:

“You can't see and you can't feel what we are”

Josef Tarrak Petrussen (2019)

### **Applying feminist methodologies in practice**

“For a long time after I conducted my artistic experiment people did not speak to me. They would ignore me in the supermarket or turn around when they saw me. I was considered “too radical” and no one wanted to be associated with me. Even my children felt the consequences at school.”

Julie Hardenberg (September 2019)

This quote is from my fieldwork in Nuuk where I interviewed Julie Hardenberg numerous times. She described in detail how criticising Danish imperialism had had many personal consequences for her

and her family. She recounted the many ways in which people attempted to silence her and how she experienced exclusion and rejection when she made particularly radical points. Julie's story epitomises how those who raise issues of injustice often are constructed as causing the very issue itself. This is well-captured by Ahmed (2010a: 591) in her work on feminist killjoys. She describes the killjoy as "the feminist who ruins a good time by speaking about injustice, inequality" and other forms of marginalisation. A killjoy is a kill-joy because she is perceived to "kill joy" in questioning the fabric of happiness. While Ahmed's killjoy was initially formulated to describe those, who question the sexist fabrics of society, the trope is very helpful in decolonising movements as well (2014a). Drawing her inspiration from Audre Lorde, the essence of Ahmed's (2014b) terminology is anti-colonial and anti-racist and is thus helpful to describe decolonising dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth. Having argued for the importance of more micro-political analysis in the Danish Commonwealth, the concept is particularly helpful. It encapsulates the arguments for a feminist lens made above whilst remaining anti-racist and anti-colonial at its core. Julie Hardenberg inspired me to follow the path of feminist killjoys because she questions the colonial common-sense, disrupts the Danish status quo and thus may indeed be described as a feminist killjoy.

Turning the lens from the field to the researcher, this section urges the researcher to be a killjoy in their research. I argue that this is necessary in order to uncover epistemic silences and counter the pervasive colonial dynamics in research. While the feminist methodologies presented in the previous section are helpful in understanding and describing the colonial dynamics at play in the Danish Commonwealth, it is necessary to apply methodological tools that actively counter these. This is to ensure that the feminist researcher does not commit the error of traditional political science by sticking to the aim of merely describing social dynamics at play. Instead, the feminist researcher must acknowledge their positionality and actively use their position, privilege and power to help alter the colonial dynamics they observe.

Following Fricker's (2013) work on epistemic injustices, I suggest that the researchers themselves have a duty to break epistemic silences and resurrect epistemic injustices. The pervasiveness of western hegemony in thought, practice and conduct means, as Fricker (2013) shows, that alternative voices, worldviews and approaches are systemically denied access to the academy. This creates an important impetus for the researcher to break systemic barriers and give voice to alternative visions, realities and practices. In the Danish Commonwealth, this means that researchers have a duty to include Greenlandic voices, experiences and visions in the academy. This is well-captured by Jensen



(2019:53) who emphasises the importance of disrupting the ongoing silencing of Greenlanders and to diversify research methodologies on Greenland.

I suggest that resurrecting epistemic injustices in research on Greenland may be achieved by conducting what the feminist geographer Parker (2015) calls “killjoy research”. In developing her feminist toolkit for feminist killjoy research, Parker draws on Ahmed’s (2010a, 2010b) work on feminist killjoys. Ahmed (2010b: 257) describes a killjoy as someone who questions, unsettles and criticises inequalities, power imbalances and is willing to destroy the “good” atmosphere to resurrect injustices. Parker helps translate Ahmed’s reflections into research practice and emphasises that the feminist killjoy researcher must be willing to unsettle “the good atmosphere” in the academy, amongst their colleagues, in the research field and in the public consciousness by actively engaging with power imbalances. This means that the researcher might feel uncomfortable at various times of their research process. Nevertheless, as Ahmed (2010a) argues in the context of being an everyday killjoy, it is important that the researcher is “unwilling to participate” in the structures of domination in order to fundamentally alter the very hegemonies they are seeking to describe. Indeed, as Ahmed (2010a: 590) writes, “A killjoy is willing to get into trouble. And I think this is specific about a killjoy manifesto; that we bring into our statements of intent or purpose the experience of what we come up against”.

Following Ahmed’s feminist radicalism, Parker presents different tools that a feminist killjoy researcher must attend to. This involves attending to emotions and acknowledging their importance in research, social life and power dynamics. It also involves engaging with uncomfortable realities and using one’s privilege as a researcher to critically engage with power inequalities and hierarchies. This may also mean taking risks in research. This does, in turn, demand that the researcher moves “beyond reflexivity” and towards directly challenging “raced, gendered and other structures and politics”. In practice, this means that the researcher must use their privilege to communicate, challenge and unsettle hierarchies of power. This diverts considerably from the orthodox dogmas in political science and debunks the myth of the objective spectator who is disengaged in the power production of their research field. Instead, it builds on the insights from the reflexive turn and takes the insistence on positionality to the next level by encouraging the researcher to become active rather than passive acknowledgers of their position in the field.

This is pertinent in the Danish Commonwealth where research on Greenland continues to be dominated by white Danes (Graugaard 2020). This urges researchers to acknowledge and make use

of their privilege to resurrect the pervasive epistemic injustices in which Greenlandic views, voices and visions are systemically excluded, denied access and silenced. What is more, killing joy and taking upon oneself the role as a killjoy researcher, is particularly pertinent in the Danish Commonwealth where much is silenced and “swept under the carpet” to uphold a good atmosphere. Indeed, in the proclaimed “happiest country” in the world, much is silenced, repressed and left unspoken in the protection of the national treasure; “hygge”<sup>6</sup>. This tendency seems to sprawl into the academy and thus it is of utmost importance that academics dare to unsettle the good atmosphere in order to pave the way for different research agendas that uncover unspoken silences and truths.

To sum up the importance of doing so, a central quote from Ahmed (2017: 257) is particularly illuminating. She writes of the duty of killjoys in dismantling narratives of global capitalism: “we will expose the happiness myths of neoliberalism and global capitalism: the fantasy that the system created for a privileged few is really about the happiness of many or the most”. This seems fitting for the Danish Commonwealth where the promise of happiness is used repeatedly to justify injustices in Greenland. Much has been written on the so-called good intentions driving Danish colonialism in Greenland, so-called Danish generosity permeating interventions in Greenland and so-called Greenlandic interest in remaining in the Danish Commonwealth. It is about time that researchers begin to expose the happiness myths of Danish denialism and exceptionalism: the fantasy that the system created for a privileged few is really about the happiness of the many or the most. Indeed, it is about time that researchers insist on the importance of Greenlandic voices and perspectives.

“There can be joy in killing joy. And kill joy we must.”

Ahmed (2010a: 592)

## Concluding notes

“One teacher told me that we should be silent all the time”

Josef Tarrak Petrussen (Tupilak 2016)

In Tarrak’s famous song Tupilak, he addresses the issue of the ongoing silencing of Greenlanders. Maybe not in a way that traditional political scientists would attend to. However, for radical

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<sup>6</sup> See Olwig and Pærregaard’s reflections on the development of Danish “hygge”.

postcolonial feminist researchers, such material is key to understanding the many ways in which continuous colonial dynamics silence Greenlanders in the everyday. This paper has attempted to show that exactly by applying insights from feminist epistemologies in decolonising practices, we may as researchers be able to uncover yet disclosed and occulted colonial dynamics in the Danish Commonwealth. Constructing an argument for the benefits of utilising radical postcolonial feminist epistemologies, this paper has attempted to construct a path that diverts from many of the common fallacies in conventional political science. Fallacies that maintain researchers in Danish loops and colonial logics. Orthodoxies which tend to systematically exclude Greenlandic voices and maintain perspectives and assumptions which perpetuate Danish imperialism. Instead, anti-colonial feminist methodologies insist on engaging and interacting with Greenlandic views, perspectives and realities and thus insist on taking Tarrak's statement seriously whilst understanding it as a relevant piece of research information. This attentiveness, in turn, alters the imperial western-centric pillars that continue to define the ontological foundations of many Dano-centric inquiries on Greenland.

Pointing to the many colonial dynamics within political science, the article also aspires to further decolonising practices in the academy by encouraging and inspiring more alternative engagement with power and politics in the Danish Commonwealth. This means engaging with alternative research conduct, agendas and tools and further the engagement with emotions, lived and felt realities. This may, in turn, fuel alternative paths forward and contribute to a much-needed nuanced understanding of what is at stake in the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. Olufemi (2020) captures the importance of doing so in her reflections on feminism. She writes that feminism is a commitment to disrupting violence when and where we see it. This includes epistemological and ontological violence which researchers have a particular duty to counter. Olufemi argues that feminism is particularly helpful in contradicting structural violence because it forces researchers "outside of the realm of words and theories" and makes the research agenda "a living, breathing set of principles". In a field so pervaded by imbalances as the Danish academy, it is both appropriate and necessary to take research outside the realm of words and towards direct practice. Indeed, Olufemi (2020) reminds us, "where we can make interventions, we should".

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