

Norwegian and Russian Mining and Mining Communities in Monica Kristensen's Oeuvre

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1. Introduction

Monica Kristensen (1950 –) is a recognized Norwegian glaciologist, meteorologist, polar explorer, and author of fiction (crime novels, see the list below) and nonfiction (about polar expeditions, Svalbard, the Kings Bay affair, and Roald Amundsen, see the list below). In her crime novels, which all take place on Svalbard, the plot is inextricably bound to place, and more precisely to the High Arctic. In two of her five crime novels, *Kullunge* (Coal Baby) and *Den døde i Barentsburg* (The Dead Man in Barentsburg), crucial parts of the action take place in the mining towns and coal mines of Longyearbyen (*Kullunge*) and Barentsburg (*Den døde i Barentsburg*). In her documentary book about the Kings Bay affair Kristensen investigates the terrible mining accident in 1962 at Kings Bay mines that killed 21 miners. In this article I will examine the literary construction and use of these specific places and communities – the Arctic, the coal mines, and their communities – in these three books. How are Norwegian and Russian mining and mining towns represented, and with what thematic consequences?¹

Crime novels:

Hollendergraven, Forlaget Press, 2007

Kullunge, Forlaget Press, 2008

Operasjon Fritham, Forlaget Press, 2009

Den døde i Barentsburg, Forlaget Press, 2011

Ekspedisjonen, Forlaget Press, 2014

Nonfiction/documentary books:

Mot 90 grader syd, Grøndahl, 1987

Det magiske landet. Fortellinger om Svalbard, Grøndahl, 1989

Dager mot Antarktis, Grøndahl Dreyer, 1993

¹ This article is based on a paper presented at the workshop “Mining in Context” on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Svalbard Treaty in Longyearbyen February 6-9, 2020.

Kings Bay-saken, Forlaget Press, 2012

Amundsens siste reise, Forlaget Press, 2017

2. *Norwegian and Russian mining and mining communities in the crime series*

Monica Kristensen's crime novels constitute a crime series in which the protagonist, Knut Fjeld, is "sysselmannsbetjent", that is, one of the governor's policemen. Characteristic of these crime novels is the significance of place, place as a particular High Arctic locality, and place as something more and other than that; in a phenomenological perspective an encounter and existential relationship between body, culture and landscape (Casey 1993), and, in a sociological perspective, a kind of "throwntogetherness" of people, processes, histories and paths of life (Massey 2005). The setting is Svalbard, and the series can be said to represent an Arctic version of the mystery of the locked room, in which the isolation from the mainland is what isolates, or locks the room, and in which the High Arctic nature and climate – the darkness, the snow, the ice, the weather – present a demanding challenge and potential danger that is exploited in the creation of suspense. As I have argued elsewhere (Wærp 2015), Kristensen's crime fiction seems to have as a crucial subproject to describe and explain Svalbard – its various places, landscapes, history, settlements, environments. This also affects the plot composition which divides into a crime plot and subplots generated by the relationship that the characters have or develop with the given High Arctic place.

Moreover, in three of the five published crime novels the open, Arctic white is contrasted with the claustrophobically closed, pitch-black: Here, significant parts of the plot are linked to the coal mines of Longyearbyen (in *Kullunge* 2008), Ny-Ålesund (in *Operasjon Fritham* 2009) and Barentsburg (in *Den døde i Barentsburg* 2011). In two of them significant parts of the main plot are linked to mining and mining communities (*Kullunge* and *Den døde i Barentsburg*). Here, the dark and dangerous coal mines contribute to the creation of suspense that place more generally is made to generate in Kristensen's crime series: In this way, the action set in the vast, cold, dangerous white room is moved to a pitch-dark, claustrophobically narrow room, deep down under the ground, and alternates between these two contrasted settings.

Whereas *Kullunge* is the title of Kristensen's second crime novel, Kullungen is the name of an existing kindergarten in Longyearbyen. In this novel, the core of the plot is that one of the children, Ella, in a mysterious way disappears from the kindergarten Kullungen. The police suspect that she is kidnapped by a pedophile, but it turns out that she has been picked up by her father, mining engineer Steinar Olsen, who deliberately has not informed the kindergarten that he has picked her up in order to frighten his wife who wants to divorce him and move to the mainland with their daughter. Steinar Olsen is described as a recently employed mining engineer who has serious problems in adapting to his new working place in the mines of the High Arctic, drinks and is violent when drinking. He has even been informed by his boss that he might lose his job. In order to hide the child, he brings her to Mine 7 (an existing mine in Longyearbyen) that is temporarily closed because of high gas concentration and danger of explosion, and then later to an old, permanently closed mine (also an existing mine) that he thinks is safe and where nobody will come looking after them. He is not sober, and goes out to run some errands, leaving

little Ella alone in the dark old mine. All she has got is a candlelight and some chocolate. Downtown Steinar Olsen is subject to an accident, a car is put to fire, his body catches fire and he dies of the serious injuries, while the child is still alone in the dark coal mine and nobody knows where she is.

The composition of the novel is as follows:

- Preface
- Maps of Svalbard
- 27 main chapters
- «Gruvesangen» (the miners' song)
- Epilogue
- Gratitude

The main part of the novel is effectively composed by parallel actions and by a suspense enhancing crosscutting between these, especially between what goes on in the wintery Arctic town of Longyearbyen, and in the dark and dangerous mines. The plot is based on a disappearance case, and the investigation related to finding the child and her kidnapper. This involves a physical movement from the challenging and potentially dangerous outer white world of Longyearbyen where the snow, the cold and the weather can kill, into the black and extremely dangerous mines where there is a – thoroughly described – continuous danger of explosion because of high gas concentration, and then back and forth between these two settings, until the climax of the novel: The child is found deep down under the ground in an old and closed mine. The white snowy town and landscape and the black mines are thus two crucial suspense enhancing determinants of the novel, and the climax of the plot is set in the deepest and narrowest of the dark mines. Moreover, the challenging living and working conditions of the High Arctic are important factors for what happens (the kidnapping), as the kidnapper has serious problems in adapting to the extreme living conditions.

The mines are not only exploited as particularly dangerous and thus suspense enhancing places. They are also, as working places, crucial parts of the novel as a portrait of Longyearbyen as a town. In addition to the mines, and the governor's office, various places of the town are described, the kindergarten, cafes and restaurants, as well as social conditions, including loneliness, alcoholism, adultery, violence in families, and local activities, such as for instance the celebration of the return of the sun, and illegal activities, e.g. reindeer hunting and smuggling. Mining in the mines of Longyearbyen is described as demanding and risky work. Mine 7 is temporarily closed because of a high gas concentration, gas that is said to come from cavities in the mountain behind the layers of coal (Kristensen 2008, 137). This gas problem is represented as seemingly insolvable. Some of the fictitious characters in the novel, the mining experts, suggest better ventilation, whereas others claim that the mine should be closed until the gas level becomes lower.

Kristensen's critical perspective on the way mining is administered and legitimated by the mining company as well as by Norwegian authorities becomes obvious when she makes the director of the mine object that they have to be in continuous operation in order to provide coal for the power station in Longyearbyen so that Mine 7 can justify its existence («Ellers forsvarer ikke Gruve 7 sin eksistens» / if not, Mine 7 does not justify its existence

(Kristensen 2008, 138)). Providing coal for the city is their reason for being. And the gas concentration of course rises and exceeds the level of explosion danger («I løpet av lørdag formiddag var grensen for eksplosjonsfare overskredet.» / During Saturday morning, the limit for the risk of explosion was exceeded (Kristensen 2008, 210)). This is Saturday, little Ella disappeared Thursday, and is (as we, the readers, know) still there in the dangerous mines. Together with some volunteer miners, the protagonist, police officer Knut Fjeld, who is afraid of the dark and suffers severely from claustrophobia, enter the mine in order to find Ella.

In *Kullunge*, thus, Kristensen, in addition to plotting a crime story, makes a portrait of Longyearbyen as a mining city. This portrait is characterized by Kristensen's expert scientific knowledge about the local geological conditions that affect the mining and the mining community; her respect for the miners and their work and understanding of the social conditions formed by the physical and mental challenges by living in the High Arctic, as well as by an implied critical perspective on the way mining is administered and legitimated by the mining company and by Norwegian authorities.

Compared to this, *Den døde i Barentsburg* provides us with a portrait of a Russian mining community on Svalbard: The Russian mining town of Barentsburg. The composition of this novel is as follows:

- Motto (quote from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*)
- Map
- 36 main chapters
- Afterword

The main part of this novel too is composed by parallel actions that are crosscut in a simple, but effectively suspense enhancing way. In this novel, the mines play a slightly less dramatic role than in *Kullunge*, even though there is a constant danger of explosion here too.

The action is as follows: The union leader for the miners at Trust Arktikugol (an existing Russian mining company), Ivan Sergejevitsj Makanin, is found dead in a macabre way in a cement mixer (drowned, his hands crushed) within the mining area in Barentsburg. According to the director of the mine this is an accident, but an accident that has nothing to do with the mining and the mining company. The miners, however, do not agree with him in this. Referring to the Svalbard Treaty, and more precisely to a paragraph saying that all mining accidents on Svalbard shall be investigated, they demand that the death of their union leader is investigated by the Norwegian Governor (the Sysselmann). The following is what the leader of the miners explicitly demands in a meeting where the miners, the director of the mine and the protagonist of the novel, Knut Fjeld from the Governor's office (Sysselmannkontoret), are present:

«Vi forlanger at de samme reglene gjelder for oss russere som for norske gruvearbeidere. Det må undersøkes om det virkelig var en arbeidsulykke, eller om Vanja ble drept. Han kunne ha stanset den forestående nedbemanningen her i Barentsburg. Det visste direktøren...» (Kristensen 2011, 77)

We demand that the same rules apply to us Russians as to Norwegian miners. It must be investigated whether it was really a work accident, or whether Vanja was killed. He could have stopped the impending downsizing here in Barentsburg. The director knew that...

What the miners fear is that mining in Barentsburg, already dramatically downsized, will be closed down, that the miners will lose their homes, jobs and the extra pay for working in the Arctic. The miners are, however, also deeply concerned about safety, and claim that their safety is not ensured in the mines, and, moreover, that no one is made responsible when accidents actually take place. The Russian interpreter tells Knut Fjeld about the consequences of the mining accident in Barentsburg in 1997, when 23 miners were killed (an actual accident):

«Ingenting, sysselmansbetjent Fjeld, det skjedde ingenting. Det ble ikke reist noen sak mot Trusten, ikke mye kritikk. Alt ble plutselig så stille. Burde det ikke ha vært påpekt at det skulle være en skriftlig arbeidsinstruks, slik at gruvearbeiderne visste hva de skulle gjøre? Slik at ingen gjorde feil? Var det ikke påbudt med kalkstein i gruva for å spre over kullstøvet? Og var det ikke påbudt med selvreddere til hver eneste arbeider? Burde ikke det riktige sprengstoffet være på plass, og skulle ikke ledelsen sørge for at det ble brukt?

I 1963 måtte en norsk regjering gå av på grunn av en gruveulykke som høsten 1962 drepte 21 arbeidere i Ny-Ålesund. Men 35 år etter, i 1997, da ble det ingen skandale. Med 23 russere døde etter en ulykke forårsaket av så mange feil, så mange brudd på sikkerhetsforskriftene.» (Kristensen 2011, 71)

“Nothing, officer Fjeld, nothing happened. No lawsuit was filed against the Trust, not much criticism. Everything suddenly became so quiet. Should it not have been pointed out that there should be a written work instruction so that the miners knew what to do? So that no one would make a mistake? Wasn't limestone mandatory in the mine to spread over the coal dust? And weren't self-rescuers obligatory for every single worker? Shouldn't the right explosive be in place, and shouldn't the management make sure that it was used?

In 1963, a Norwegian government had to resign due to a mining accident that in the autumn of 1962 killed 21 workers in Ny-Ålesund. But 35 years later, in 1997, then there was no scandal. With 23 Russians dead after an accident caused by so many errors, so many violations of safety regulations.”

In addition to the murder of the union leader, three more killings take place in the novel: The director of the mine (Konstantin Nikolajevitsj de Rustin) is killed, so is a pig farmer (Grigótovit) and a miner (Anton). Most of the miners, the administrative leaders of the mine and the authorities of the town come from mining areas in Ukraine, where mines have been closed down, and all four killings eventually turn out to be related to past events in Ukraine and more specifically to a massacre at a farm outside the mining city of Pischane in 1974.

Den døde i Barentsburg has a more complex structure than *Kullunge*, with a series of embedded stories. In addition to the suspense enhancing crosscutting between Longyearbyen and Barentsburg, as well as between the town and its mines, the novel is characterized by a network of inserted stories; characters telling long stories from their past in Ukraine. These stories, about mining, corruption, miners illegally producing vodka in the mines, and the massacre in Pischane in 1974, contribute to the plot by explaining old hatred, old conflicts and possible motives, but even exceed the main plot and contribute to constituting subplots of a more documentary kind, describing the long history of mining and corruption in Ukraine, and the relation between the mining and miners in Barentsburg and those in Ukraine.

In this novel the mines and the explosion danger of the mines are somewhat more loosely related to the development of the plot phases towards the climax. All of the characters are related to the mines as workers, and the murders take place in the mining town. The action is set in winter, in the cold, dangerous, white Arctic in the dark time of the year, and at certain points of the action the protagonist is almost freezing to death (he falls into the sea water, stays too long outside in the cold, and is not always properly dressed for the cold). A couple of times the action is moved into the dark and claustrophobically narrow and dangerous rooms of the mines. All though these are not the most significant points in the plot composition, the constant danger of explosion combined with the general lack of necessary safety equipment, haunt the town. Together with the visible decay of the mining town, it contributes to creating a disturbingly unheimlich atmosphere in the novel all the way to the climax of the novel; the protagonist almost being killed, and the revelation of the killer.

The novel offers a very dark and depressing picture of Barentsburg as an Arctic mining village in the state of heavy decline and decay. At the beginning of the novel, we get a glimpse of Barentsburg from the air, from the helicopter, when Knut Fjeld approaches Barentsburg:

Den russiske gruveleiren lå i en bratt skråning ned mot fjorden og liknet på en gammel, forlatt ruin som ingen hadde tatt seg bryet eller kostnadene med å fjerne. De få gatelysene kastet et trist, gult skjær over veiene der nede og virket kraft-løse mot polarmørket rundt byen. [...] Forfalne betong- og murbygninger på lange rekker. Skitne veier over snødekte bakker bort til gruveinngangene. Bratte smale trapper nedover mot kaia. (Kristensen 2011, 25)

The Russian mining camp was located on a steep slope down to the fjord and resembled an old, abandoned ruin that no one had bothered or paid to remove. The few streetlights cast a sad, yellow tinge over the roads down there and seemed powerless against the polar darkness around the city. [...] Dilapidated concrete and brick buildings in long rows. Dirty roads over snow-covered slopes to the mine entrances. Steep narrow stairs down towards the quay.

Kristensen's Barentsburg is not only characterized by miners working and living under an extremely high physical and mental pressure, but also by a living and lively Russian

culture (religion, clothing, tea with raspberry jam, vodka, cultural exchanges). Illegal fishery, however, cheating with quotas and smuggling, are part of the portrait too.

Safety in the mines represents a severe problem for the mining community in this novel, so does the decay of the village, as well as the supplies of food and necessary equipment to the miners and their families. The following is some of the criticism the union leader comes up with just before he is found dead and mutilated in the cement mixer:

«Tjuetre døde og syv fortsatt igjen der inne i gruvegangene? [Her refererer han til gruveulykken i 1997] Det må ta en slutt dette vanstyret. Har de glemt oss nede på fastlandet? Vi får jo ikke tilstrekkelig med forsyninger... Hva skal vi leve av i vinter? Almisser fra Longyearbyen?» (Kristensen 2011, 12)

Twenty-three dead and seven still left in the mine tunnels? [Here he refers to the mining accident in 1997] This mismanagement must end. Have they forgotten us down on the mainland? We do not get enough supplies... What are we going to live on this winter? Alms from Longyearbyen?

Russian mining, and the problem of safety in Barentsburg, is compared to Norwegian mining and safety in a rather critical way in the novel: «Selv om ingen sa noe offisielt og arbeidstilsynet bare rapporterte om direkte overtredelser av den norske arbeidsmiljøloven, var det ganske åpenbart at en norsk gruve aldri kunne ha vært drevet på samme måte» / Although no one said anything officially and the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority only reported direct violations of the Norwegian Working Environment Act, it was quite obvious that a Norwegian mine could never have been operated in the same way (Kristensen 2011, 61).

Whereas in *Kullunge* Kristensen makes a portrait of Longyearbyen as a mining city characterized not only by her expert knowledge about the local geological and meteorological conditions that affect the mining and the mining community, but also by her knowledge from within and identification with Norwegian culture, her picture of Barentsburg, although clearly fascinating as well as critically engaged, turns out to be slightly more stereotypically painted with the good versus the bad and the ugly, and in this way seems slightly less realistic than her description of the Norwegian mining town, Longyearbyen. Her picture of Barentsburg is based on the gaze and understanding of an author from a different nationality and culture than the Russian portrayed. Nevertheless, Kristensen's respect for the miners and their work, her understanding of the social conditions formed by the physical and mental challenges by living in the High Arctic, as well as the critical perspective on the way mining is administered and legitimated by the mining company and by Russian authorities, is unambiguously represented in this novel too. The critical perspective on the way mining is administered and legitimated by the authorities is more conspicuous, though, in *Den døde in Barentsburg*. Moreover, a more international perspective on the strategic national presence on Svalbard becomes more apparent in this novel.

3. *Mining and mining communities in Kings Bay-saken (2012, King's Bay Affair) – and the closing down of Kings Bay, Grumant and Pyramiden*

In addition to exciting crime plots, thus, the two crime novels dealt with in the previous part of this article offer engaging portraits of two mining towns, one Russian and one Norwegian, Longyearbyen and Barentsburg, with a critical perspective on the ongoing local mining, as well as on the way political interests seem to govern decision making. In the documentary book about the Kings Bay affair, Kristensen depicts what was for a long time the northernmost mining village of the world, Ny-Ålesund. In this documentary book we are offered a more thorough and scientifically argued elaboration of the problems of mining in the High Arctic: The geological and meteorological conditions. This book is about the historical mining accident in Ny-Ålesund in 1962, when 21 miners were killed. The book has no genre specification either on the front or colophon page, but the blurb places it in the documentary genre. The afterword fronts the novel-like side of the book: “Jeg har mange å takke for arbeidet med denne *romanen*” (Kristensen 2012:319, my italics) / I have many to thank for the work on this *novel*). Most of the content is historical events and facts, and the historical events that the mining accident and the aftermath constitute are not only extensively referred to, as the documentary genre requires, but affect the text's content structure to a decisive degree. Compared to a purely academic historical analysis, such as Dag Karmly's book *Kings Bay-saken* (The Kings Bay Affair) (Karmly 1975), which is a scientific dissertation, Kristensen's book operates with what in documentary theory is understood as a more subjective concept of truth. Moreover, it is, as I will argue, characterized by essential features of the true crime genre.

In his modern classic about documentaries, *Introduction to documentary*, Bill Nichols stresses the significance of the point of view of the maker of a documentary film in a way that is valid for authors of documentary books as well:

Documentary films speak about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a way of seeing the historical world directly rather than into a fictional allegory. (Nichols 2010, 14)

In Grierson (1979) this kind of shaping of the story is called “a creative treatment of actuality”. True crime is – in line with this, and in its intermediate position between fiction and documentary – based on real events that are shaped or creatively treated through genre, medium, language, expression, perspective:

Very simply, a [true crime] murder narrative is a story – the story of real events, shaped by the teller and imbued by his or her values and beliefs about such events. Narratives can be textual, visual, aural, or a mixture of the three. In addition, murder narratives are also shaped by the means of their production – under deadline for a newspaper story, with great attention to research and accuracy for a high quality book, or brought to life by actors in a televised dramatization or film. (Murley 2008, 6)

In *Kings Bay-saken*, Kristensen's structuring belief is that this terrible accident could have been avoided if Stortinget (the Norwegian parliament) had taken the necessary precautions, and that instead of this, the miners and the management of the mine were blamed for the accident, even though it was not – and still is not – clear what caused the accident. In her book, the government is, if not proven guilty, made responsible for what happened, and the miners and the management of the mine exonerated from the accusations they experienced especially after the second investigation report was published (the so-called Tønset report). In this way, the book represents what we could call a plotting against (what is taken as) a lie. However, Kristensen's engagement and critique also concerns the forced moving of the miners back to the mainland after the accident, that is, the kind of breaking up of a small society and closing down of a mining village – something that also took place in the Russian mining communities Grumant (1961–62) and Pyramiden (1998).

The cover illustrations paratextually signal Kristensen's critical perspective. The frontpage illustration consists of a montage of two photos in black and white and sepia, a funeral procession and a political meeting, in a way that signal authenticity, and, by way of contrast, critical focus: The Kings Bay affair as a political versus a human affair. The illustration of the back of the book repeats the contrasting of two photos. One of them shows Norwegian politicians, including the then prime minister, Einar Gerhardsen, wearing dark sunglasses (this was the first time ever that a discussion in the parliament was shown on TV in Norway), the other shows miners having a break in the Ester mine (where the accident happened) some time in 1961-2. The lights of the media versus the darkness of the mine. Again, the political versus the human aspect of the King's Bay affair.

The overall composition of the book is as follows:

- Dedication (“Til veteranene i Kings Bay – men, kvinner og barn, overlevende og døde” / To the veterans of King's Bay – men, women and children, survivors and deceased)
- Two maps
- Contents
- Main part, chapters 1-28
- Afterword
- List of deceased and missing miners
- Words and expressions describing mining
- Endnotes

In addition, the book contains 24 pages with photos from various archives.

The question of the book is «what happened», with the intention to find an answer. Referring to a Dutch mining expert, Monica Kristensen starts by focusing on the explosion itself. Here is the Dutch mining expert P. Th. Velzeboer as quoted by Kristensen:

Flere årsaker (til ulykken) kan tenkes, men i lys av tidligere erfaringer er det ingen av dem som kan gi en fyldestgjørende forklaring, og jeg frykter at man aldri vil få det riktige svar, *untagen man finner inn til eksplosjonens hjerte*. (Kristensen 2012, 14, my italics)

Many causes (of the accident) can be imagined, but in the light of previous experience none of them can offer a satisfying explanation, and I fear that one never will find the right answer, *except if one can find the heart of the explosion.*

This – the need to find the innermost cause, the heart of the accident – organizes the overall argument of the book, as the last chapter is entitled “The heart of the accident”. The inner logic, or the thematic composition of the book, can be described in this way:

Chapter 1: The question

Chapter 1-12: Suspense enhancing crosscutting of parallel actions (as in the crime novels): Here, the narrator cuts away from one action (what happens in the mining village and in the Ester mine in the run up to the explosion) to another (in the historical and political context) to suggest connections between what happens, what has happened previously and what has been decided politically.

Chapter 12-19: Svalbard right after the accident

Chapter 20-26: The political aftermath

Chapter 27: The human aspect

Chapter 28: The answer, based on facts for the possible causes of the accident plus a fictitious representation of the moment of the ignition, i.e. the heart of the explosion

In the last chapter Kristensen thus arranges her facts and data in various categories and as parts of a concluding argumentation for what might have caused the explosion. Here, the local geological and meteorological conditions (especially the geological layers, the particular type of coal, and the frequent polar vortexes) are foregrounded as making the conditions so extremely demanding and dangerous that there should never have been any mining in the Ester mine: According to Kristensen, operating this particular High Arctic mine (the Ester mine) was simply not possible in a safe way. She also foregrounds the political aspect of this: The importance of operating the mine in order to legitimize a Norwegian settlement in Ny-Ålesund and in this way signal national presence and Norwegian sovereignty. The missing information now is the cause of the ignition. At this point, as already mentioned, Kristensen turns to fiction:

Herfra kan vi bare spekulere, for ingen observasjoner etter ulykken er tilgjengelig fra dypet i Beltesjakt Vest. Vi må nærme oss ulykkens innerste kjerne, eksplosjonens hjerte – *ikke med fakta, men med innlevelse.*” (Kristensen 2012, 316, my italics).

From here we can only speculate, for no observation of the accident is available from the depths of the Ester mine. We have to approach the inner core of the accident, the explosion, *not with facts, but with empathic imagination.*

As a result, the last three pages of the documentary book is a minute-by-minute fictitious narration (or reconstruction), based on available facts of the weather conditions and of what the miners did the last minutes before the moment of explosion:

Et polart lavtrykk er på vei over Framstredet fra Grønland. [...] Trykket er på vei bratt nedover. I de gamle, utdrevne strossene på den andre siden av Beltesjakt Vest siver det

metangass, lettere enn luft, usynlig og luktfri inn i de veldige bekmørke salene bak plastforhengene og portene som tidligere var strossene 3 og 5.

Selv en liten mengde gass, knappe 2 kubikkmeter slik det senere ble bedømt av granskningskommisjonen å være innerst i strosse fire over kullene, er nok til å sprengte til side portene på den andre siden av gruvegangen, antenne de enorme gassmengdene i de nedlagte strossene innenfor, jage som en glødende ball gjennom sjaktene og feltortene ovenfor – rasere, ødelegge, drepe.

Hånden til Wavold griper om gasslampe. Han er uvitende om at det kan være en defekt i glasset som dekker tenningsmekanismen, farlig bare hvis metangassprosenten i luften som måles er over 4%. Det er slutt på det siste minuttet og stiger Wavold tenner lampen. Den lille, guloransje flammen inne i gassmåleren blusser opp med et intenst, grønnaktig skjær, kommer i kontakt med den høyeksplosive blandingen av metangass og luft i strosse 4. (Kristensen 2012, 318)

A polar low pressure is on its way across the Fram Strait from Greenland. [...] The pressure is on its way down steeply. In the old, expelled roads on the other side of Belt Shaft West, methane gas, lighter than air, invisible and odorless, seeps into the very dark halls behind the plastic curtains and gates that were previously roads 3 and 5.

Even a small amount of gas, barely 2 cubic meters as it was later judged by the commission of inquiry to be at the bottom of road four over the coals, is enough to blow aside the gates on the other side of the mine tunnel, ignite huge amounts of gas in the disused roads inside, chase like a glowing ball through the shafts and fields above - rage, destroy, kill.

Wavold's hand grabs the gas lamp. He is unaware that there may be a defect in the glass that covers the ignition mechanism, dangerous only if the methane gas percentage in the air being measured is above 4%. It's over at the last minute and the rising Wavold lights the lamp. The small, yellow-orange flame inside the gas meter flares up with an intense, greenish tinge, comes into contact with the highly explosive mixture of methane gas and air in road 4.

As already mentioned, Kristensen also focuses another aspect of the Kings Bay affair, or rather, she adds something to its complexity: She argues that the way the accident was dealt with led to a new tragedy for the small mining village. Not only were the miners left with the blame for the accident (allegedly for having been sloppy with the safety rules), the mining was stopped and the mine closed down, and the miners, people who had had their homes there for generations, lived their lives there, attached themselves to the place, had their families and friends there, were all of a sudden forced to leave their homes and move to the mainland. This forced removal of the inhabitants of the small mining village is perceived by Kristensen as a new, terrible accident – losing one's home:

Avreisen fra Ny-Ålesund må ha føltes som en ny ulykke rammet dem. Plutselig skulle de som hadde mistet så mye, som ennå ikke hadde kommet seg etter det første grusomme sjokket, også miste sine hjem og sine venner. (Kristensen 2012, 293)

The departure from Ny-Ålesund must have felt like a new accident hitting them. Suddenly, those who had lost so much, who had not yet recovered from the first horrific shock, would also lose their homes and their friends.

What in the beginning had been an almost uninhabitable place, had by the continuous mining activities since the beginning of the 20th century, gradually become a small mining village where people built, dwelled, worked, and lived, adapted and attached themselves to the place. For many of the miners and their families, the High Arctic Ny-Ålesund became the place they experienced as and called their home:

Opprinnelig var han fra Borkenes, i Kvæfjorden ved Harstad og dette ble regnet som hans faste bopel. Ingen bodde fast i Ny-Ålesund, verken i selskapets eller i norske myndigheters øyne. [...] Innimellom oppholdene i Kings Bay arbeidet han på fastlandet et år eller to i anlegg eller gruvedrift. Allikevel kom han alltid tilbake til Ny-Ålesund, *det var her han følte seg hjemme.* (Kristensen 2012, 22, my italics)

Originally he was from Borkenes, in Kvæfjorden near Harstad and this was considered his permanent residence. No one lived permanently in Ny-Ålesund, neither in the company's nor in the eyes of the Norwegian authorities. [...] Between stays in Kings Bay, he worked on the mainland for a year or two in construction or mining. Still, he always came back to Ny-Ålesund, *this was where he felt at home.*

Den 16. november 1962, ti dager etter eksplosjonsulykken i Estergruva, reiste 77 gruvearbeidere, 9 kvinner og 14 barn fra Ny-Ålesund med kullbåten M/S "Ingerfire", lastebåten M/S "Jacob Kjøde" og ishavsskutene M/S "Nordsel" og M/S "Nordsyssel". De fleste av dem hadde ikke ønsket å forlate Kings Bay, og mange hadde knapt hatt tid til å pakke. *De forlot de små familiehusene og rommene sine på ungkarshjemmen med et håp om at det en gang ville være mulig å vende tilbake – kanskje allerede neste sommer?* Det hadde vært store eksplosjoner i Estergruva tidligere, og driften hadde ikke blitt stengt for godt etter disse ulykkene. (Kristensen 2012, 293, my italics)

On 16 November 1962, ten days after the explosion accident in the Estergruva, 77 miners, 9 women and 14 children traveled from Ny-Ålesund with the coal boat M/S "Ingerfire", the cargo boat M/S "Jacob Kjøde" and the Arctic ships M/S "Nordsel" and M/S "Nordsyssel". Most of them had not wanted to leave Kings Bay, and many had barely had time to pack. *They left their small family houses and rooms in the accommodation for singles with the hope that it would one day be possible to return - perhaps as early as next summer?* There had been large explosions in the Estergruva before, and the operation had not been closed for good after these accidents.

Mange av gruvearbeiderne hadde vært der i mange år og *kunne ikke tenke seg noe annet liv enn i Arktis.* (Kristensen 2012, 297, my italics)

Many of the miners had been there for many years and *could not imagine any other life than in the Arctic.*

Hele familier hadde opp gjennom årene etter andre verdenskrig slått seg ned i dette verdens nordligste samfunn: Grimsmo-familien, Sæter-brødrene med koner og barn, Kåre Engan med hele sin store familie og Sletten-familien, Ødegård-familien. (Kristensen 2012, 302, my italics)

Throughout the years after World War II, entire families had settled in this world's northernmost community: the Grimsmo family, the Sæter brothers with wives and children, Kåre Engan with his entire large family and the Sletten family, the Ødegård family.

Then, all of a sudden, the miners were moved by force and this little mining village was not any longer a mining village. Moreover, Kristensen underscores the fact that this is not a unique case in the Arctic: «Var det så enkelt å utslette et helt samfunn?» / Was it so easy to wipe out an entire society?, she makes the miners think in 1961 (Kristensen 2012, 20), that is, a year before their own tragedy, and about the closing down of the unprofitable mine in the Russian settlement Grumant in 1961-62. After this, the Russian mining village Pyramiden was as we know closed down in 1998. This forced closure of mining activity, and this forced removal of miners and termination of mining settlements and villages, are foregrounded in the book as a second accident experienced by the miners who are already suffering the consequences of the first terrible accident.

4. Conclusion

Whereas the crime novels – *Kullunge* and *Den døde i Barentsburg* – are characterized by the critical and analytical perspective typical of the documentary genre, the documentary book – *Kings Bay-saken* – is characterized by features of (true) crime literature. The critical focus in all three books dealt with in this article is on the Norwegian and Russian mines on Svalbard as extremely demanding and dangerous working places in the High Arctic, an area that in itself is challenging and potentially dangerous. Moreover, the critical focus is on the way mining and mining communities are administered and legitimated, on the closure – and an imminent threat of closure – of mining villages and communities and on forced removal of people, who have their homes there, to the mainland. Inextricably related to all of this, underlying everything, is the resolution on the Norwegian sovereignty of the Svalbard Treaty, as well the need to prove a national presence on Svalbard for the Russian as well as the Norwegian (and other) nations, and the way political interests seem to override not only the profit of mining but also the safety and life quality of the miners and their families. This is, in other words, an existentially, socially and politically engaged literature.

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