

Tracing Crime in Greenland-Set Feature Films and TV Series: Colonial Histories, Indigenous Perspectives and the Rise of Arctic Noir

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Abstract

For over a century, screen narratives set in Greenland have used crime to reflect and rework tensions between law, society, and place. This article examines a broad selection of films and television series set or shot in Greenland to trace how crime is used to negotiate questions of justice, identity, and power. Through a place-based approach informed by location studies, it shows how spatial representation contributes to the narrative and symbolic role of crime across both local and international productions. While crime is used differently by Greenlandic and foreign filmmakers, the article argues that it consistently functions as a flexible narrative device for exploring Greenland's complex social, cultural, and geopolitical realities. The conclusion identifies crime as a persistent and adaptable narrative tool, enabling filmmakers to engage with Greenland's evolving legal, social, and geopolitical conditions.

In recent years, the notion of Arctic Noir has emerged as a significant development of the Nordic Noir tradition, extending its focus to the vast and diverse landscapes of the circumpolar North. While Nordic Noir is typically characterised by brooding atmospheres, moral ambiguity, and critiques of social institutions, understood as a genre that fuses noir sensibilities with Nordic realism and high-end television aesthetics (Engelstad 2018), Arctic Noir broadens these concerns to include indigenous experiences, environmental crises, and geopolitical tensions unique to the Arctic region (Grønlund & Waade 2024, 355). Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), with its unique landscapes, complex coloni-

al history, and precarious geopolitical position occupies a central place within this emerging framework.

Yet, crime narratives in Greenland-set screen fiction have a longer history that predates this recent notion. Here, crime is understood in a basic sense as illegal acts or unlawful activity, while also encompassing broader narrative engagements with justice, transgression, and social disorder (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Depictions of crime have long functioned as a prism through which to examine profound tensions: between human and nature, indigenous and colonial (legal) systems, historical injustices, and the social disorders that accompany rapid cultural change. In this way, tracing the evolution of crime narratives from early film to contemporary productions offers insights into the continuities and ruptures in cinematic portrayals of Greenland and crime and highlights how various storytellers – from early colonial film to recent indigenous productions – negotiate questions of justice, identity, and power in a postcolonial Arctic context. By analysing how crime narratives are constructed and used across different productions and genres, this approach illuminates the complex interplay between genre conventions, place-based storytelling, and the broader socio-political realities of Greenland. The study is guided by a basic analytical framework centred on close readings of selected works in which crime or criminal acts play a central narrative role. Rather than adhering strictly to conventional definitions of the crime fiction genre, it broadens its scope to examine representations of criminality across multiple genres. In doing so, the article seeks to demonstrate how crime functions as a flexible narrative device within Greenland-set screen fiction.

The article traces the development of crime as a thematic and narrative device in Greenlandic film and television, examining how such portrayals have evolved over time, what characterises them, and what narrative possibilities and representational challenges they entail. Through textual analysis of key works spanning different historical periods and production contexts, the article interrogates how crime functions as a flexible narrative device, revealing tensions between colonial legacies and indigenous agency, as well as articulating social, cultural, and environmental perspectives specific to Greenland. Ultimately, this exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of how Greenland-set screen fiction negotiates and redefines concepts of law, transgression, and social order within the multifaceted realities of Greenland.

Tracing crime in screen fiction: A place-based approach

Since this article spans more than a century of film history and numerous productions, it takes the form of a systematic overview, supplemented by brief analyses of key works. The study is guided by a basic analytical framework centred on close readings of selected works in which crime or criminal acts play a central narrative role. Rather than adhering strictly to conventional definitions of the crime fiction genre, it broadens its scope to examine representations of criminality across multiple genres. In doing so, the article seeks to demonstrate how crime functions as a flexible narrative device within Greenland-set screen fiction.

The literature on crime fiction is extensive and deeply rooted in Western traditions. Tzvetan Todorov described crime fiction as stories containing “two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation” (Todorov 1977, 44). However, as Richard Bradford (2015, 1–2) notes, crime has featured in narratives for over two millennia, from *Oedipus* to *Hamlet*. It has functioned as a framework for exploring broader themes such as fate, justice, and human nature. Crime is a flexible narrative trigger that can initiate or shift storylines by influencing characters’ actions, provoking conflict, or accelerating plot developments.

Beyond its conventional definition, crime can be understood more broadly as a complex social and moral concept encompassing harms caused by both individuals and powerful institutions (Friedrichs 2015, 41; Hillyard et al. 2004). This expanded view aligns with postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives which emphasise how legacies of colonialism and global capitalism perpetuate social and environmental injustices disproportionately affecting marginalised communities (Frame 2022, 2). Such perspectives are vital for analysing crime within Greenland’s unique cultural, legal, and historical context. In this article, crime is then understood broadly as a socially and culturally constructed concept that encompasses both legally defined offences and other forms of social harm and injustice, particularly those shaped by historical, political, and ecological factors.

To account for the centrality of place in these narratives, the article further draws on *location studies* (Hansen & Waade 2017; 2019), emphasising the dual role of locations as both narrative elements and production sites. While this article is not a production study per se, it focuses on the on-screen rep-

resentation of Greenlandic spaces and how these places function within the narrative. Landscapes, settlements, and spatial arrangements are not treated as neutral backdrops but as active elements that inform tone, atmosphere, character relationships, and thematic resonance, especially in relation to crime and justice.

As a *place-based* study (Grønlund 2023, 84), case selection is then guided by the productions being both made in and about Greenland. This means that both local Greenlandic productions and international or co-productions are considered if the production is shot on location in or set in Greenland. The approach emphasises the physical and cultural particularities of Greenlandic places as depicted on screen, and their interrelation with broader themes such as colonial history, social justice, and environmental conditions. The off-screen details then serve primarily to contextualise and nuance the understanding of on-screen spatial representations. Given the breadth of the material, I focus on several exemplary cases from different historical periods that collectively capture important continuities and changes in the mediation of crime.

By combining a broad understanding of crime with a place-based analytical perspective, this article examines how Greenlandic screen narratives use crime to negotiate complex cultural, historical, and spatial dynamics. Rather than seeking to define a singular Greenlandic crime genre, the aim is to trace how the representation of crime has shifted over time and how it enables filmmakers – both local and external – to engage with Greenland’s history, geopolitical position, and narrative potential.

Crime in Greenland-set film and TV fiction: Towards the first wave

The history of Greenlandic cinema dates back as far as the late 19th century.¹ Between 1897 and 2023, a total of 81 feature films and TV series were produced in or about Greenland (Grønlund 2023, 329–331). Of these, more than half were produced from the year 2000 onwards, and 35 of the productions were made after the premiere of *Nuummioq* (Otto Rosing and Torben Bech, 2009) and the initiation of the ‘second wave’ in Greenlandic film characterised by increased indigenous production and influence (Grønlund 2023, 161; Thorsen & Péronard

1. For the most up-to-date reviews of film history in and about Greenland, see Grønlund 2021; 2023.

2021, 267). This pattern reflects a gradual yet significant emergence of Greenland as a distinct cinematic space, shaped increasingly by local voices over the past two decades.

Before 2009, most Greenland-related productions fell within adventure and drama genres, deeply rooted in the foundational traditions of expedition and ethnographic documentary films. These works often emphasised themes of exploration, survival, and encounters with the 'other', the Greenlandic Inuit, reflecting dominant colonial and exoticising narratives. This early body of work was exclusively dominated by external Western perspectives until Greenlandic influence emerged in the late 1900s. Overall, these narratives position Greenland as a peripheral and isolated space, both geographically and legally, where internal conflicts arise, drawing on ethnographic dramas that explore Inuit life and cultural encounters alongside suspenseful expedition films focused on survival in the Arctic frontier.

The adventure films of the 1930s such as *S.O.S. Eisberg* (Arnold Fanck, 1933) and *Nordhavets Mænd* (Men of the North Sea, Lau Lauritzen Jr., 1939) portray the Arctic as a frontier where formal legal authority is fragile and isolation and survival lead to morally ambiguous and criminal acts. For example, Arctic isolation drives the characters to madness in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, ultimately resulting in violence and death. Similarly, in *Nordhavets Mænd*, a ship becomes stranded in the Arctic, and the desperate struggle for survival culminates in a violent shootout and the death of a crew member.

This narrative pattern follows a central trope familiar from other genres and geographical contexts where extreme isolation and harsh environments erode social and legal norms, triggering psychological breakdowns and criminal behaviour. Such tropes underscore how isolation intensifies conflict and blurs the boundaries between lawfulness and lawlessness, making crime a consequence of the struggle for survival. This thematic continuity persists in later films such as *Kjærlighetens kjøtere* (*Zero Kelvin*, Hans Petter Moland, 1995) or *Against the Ice* (Peter Flinth, 2022), which similarly explores isolation-driven psychological tension and violent confrontations among characters in an Arctic environment.

In many ways, the trope continues with a geopolitical scope in Cold War thrillers such as *Firefox* (Clint Eastwood, 1982) and *Sub Down* (Gregg Champion, 1997), both partly shot in Greenland, where the Arctic becomes a stage of

geopolitical conflict. These films amplify themes of conflict and tension not only through portrayals of harsh environmental conditions but also through escalating global power struggles, in a manner that echoes the historical function of expeditions in earlier geopolitical demarcations of territory.

Within this trajectory, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (Bille August, 1997) stands out as a landmark film. Just as the book it is based on is widely recognized as the progenitor of Arctic Noir (Toudoire-Surlapierre 2023, 2), the cinematic version serves as the first definitive instance of a crime story set in Greenland. As I will argue later, the genre's subsequent popularity stems from tensions that arise from the survival and Cold War narratives, shaping a distinctive noir and crime story closely tied to Greenlandic landscapes.

The ethnographic branch of Greenlandic cinema, largely shaped by foreign productions, often portrays Inuit characters through what Ann Fienup-Riordan has referred to as “the ‘pure primitive’: peaceful, happy, childlike, noble, independent, and free” (Fienup-Riordan 1995, xi), emphasizing their position at the geographical and historical periphery of ‘Western civilisation’, casting them as quintessential subjects of a particular form of exoticism. Similarly, Lill Rastad Bjørst highlights how Danish representations often simplify the Arctic “into a set of narratives about mysticism, polar darkness, spirituality, survival in nature, and art – narratives that often carry a romanticised aura of freedom” (Bjørst 2008, 9 (my translation)). In contrast, most narratives attribute crime and violence to external (colonial) forces.

In George Schneevoigt's *Eskimo* (1930), for example, the story follows a troubled gambler who flees to Greenland where Inuit offer refuge and human connection. Crime and brutality are here framed as intrusions by outsiders rather than part of indigenous society's fabric. Similarly, *Tukuma* (Palle Kjørulff-Schmidt, 1985) centres on a protagonist traveling to Greenland due to his brother's (unexplained) death, but shifts focus from murder mystery conventions toward his personal immersion in the warmth and tranquillity of Greenlandic culture.

This romanticised narrative contrasts with films exposing profound legal and moral conflicts between indigenous and colonial justice systems. Although not taking place in, but shot partly in Greenland, Nicholas Ray's *The Savage Innocents* (1960) remains relevant as an early Arctic screen narrative that stages criminality through the clash between indigenous moral worlds and

imposed colonial law. The film also carries a more specific Greenlandic relevance: while the story is broadly set in the Canadian Arctic, parts of it were shot in Ilulissat, making it an example of how Greenlandic locations have been mobilised visually and industrially to stand in for a more generic circumpolar imaginary of the Arctic and the Inuit. The film presents an Inuk hunter who, following a dispute leading to the accidental killing of a Christian missionary, is pursued for trial and execution under colonial law. The action is not viewed as illegal under his community's customary legal structure, which emphasizes the friction between clashing judicial frameworks. A pivotal exchange between the hunter and colonial troopers dramatises this clash, as he challenges the legitimacy of the imposed legal order. The narrative culminates with the hunter saving a trooper, producing a moral dilemma between duty and gratitude that underscores the film's broader concern with justice, imperialism, and the colonial production of crime.

Later Greenlandic productions shift attention inward, exploring moral decline and social tensions shaped by colonisation and modernisation. This is particularly clear around the first wave of Greenlandic filmmaking from the mid-1980s until the mid-2000s. Here, *Takorluukkat Sisamat* (Four Visions, Albert Nuka, 1985), possibly the first Greenlandic feature film production, follows Ujarak's descent into despair, driven by alcohol abuse. While largely a social realist melodrama, the film incorporates crime and courtroom drama elements to explore the consequences of lawlessness and personal breakdown within Nuuk's urban and coastal settings. Though initially a government-sponsored alcohol prevention film, it marks an early Greenlandic engagement with themes of crime and social disruption.

The later feature film *Lysets hjerte* (*Heart of Light*, Jacob Grønlykke, 1998) continues this exploration, focusing on family conflict and violence rooted in colonial trauma. The film's central crime is committed by Niisi, who murders three friends and then commits suicide after a series of escalating tensions during his brother's birthday party. As argued by Jette Rygaard and Birgit Kleist Pedersen (2003), these acts of violence are portrayed as symptomatic of fractured identities and unresolved trauma tied to Greenland's colonial past and cultural disintegration. The narrative contrasts urban familial strife with wilderness scenes depicting Rasmus' symbolic journey, where he confronts

mythical figures embodying colonial oppression and personal guilt, ultimately seeking reconciliation with his roots far away from urban settlements.

This historical overview reveals two dominant strands in Greenland-set screen fiction: an expedition strand developing into narratives of survival, isolation, and the breakdown of social norms in extreme Arctic environments; and an ethnographic strand, shaped largely by external perspectives, which portrays Inuit life through romanticised and exoticised imagery. Later, these have been increasingly supplemented – and at times challenged – by growing indigenous influence that reframe these narratives through local perspectives. Crime in these films functions not only as dramatic tension but also to explore broader themes such as isolation, lawlessness, cultural clash, and social transformation. The following section will analyse how post-2009 productions develop these dynamics.

Second wave crime: 2009–present

Since the onset of the second wave of Greenlandic filmmaking, there has been a notable growth in local film production alongside increasing interest from foreign companies, especially with the rise of streaming platforms. As I will argue, many thematic and narrative elements from earlier Greenlandic cinema persist into this period and beyond. This continuity is apparent not only in the rise and consolidation of Arctic Noir but also across other narrative forms. For clarity, the following analysis is organised into three key strands: local, Danish, and internationally oriented screen productions.

Ukiutoqqami Pilluaritsi (Happy New Year, 2019) exemplifies a Greenlandic crime narrative deeply rooted in place while shifting the focus away from social decay and towards comedy. Directed by Otto Rosing, the film follows Minik, a Swedish-speaking Greenlander raised in Sweden, who returns to Nuuk for Christmas. His outsider perspective exposes him to unfamiliar social dynamics as he becomes unwittingly involved in a comedy crime plot centred on stolen fireworks, the city's underworld and a romantic encounter. Firmly situated in Nuuk's urban environment, the film uses the city's physical and social spaces to shape narrative and character interactions. Unlike much of the contemporary fiction and documentary production focusing on urban decay, *Ukiutoqqami Pilluaritsi* presents Nuuk as a positive lively setting where crime is presented in a light-hearted and humorous way. The petty crimes serve as a

catalyst for humorous chaos rather than tension or moral conflict, challenging the social realistic strand of despair and lost identity.

By foregrounding Nuuk's urban spaces and Minik's cultural dislocation, *Ukiutoqqami Pilluaritsi* shows how place functions as a vital narrative and aesthetic resource. It challenges dominant portrayals by offering a playful, socially embedded vision of criminality. Similar spatial and genre blending occurs in works by other Greenlandic filmmakers such as Malik Kleist who also merge familiar genre elements with local settings and social complexities.

Kleist has significantly contributed to Greenlandic genre cinema with four horror films, notably the two-part series *Qaqqat Alanngui* (The Shadows of the Mountains, 2011) and *Alanngut Killinganni* (*The Edge of the Shadows*, 2022). These works blend supernatural horror with Greenlandic mythology, centring on the *qivittoq* – a restless figure from Greenlandic folklore – reimagined as a monstrous presence. In both films, the narratives connect the deadly awakening of the *qivittoq* to human environmental and cultural harm, such as littering and violating Inuit graves, portraying these crimes as a rupture in ecological and ancestral harmony. In this way, crime is not merely a catalyst for punishment, but a symbol of social and ecological imbalance, and the *qivittoq* functions both as a menacing force and a protector of nature, embodying conceptions of justice that integrate environmental stewardship.

By moving beyond traditional portrayals of isolation and social decay, contemporary Greenlandic cinema explores crime through diverse lenses to reflect evolving local realities. This ongoing innovation demonstrates how Greenlandic filmmakers continue to engage with both historical influences and contemporary challenges, crafting narratives that are rooted in their specific social and cultural contexts. Building on this, the following section shifts focus to Danish productions to explore how they, in contrast to indigenous production, directly confront the colonial past (and postcolonial present).

Colonial shadows and crimes of the past

In recent years, Danish cinema has increasingly engaged with Denmark's colonial past, exemplified by Frederikke Aspöck's *Viften* (*Empire*, 2023), set in 1848 in the Danish West Indies, which explores the complexities of colonial legacies through intimate personal narratives. A similarly critical engagement occurs in the context of Greenland's colonisation, where Louise Friedberg's *Eksperi-*

mentet (*The Experiment*, 2010) occupies a pivotal place as an examination of historical injustice manifested through institutional violence and systemic colonial oppression. The movie explores the 1951 Danish social experiment involving Greenlandic children who were relocated to Denmark under a colonial initiative marketed as benevolent care, education and assimilation, though it ultimately caused deep cultural and individual trauma (Jensen et al. 2020). The movie opens two years later as the children go back to an orphanage in Nuuk, where a recently hired Danish head nurse is directed by the authorities to fashion them into 'elite Danes' as role models for Greenlanders. The failure of this integration, however, splits the children's sense of self between two worlds, resulting in profound unhappiness. By exposing the mechanisms through which Danish state institutions enacted colonial violence, *The Experiment* reconfigures criminality as embedded within the apparatus of governance and assimilationist policies. The film's spatial setting in Nuuk's orphanage crystallises these colonial power dynamics, transforming the Greenlandic landscapes to a settler environment of surveillance, control, and dislocation that shapes the children's lived experiences. Furthermore, as argued by Louise Schou Therkildsen and Lisa Villadsen (2024 9–10), *The Experiment* presents colonialism as an ongoing moral failure characterised by systemic concealment, denial, and the erasure of survivors' experiences. They argue that this conceptualisation of colonialism resonates with broader public debates on collective memory, historical accountability, and moral reckoning, and the film's impact is evident in its contribution to shifting Danish discourse and paving the way for official apologies to survivors of the actual experiment.

Parallel to this historical narrative, the Danish feature film *Kalak* (Isabella Eklöf, 2022) explores the personal and social legacies of colonial trauma through a story set in Greenland, marked by substantial Greenlandic agency and involvement. Set in the late 1990s, the film follows Jan, a Danish nurse who relocates with his family to Nuuk. Haunted by trauma rooted in sexual abuse perpetrated by his father, he descends into destructive patterns of drug abuse as well as troubled relationships with local women. Haunted by unresolved trauma from his abusive father, Jan's family faces considerable distress and eventually moves to the small East coast settlement of Kulusuk. Despite the relocation, Jan's addiction worsens, leading to his return to Denmark.

While *The Experiment* documents institutionalised abuse, *Kalak* focuses on the affective and psychological aftermath tied to the white main character – sexual violence, addiction, and fractured family ties – as manifestations of colonial histories. By doing so, it extends the notion of criminality to include intergenerational trauma and social marginalisation within Greenlandic society. The film's unflinching portrayal of substance abuse and domestic strife engages with deeply embedded prejudices, but relocates them onto its white protagonist rather than projecting them onto Greenlandic characters. It thus confronts the ongoing psychological and social scars of colonialism, moving beyond reductive stereotypes or solely historical victimhood to illuminate complex social realities.²

Taken together, *The Experiment* and *Kalak* exemplify how Danish-led screen productions increasingly confront public discourses surrounding colonialism, systemic violence, and their enduring impact. They reveal the multifaceted nature of colonial wrongdoing – both institutional and intimate – and engage Danish audiences in processes of moral reflection, historical reckoning, and reimagining Danish-Greenlandic relations.

The emergence of Greenland-set Arctic Noir

Building on the preceding trajectory of Greenland-set crime narratives, the emergence of Arctic Noir marks a significant development in the overall history traced in this article. Rather than constituting a wholly new departure, Arctic Noir brings together and reconfigures several tendencies already present in earlier Greenland-set screen fiction: the spatial isolation and survivalism of expedition narratives, the geopolitical tensions of Cold War thrillers, and the legal and moral conflicts shaped by colonial relations. What Arctic Noir contributes, then, is a more explicit crime-based framework through which these tensions can be articulated in contemporary terms, especially in relation to postcolonial power, indigenous agency, environmental crisis, and Arctic geopolitics. Within this context, the Swedish TV serial *Tunn is* (*Thin Ice*, Viaplay, 2020) and the Danish political drama TV series *Borgen: Riget, Magten & Æren* (*Borgen: Power & Glory*, DR/Netflix, 2022) exemplify how Arctic Noir crystallises

2. For a in-depth on- and off-screen analysis of *Kalak*, see Grønlund 2026.

es these older and newer tendencies into narratively and aesthetically distinct productions set in Greenlandic urban and rural landscapes.

Thin Ice exemplifies how contemporary Greenland-set crime narratives negotiate inherited colonial imaginaries alongside emerging indigenous expressions (see also Grønlund 2022; Agger 2021). Set amid the stark landscapes of East Greenland, the series unfolds as a politically charged crime thriller centred on a violent attack during an Arctic Council meeting, immediately foregrounding the region's contested sovereignty and geopolitical tensions with connections to the Cold War thrillers of the 1990s. The plot begins with sabotage aboard a research vessel; a violent incident that triggers an investigation revealing a wider conspiracy involving espionage, political corruption, and attempts to control Arctic resource negotiations. Throughout the serial, crimes are intricately linked to the power struggles that define the Arctic's geopolitical landscape, supplemented by a new focus on indigenous perspectives. In other words, the fractures of the welfare state commonly explored in Nordic Noir are here displaced onto postcolonial relations between and beyond Nordic countries – a pattern also evident in other Arctic Noir stories set in regions such as Sápmi and Iceland, for example *Midnatssol* (*Midnight Sun*, SVT/Canal+ 2016) and *Ófærð* (*Trapped*, RVK Studios, 2015–2021).

In this way, Greenlandic characters play a central role in *Thin Ice*, embodying evolving indigenous agency within these fraught political landscapes. Enok Lyngé, a Greenlandic police officer, anchors the investigation with local insight and moral clarity often missing from outsider perspectives. On the other hand, his wife Ina's struggles with alcoholism reflect some of the existing social challenges in postcolonial Greenland, while the young activist Kimmernaq embodies indigenous resistance and the push for climate justice and political autonomy. Far from being passive characters, Greenlandic politicians in the series wrestle with tensions between economic development, particularly through mining projects promising financial independence, and the preservation of cultural and environmental integrity, foregrounding themes of identity and self-determination amid global power pressures.

The series also critiques Danish-Greenlandic relations through figures such as Danish foreign minister Martin Overgaard, whose ignorance of Greenlandic realities underscores persistent colonial attitudes and asymmetrical power dynamics. By employing and then complicating national stereotypes among

Arctic Council delegates, *Thin Ice* reflects shifting alliances and mistrust within Arctic governance. Crucially, Greenlandic perspectives remain central, challenging the dominant gaze and claiming narrative space within international crime fiction.

In this vein, *Borgen: Power & Glory* (DR/Netflix, 2022) further expands the Arctic Noir framework, intertwining political intrigue with noir aesthetics to foreground the fraught and complex relationship between Denmark and Greenland. As in the original three seasons of *Borgen* (DR, 2010–2013), Birgitte Nyborg remains the main character, now serving as Denmark's Foreign Minister, whose role encapsulates the moral and political ambiguities inherent in Danish-Greenlandic relations. As in *Thin Ice*, the catalyst of political intrigue is an oil discovery, which stages the clash between climate politics, power struggles, and the fragile relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Nyborg's subsequent attempts to balance Greenland's push for self-determination against Denmark's geopolitical and environmental agendas reveal the tensions arising from continued dependency relations. Greenlandic characters exhibit significant narrative agency, articulating indigenous perspectives on sovereignty and challenging external exploitation, particularly through Hans Eliassen, Greenland's Foreign Minister, and Emmy Rasmussen, a government official who questions Danish paternalism. While primarily a political drama, the series deploys crime narrative conventions, particularly through the questionable death of Malik, a Greenlandic young man whose apparent suicide triggers deeper inquiries into structural corruption and geopolitical exploitation. This event echoes Arctic Noir traditions, positioning crime as a symptom of colonial legacies rather than isolated wrongdoing.

Aesthetically, *Borgen: Power & Glory* exemplifies Arctic Noir through its dramatic deployment of Greenland's striking landscapes – vast ice fields, colourful urban settlements, melting glaciers, and harsh climatic conditions – which function as metaphors for political instability, environmental fragility, and contested sovereignty, forming a critical visual language that confronts both the climate crisis and geopolitical tensions. As argued elsewhere (Grønlund & Waade 2024), the series represents a multilayered contestedness tied to Greenland in distinct ways: culturally, through postcolonial tensions between Denmark and Greenland; politically, via competing international interests in

its natural resources; and environmentally, as Arctic landscapes rapidly transform under global warming.

This is fundamentally shared by *Thin Ice*, as both narratives use politically charged crimes to catalyse investigations into broader systemic corruption surrounding oil exploration and Arctic governance. Consequently, Arctic Noir highlights the main point of this study: that criminal elements in films and series set in Greenland serve not so much as consistent generic indicators, but as adaptable storytelling tools used to address evolving conflicts involving legal systems, authority, geography, and fairness. In *Thin Ice* and *Borgen: Power & Glory*, crime becomes a way of linking local Greenlandic realities to transnational struggles over sovereignty, resources, climate, and colonial afterlives.

Taken together, *Thin Ice* and *Borgen: Power & Glory* show how Arctic Noir emerges as both a continuation and a reconfiguration of long-standing cinematic traditions. It inherits visual and narrative elements from expedition films, ethnographic representations, Cold War thrillers, and Nordic Noir, but reorganises them around contemporary concerns with postcolonial injustice, indigenous political agency, and environmental exploitation. Arctic Noir is therefore important to this study not simply as a recent subgenre, but as a contemporary form in which the longer history of Greenland-set crime narratives becomes newly legible. Despite relying on conventional visual and narrative frameworks, both series prioritize indigenous outlooks, interpret crime through the lens of colonial history and nature exploitation, and give prominence to Greenlandic leadership and action. In doing so, they mediate between continuity and disruption, alongside the interplay of specific local details and transnational genre tropes, framing Arctic Noir as a crossbred category that simultaneously critiques and reconfigures its inherited patterns.

Tracing characteristics of Greenland-set crime in fiction

Across more than a century of screen portrayals, crime has functioned as a recurring (though flexible) narrative device. Rather than constituting a stable genre category, crime in this context traverse multiple modes of storytelling, from early ethnographic and expedition films to contemporary political dramas, horror, social realism, and Arctic Noir. What characterises Greenland-set crime narratives, therefore, is not a uniform faithfulness to crime genre conventions, but the persistent mobilisation of criminal acts, transgressions, or

legal ambiguities to dramatise broader tensions both cultural, social, environmental, and geopolitical.

This versatility presents significant possibilities. Crime – in both literal and symbolic forms – allows filmmakers to address difficult themes such as addiction, violence, cultural loss, colonial injustice, environmental harm, and sovereignty struggles. It functions as a narrative bridge between past and present, external and internal perspectives, individual psychology and collective experience. Moreover, it facilitates a form of place-based storytelling where specific settings (e.g. Nuuk, Ilulissat or East Greenlandic settlements) are not just backdrops but integral to the way crime is visualised, explained, and felt. In this sense, the Greenlandic landscape remains a central shaping force: an aesthetic and thematic presence that conditions how wrongdoing is framed and understood.

At the same time, the use of crime as a structuring motif is not without challenges. One issue is the risk of narrative repetition or thematic saturation, especially when crime becomes the default device through which Greenland is represented, particularly in works produced by outsiders. Over-representation of social dysfunction or constant political conflict may inadvertently reinforce narrow understandings of Greenlandic life, limiting the range of stories that circulate internationally. Furthermore, there are structural constraints: with relatively few locally managed productions, the narrative terms are still largely defined by external filmmakers, which may reproduce asymmetries in creative control, perspective, and thematic emphasis.

Finally, the political stakes of these narratives remain significant. Whether crime is portrayed as individual misdeed, social rupture, or institutional injustice, it frequently gestures towards unresolved tensions in Greenland's post-colonial condition. These include struggles over sovereignty, memory, justice, and self-representation – all of which are enacted through and around questions of transgression, responsibility, and reparation. As such, Greenland-set crime narratives are not simply stories about wrongdoing; they are vehicles for negotiating the shifting boundaries between law and power, culture and identity, past and future.

In sum, what characterises Greenland-set crime narratives is their historical continuity, genre hybridity, thematic depth, and strong place-based orientation. Their possibilities lie in the way they can articulate complex, often

underrepresented realities of Greenlandic society and history. Their challenges lie in questions of representation, repetition, and structural inequality both within narratives and in the broader systems of screen production. As Greenland's film culture continues to evolve, the ongoing reimagining of crime as a narrative tool will remain an important part of how its stories engage local and global audiences.

Conclusion

Overall, this analysis has shown that crime in Greenlandic film and television fiction functions not merely as a genre element but as a flexible and persistent narrative device across a wide range of productions, periods, and formats. From early expedition films and ethnographic dramas to contemporary Greenlandic horror, social realism, and political thrillers, it is often the presence of crime – whether in the form of violence, wrongdoing, institutional failure, or cultural conflict – that drives the plot and foregrounds broader concerns with justice, identity, and power.

Greenland-set crime narratives are characterised by their genre hybridity, strong spatial embeddedness, and ability to interweave local experiences with global genre conventions. They offer distinct possibilities for exploring postcolonial tensions, environmental precarity, and indigenous self-representation, while also presenting challenges in terms of narrative repetition, stereotypical tropes, and external control over storytelling frameworks.

Tracing the use of crime in Greenlandic screen narratives reveals a much longer trajectory than the relatively recent emergence of Arctic Noir might suggest. Already in early twentieth-century adventure and ethnographic films, crime served as a narrative tool to explore isolation, survival, and moral ambiguity in the Arctic periphery. Contemporary developments, particularly the rise of Arctic Noir, can be seen as a continuation and reconfiguration of these earlier traditions. Rather than being a totally new genre, Arctic Noir merges elements from Nordic Noir, such as characters, moral complexity and social critique, with longer-standing cinematic traditions including frontier adventure, Cold War thrillers, and ethnographic representations of the Arctic.

As such, Arctic Noir exemplifies how crime in Greenlandic screen fiction brings together inherited genre conventions and contemporary geopolitical realities. It functions not only as a narrative structure but also as a means of

negotiating shifting conceptions of law, sovereignty, and representation in a postcolonial context.

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