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To cite this article: Janina Priebe (2018) A modern mine? Greenlandic media coverage on the mining community of Qullissat, western Greenland, 1942–1968, *The Polar Journal*, 8:1, 141-162, DOI: [10.1080/2154896X.2018.1468620](https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2018.1468620)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2018.1468620>



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Published online: 31 Jul 2018.



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A modern mine? Greenlandic media coverage on the mining community of Qullissat, western Greenland, 1942–1968

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ABSTRACT

During the first half of the twentieth century, the coalmine of Qullissat on Disko Island in western Greenland was at the centre of visions of an industrial future for the then Danish dependency. The closure of the mine and resettlement of the community in 1972 was thus marked by confusion, and became a key event in the political development of modern Greenland. This qualitative study analyses the representation of Qullissat in two Greenlandic newspapers, *Grønlandsposten* and *Atuagadliutit/Grønlandsposten*, between 1942 and 1968. It seeks to add a layer of understanding to the history of the mining community by drawing attention to the framing of Qullissat's future in public discourse, using newspapers as a historical source. During the Second World War and well into the 1950s, media coverage of Qullissat focused on the modernisation measures initiated by the Danish mine management based on expert assessments. From the mid-1960s, however, the representations of Greenlandic workers as not matching modern industrial ideas created the impression of a community that was no longer viable in the postcolonial setting. In many respects, this media discourse reflects a perceived dichotomy between Denmark as a modern society, and Greenland as non-modern and dependent.

KEYWORDS

Greenland; Qullissat; media narrative; history of mining; modernisation; post-colonialism

Few human activities are as profoundly associated with the potential to alter both the environment and society as mining.¹ In the history of the Arctic, a region remote from the centres of colonial power, mining was all the more tied to developing nature and people towards modernity.² Echoing this coupling of economic and cultural development, the coalmine of Qullissat on Disko Island in western Greenland (see Figure 1) was at the centre of visions of an industrial Greenland during the first half of the twentieth century. Greenland, the Arctic's largest island, was formally integrated into the Kingdom of Denmark in 1953. Long before this, following the arrival of Danish-Norwegian missionaries in the 1720s, Danish authorities had idealised and aimed at preserving the Greenlandic hunting culture. From the early 1900s, however, the colony had become increasingly integrated into the global arena.³

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¹Bridge, "Contested Terrain."

²Forsell, "Modernizing the Economic Landscapes of the North," 199; Huggan, "Introduction: Unscrambling the Arctic," 16.

³Priebe, "From Siam to Greenland."



Figure 1. Disko Island in western Greenland. Map created by, and published with the permission of, Hans van der Maarel.

Now, it was the mineworkers of Qullissat, rather than seal hunters in small settlements, who stood for the modern Greenland that reformers imagined. Against this backdrop, the closure of the Qullissat coalmine and the resettlement of the community in 1972 were marked by confusion. For those affected by the closure, it was unclear whether the Danish authorities or Greenlandic representatives were responsible for the final decision to abandon

⁴Sørensen, *Byen der ikke vil dø* [*The Town that did not Want to Die*], 161.

the mining community at a time when operations had become less profitable. To many, the demise of Qullissat became the symbol of a faceless, market-oriented post-war economy.⁴

Coal was first mined in the Disko Bay area in the early 1780s;⁵ however, mining operations were not launched in the location of Qullissat until 1924, when the mining settlement was established there. From this time onwards, the community on Disko Island grew rapidly; it became one of Greenland's largest and fastest-growing settlements in the 1930s.⁶ The Qullissat coalmine was owned by the Danish state, and managed by a team of Danish and foreign experts. The mineworkers, however, were almost exclusively Greenlandic.⁷ They came from different settlements with their families and created a unique form of urban community in Greenland. In many ways, the mining community of Qullissat embodied the new direction in Greenland's governance during the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Between the 1940s and the late 1960s, the mining community of Qullissat developed against a backdrop of shifting political discourse on Greenland's governance, as the dependency's role in world politics became significantly more complex. During the Second World War, coal from Qullissat had covered Greenland's energy needs, when Danish supplies were cut off by the German occupation of Copenhagen in April 1940.⁸ After the war, Denmark was forced to adapt its governance model in Greenland, in light of the ongoing and significant presence of the US military. The early cold war catapulted the Arctic island to the centre of global war strategies.⁹ Modernising Greenland under Denmark's auspices became essential: for legitimately integrating the dependency into the Kingdom as a Danish municipality; for securing authority over it; and for throwing off Denmark's unwanted label of a colonial power in the post-war era.¹⁰

Promises of a bright future for the mining community of Qullissat were variously repeated and broken during these decades. In communicating political decisions, the media functioned not only as a channel for information, but also set the focus and tone for public debate by presenting information in a particular way.¹¹ The resulting news discourse can be viewed as a "sociocognitive process," involving creators and audience simultaneously.¹²

This article explores representations of Qullissat in Greenland's major Danish-language news outlet *Grønlandsposten*, which was in print from 1942 until 1951, and in the bilingual newspaper *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten (A/G)*, between 1952 and 1968.¹³ The study largely follows a narrative approach that is concerned with style and register, and focuses on vocabulary, arguments and explanations.¹⁴ Identifying these elements in historical media sources allows us to trace the discursive construction of intended and imagined futures.

⁵Secher and Burchardt, "Ingeniør M. Nyeboe," 250.

⁶On Disko Island, coal was first mined at Kaersuarsuk in 1906. Sørensen, *Byen der ikke vil dø* [*The Town That did not Want to Die*], 60.

⁷Sejersen, "Large-scale Mining," 172; Jørgensen, "Minder og eftermæler."

⁸On April 9, 1940, Henrik Kauffmann (1888–1963), Danish ambassador to the United States, negotiated a treaty with the U.S. regarding the defence of Greenland against German aggression. In 1941, he signed the agreement that marked the beginning of U.S. military presence in Greenland. Although contested by the Governors in Greenland, Aksel Svane and Eske Brun, and dismissed by the Copenhagen government, Kauffmann was acknowledged by the U.S. as the highest representative of Danish interests. Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 65.

⁹Heymann et al., "Exploring Greenland," 40.

¹⁰Beukel et al., *Phasing out the Colonial Status*, 68.

¹¹Tankard, "Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing," 96.

¹²Pan and Kosicki, "Framing Analysis," 55.

¹³The Danish *Grønlandsposten* and the Greenlandic *Atuagagdliutit*, Greenland's oldest newspaper founded in 1861, were merged in 1952. Both newspapers are available in digitised form on the collaborative website Timarit, run by the national libraries of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland (timarit.is. – Tímarit Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn).

¹⁴Bednarek, *Evaluation in Media Discourse*, 11.

Rather than providing an extensive media analysis, this qualitative study seeks to add a layer of understanding to the history of Qullissat and draw attention to the framing of the community's future in the two major newspapers associated with the region at the time.¹⁵

The temporal scope of this study comprises the newspapers' coverage from *Grønlandsposten's* foundation in 1942 until 1968, when the Greenland Provincial Council (Grønlands Landsråd) silently accepted the closure of the coalmine in Qullissat and finalised the decision to resettle all inhabitants.¹⁶ Media references to the mine and the town of Qullissat have been included in the analysis to emphasise both Qullissat's character as a mining community and the shifting focus of the media coverage between the mine and mineworkers. The analysis has been guided by the following questions: How did the newspapers present Qullissat's future between 1942 and 1968? What were the major phases in the media representation of Qullissat? Who did the newspapers credit with defining and realising Qullissat as a "modern mine"?

The newspapers *Grønlandsposten* and *A/G*

The Greenlandic newspaper *Atuagagdliutit* was founded as an educating paper in 1861. On the initiative of Hinrich J. Rink (1819–1893), inspector for the colony of South Greenland and later the director of the state-led organisation managing the monopoly trade, Kongelige Grønlandske Handel (KGH), *Atuagagdliutit* was financed by the colonial administration and freely distributed once per year. It featured translations of Danish literature, while Greenlandic authors contributed articles on various topics relevant to the communities, such as hunting conditions. In the words of Knud Oldendow (1892–1975), director of the Greenland Administration from 1938 until 1949, *Atuagagdliutit* aimed to further the Greenlanders' cultural development from an "Esquimo community into a people".¹⁷ Owned by the Danish state until 1952, it was Greenland's oldest and most widely read newspaper.

By contrast, *Grønlandsposten* was founded in 1942 for Danes living in Greenland, who found themselves cut off from communication and transport links to Denmark during the Second World War.¹⁸ Coming about 70 years after the first edition of *Atuagagdliutit*, the founding of *Grønlandsposten* reflected Greenland's growing geopolitical importance. The staff of *Grønlandsposten* was drawn from among the Danes in Greenland, including zoologist Christian Vibe (1913–1998), who was stranded after an expedition in 1940. The Governor of North Greenland, Eske Brun (1904–1987), was in control of the island's administration in exile. In 1941, he assigned Vibe and Kristoffer Lyng (1894–1967), Greenlandic journalist and editor of *Atuagagdliutit*, to establish a telegram news service in Godthaab. Using an American transmitter, the service provided summaries of radio news, which were distributed to telegraph stations within reach.¹⁹ In order to provide more detailed information as the war progressed, *Grønlandsposten* first appeared in March 1942, with Vibe as the chief editor. In the newspaper's early years, Vibe was largely responsible for generating the content of *Grønlandsposten*. Privately owned but officially aided, the paper also acted as Governor Brun's mouthpiece, supporting the "new pulse in Greenland's society".²⁰ Brun

¹⁵For the role of media discourse in shaping Greenlandic self-perception, see Thisted, "Discourses of Indigeneity."

¹⁶Andersen et al. provide a detailed account of the somewhat opaque decision-making process that led to the mine's closure and the resettlement of the community's inhabitants in 1972. Andersen et al., "Qullissat."

¹⁷Oldendow, *Printing in Greenland*, 28.

¹⁸Meier, *Zeitungen auf Grönland* [Newspapers in Greenland], 72.

¹⁹Ibid., 69–70.

²⁰"... nye Puls slag i det grønlandske Samfund." Therkilsen, "Vejen videre frem," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 4), October 16, 1947, 79.

became a charismatic advocate for reform and the modernisation of Greenland's society and economy after the war. *Grønlandsposten* appeared only in Danish. In the mid-1940s, it had a maximum print run of 1,200 copies, at a time when the total population of Greenland was approximately 20,000, including about 400 Danish civil servants.²¹

With the end of the Second World War, *Grønlandsposten* lost its *raison d'être* as a wartime news channel for Danes stranded in Greenland. After 1945, the newspaper's chief editors were no longer based in the colony, but in Copenhagen. As the readership began to decline, circulation numbers sank. In 1952, *Grønlandsposten* merged with *Atuagagdliutit*, and Lyngé, who had also been a member of the South Greenland Provincial Council, was appointed chief editor of the new bilingual newspaper, *A/G*, until 1953.

A/G was financed by a relatively low purchase price per copy, advertisements (in the beginning mostly by the Royal Greenland Trade Department), and regular financial support from the Danish state.²² It featured current news from Greenland and international developments relevant to local communities, as well as an extensive *feuilleton* (cultural supplement). At the end of the 1950s, *A/G* sold about 4,500 copies – the equivalent of one copy per household in the capital of Godthaab. *A/G* was distributed to all larger coastal settlements and several smaller communities. Since 1960, the vast majority of its audience comprised Greenlandic readers. In addition, there were about 500 subscribers in Copenhagen, Sweden, Iceland, the United States and Canada.²³

From 1942 until 1962, the chief editors of both *Grønlandsposten* and *A/G* were, with one exception, Danes with backgrounds in journalism and typography, who had not previously been to Greenland. For these Danish editors, *Grønlandsposten* (and later *A/G*) was a stepping stone before they returned to Denmark to take up new positions. In Denmark, newspapers linked to the Social Democrats party employed all the chief editors of *Grønlandsposten*, except for its founder, Christian Vibe, while Kristoffer Lyngé's successors at *A/G*, Palle Brandt and Ernst Erngaard, both took up positions at newspapers directly linked to or supporting the liberal-conservative Venstre party. From 1962, however, the Greenlandic journalist Jørgen Fleischer led *A/G* for more than two decades.²⁴

These connections reflect the pro-reform position of *Grønlandsposten* and *A/G* during the middle decades of the twentieth century. In 1947, Denmark's minority government, led by the Social Democrats, initiated the state-led modernisation reforms in Greenland that marked a radically new phase in Greenland's post-war governance. At its core was the Greenland Commission of 1948, a government-appointed group of Danish and Greenlandic officials, as well as representatives from private industry.²⁵ In 1950, the Commission published its report, commonly known as G-50, which provided the foundation for reorienting and diversifying the dependency's economy towards industrialisation, as well as opening the state monopoly to Danish businesses. The G-50 reforms did not result in significant private investment in Greenland, however. In 1960, a follow-up commission, known as G-60, recommended that state-led initiatives instead be designed to advance the industrialisation

²¹Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 79.

²²Meier, *Zeitungen auf Grönland* [*Newspapers in Greenland*], 83.

²³*Ibid.*, 90–94.

²⁴The chief editors of *Grønlandsposten* were Christian Vibe, 1942–1947; Kjeld Rask Therkilsen, 1947–1949; and Jacob Sehested Grove, 1949–1951. The chief editors of *A/G* were Kristoffer Lyngé, 1952–1953 (together with Helge Christensen); Palle Brandt, 1953–1957; Erik Erngaard, 1960–62; and Jørgen Fleischer, 1962–1987.

²⁵The Commission's main body consisted of sixteen members, and the total number including the sub-commissions reached 105 members. For details, see Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 101.

of Greenland's economy. The primary goal was to build up large-scale fisheries and concentrate settlements to provide an industrial workforce for this new sector. These policies stood for a widely acknowledged, yet contested, position within Danish politics and among Greenlandic representatives.²⁶

As a media outlet, *Grønlandsposten* supported comprehensive administrative reforms during and after the Second World War. *A/G* and *Atuagagdliutit*, one of its predecessors, are comparable only to a very limited extent. Whereas *Atuagagdliutit* had the character of a cultural magazine, *A/G* responded to demand for information on current developments and was, in that sense, a direct successor of *Grønlandsposten* as a news outlet.²⁷

Especially after 1945, journalist publications like *Grønlandsposten* critiqued traditional colonial policy and promoted new ideas that were later taken up in policy directions, such as the partial privatisation of mining operations. Historian Finn Gad notes that critical journalism publications laid the foundation for the radical modernisation initiated in the 1950s and 1960s:

The members of parliament awakened, and the common Danes who grew up with romantic ideals [...] and the assumption that Greenland was in the best hands, were pulled out of their illusions.²⁸

Grønlandsposten, and later *A/G*, were among the publications that set the tone in debates about Greenland's future and formed a frame for understanding the current situation.²⁹ They also contributed to influencing the self-perception of their readers: *Grønlandsposten* was mainly read by Danish civil servants and their families, whereas *A/G* had a predominantly Greenlandic audience. From 1942 and 1952, respectively, these outlets expressed a particular notion of Greenland's future within the public-political debate on modernisation measures and administrative reforms. For these reasons, the surviving media discourse on Qullissat, the mining community that secured Greenland's energy supply during the Second World War, provides a particularly insightful and important lens through which to consider the narratives that fed into the debates over Greenland's future in the twentieth century.

The pillar of Greenland's energy supply, 1942–1945

In 1940, the Greenland Delegation in New York took control of the island's trade and supplies, after Governors Eske Brun and Aksel Svane declared their authority over the dependency in the "exceptional circumstances" created by the German Occupation of Copenhagen.³⁰ However, it was vital to the provisional central administration, established by Brun and Svane, to make Greenland's economy as autonomous (and its supply as independent) as possible. During the Second World War, *Grønlandsposten*'s coverage of Qullissat focused on the coalmine's production and emphasised its essential role in securing wartime energy supplies, which helped to minimise foreign imports and influence over Greenland's governance.

On the front page of the newly founded *Grønlandsposten* in September 1942, Governor Brun authored an article on "The supply problem".³¹ Brun reported that US shipping supplies to the settlements scattered along Greenland's west coast had become difficult since

²⁶DIIIS, *Afvikling af Grønlands kolonistatus [Phasing out Greenland's colonial status]*, 24–25.

²⁷From the 1930s, Qullissat was regularly mentioned in *Atuagagdliutit* before it merged with *Grønlandsposten*. These representations remain to be analysed by scholars with Greenlandic language skills.

²⁸Gad, *Grønland [Greenland]*, 285.

²⁹Davies et al., "Framing a Climate Change Frontier in Greenland," 482.

³⁰Dunbar, "Greenland," 125.

³¹Brun, "Førsyningsproblemet," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 13), September 16, 1942, 145–6.

the formerly neutral United States had entered the war with the allied forces in December 1941. The Americans, the governor stated, now prioritised the war effort and were eager to restructure the logistics of Greenland's supply. According to Brun, the central administration thus planned to establish transit storage facilities in larger settlements, like Sukkertoppen and Godthaab, each focusing on specific goods, such as salt and wood. Each transit centre would have extensive storage facilities and infrastructure for distributing supplies to smaller settlements. Under this plan, Qullissat would be the main transit centre for technical material, especially the tools and supplies needed in forges. Brun announced that the construction would start in the same year.

The Qullissat coalmine already served as the primary source of Greenland's wartime energy supply. Ships departing from Qullissat distributed coal to the major settlements along the west coast, serving all colonial districts from Kap Farvel on the southern tip up to Thule in the North.³² Trade inspector Axel Malmquist concluded in an account of Greenland's economic situation in 1943 that Qullissat's increased production had allowed the colony to stock up on coal supplies that would last until the following summer.³³ Additionally, in his account for 1944, Malmquist emphasised in *Grønlandsposten* that there had been no need to import coal for household purposes thanks to Qullissat's growing exploitation rates.³⁴

Annual coal production had almost doubled in the 20 years since mining operations were launched in Qullissat in the mid-1920s, despite the fact that most work was still done manually and without electric lighting in the shaft. The coalmine's strategic importance during the Second World War motivated the central administration to invest in modern equipment to make extraction more efficient.³⁵ Moreover, the residential area for mineworkers and their families, as well as the infrastructure of the mining community, were extended and modernised. Both the inhabitants and the authorities invested in the community. They acted on the assumption that Qullissat had bright prospects. For instance, a brief notice in *Grønlandsposten* in August 1943 announced that a device for movie screenings had been installed, paid for by Qullissat's inhabitants.³⁶ In January 1945, the newspaper reported that the new hospital, under construction since 1943, was now fully operational. Its design and structure were unique in Greenland: the wards were south facing, while a special unit for tuberculosis patients was separated by a heavy door to minimise the risk of transmission.³⁷ The installation of a new X-ray machine was planned for the summer of 1946.³⁸

When *Grønlandsposten* announced the German surrender on 16 May 1945, it reported that Denmark's liberation was celebrated in various major settlements. The festivities in Qullissat were described in great detail, including, for instance, how the cinema's loudspeakers were used to provide music as part of the celebrations in the town.³⁹ This report illustrates the importance of events in Qullissat for people in other settlements, demonstrating the significance of the mining community to Greenland as a whole.

³²"Store forsyninger ankommet til Grønland," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 7), June 16, 1942, 76. The listed destinations were Godthaab, Holsteinsborg, Thule, Jakobshavn, Sukkertoppen, Upernavik, Frederikshaab, Egedesminde, Umanak, and Christianshaab.

³³Malmquist, "Grønlandske handels- og erhvervsforhold etc. ved udgangen af 1943," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 24), December 16, 1943, 277–80.

³⁴In 1943 and 1944, the Qullissat coalmine produced 6000 and 7000 tons per annum respectively. "Grønlands besejlings- og handelsforhold etc. i 1944," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 3), February 1, 1945, 25–29.

³⁵"K'utdligssat gennem 30 år," *A/G*, August 5, 1965, 10.

³⁶"Film til Kutdligssat," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 15), August 1, 1943, 176.

³⁷"Det nye sygehus i Kudligssat," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 2), January 16, 1945, 16.

³⁸"Sundhedsmæssige og sociale spørgsmål," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 6), July 1, 1946, 136.

³⁹"Vild jubel og glæde over hele Grønland," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 10), May 16, 1945, 116.

In December 1945, Brun presented another front-page article in *Grønlandsposten* with a positive outlook for Greenland's economic and cultural development after the war, while simultaneously lauding the achievements made during the isolation from Denmark. Again, Brun emphasised that the Qullissat coalmine was vital to Greenland's self-sufficiency, which had advanced on all levels. The increased extraction rates of the mine reflected the successful management of Greenland under the central administration during the war. Brun concluded that the independent Danish leadership had succeeded in improving Greenlanders' wealth and wellbeing:

The Danish administration in Greenland is founded solely on this one pillar: the wellbeing of the Greenlandic people [...]. Looking at how the situation developed, we were not only able to avert a depression. The rising curve, which characterised the interwar period, continues.⁴⁰

In the governor's view, it had always been Denmark's intention to "help Greenland and the Greenlanders",⁴¹ an attitude that set apart Danish colonialism from the imperial ventures of other states.⁴² In this spirit, *Grønlandsposten* presented the coalmine and community of Qullissat as a showcase of the economic and social development Danish authorities had facilitated in the colony during the war. For instance, the town's hospital epitomised the reforms in health services, especially concerning tuberculosis.

Anticipating the rush for mineral resources, 1945–1947

In the immediate post-war period, Greenland's future was debated in a setting that had undergone radical change. The profound administrative reforms that occurred during the war challenged the rebuilding of relations with mainland Denmark. As historian Axel Kjær Sørensen points out, Brun emerged as the "uncrowned king of Greenland", as the governor was titled by the Social Democrats' newspaper *Social-Demokraten* in August 1945.⁴³ Economically, the colony was closely tied to the United States. For Denmark, the challenge of balancing military protection and political sovereignty over a territory it had not been able to control during wartime marked the early cold war period. Mineral resources in the colony also became strategically important from an economic and political viewpoint, as Greenland's sales of cryolite (a mineral used in aluminium production) had become crucial during the Second World War in the production of aircraft.⁴⁴ The forerunners of the Greenland Commission, appointed in 1948, began to negotiate, among other issues, the wish of many in Greenland to open the state monopoly and allow Danish and foreign investment in the colony. In support of this, *Grønlandsposten* suggested there might be a gold rush atmosphere when it came to Greenland's mineral riches immediately after the war. The promise of an effective (at least partial) privatisation of the Greenlandic economy was a key theme of the media narrative in the years 1945–1947.

⁴⁰Dansk Styre i Grønland har i Virkeligheden kun den ene Grundpille, Fremmet af den grønlandske Befolknings Velfærd [...]. Som Forholdene udviklede sig, undgik vi ikke blot en Sækning. Den opgaaende Kurve, som havde karakteriseret Aarene mellem Krigene, fortsattes." Brun, "Grønland i adskillelsens aar," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 18), December 1, 1945, 258–73, 263.

⁴¹Cited in Heinrich, "Eske Brun og det moderne Grønlands tilblivelse" [Eske Brun and the Formation of Modern Greenland], 59.

⁴²Jensen, "Danishness as Whiteness in Crisis," 108.

⁴³Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 82.

⁴⁴Taagholt and Brooks, "Mineral Riches," 361.

In 1946, *Grønlandsposten* published an extensive background piece on the history and prospects of Greenland's mineral resources.⁴⁵ The article stated that, in contrast to the east coast, where the geologist Lauge Koch (1892–1964) had explored large stretches of soil, the west coast had not received much attention. A geological survey for the purpose of finding commercially viable quantities of minerals had begun in 1938 but was terminated with the German occupation of Copenhagen. The article's author used the coalmine of Qullissat as an example of how production in Greenland's extractive sector could be considerably higher if more investments were made:

This coalmine produced between 7–8,000 tons [per annum] in recent years, but it aims at 12,000. However, this cannot happen with the equipment available today. It is thus planned to acquire an excavator and a handling plant.⁴⁶

At a time when the mineworkers were doing most of the work manually, investment in the mechanisation of mineral extraction was central to the vision of Greenland's economic viability in the post-war years. The author of the article further suggested (in line with the prevailing view of the reformers):

The time is long gone when we could look at Greenland as a nature reserve where Denmark's only task was to protect a primitive people from the perils of civilisation and slowly raise them to European culture.⁴⁷ *Grønlandsposten* suggested that private initiatives should take on these tasks, though closely monitored by state authorities, which would hopefully "keep their hands off the practical side of the matter".⁴⁸

At the end of the war, however, there were conflicting opinions on how to open Greenland to private capital. The Danish private sector showed little concrete interest in the G-50 reforms. Yet, visions of "unimaginable riches in Greenland, if only the right people would come along"⁴⁹ remained powerful. They had been at the core of critiques of the colonial state monopoly since it was established in the mid-eighteenth century.⁵⁰ Almost two centuries later, the idea had not lost its appeal.

In spring 1947, *Grønlandsposten's* editor, Vibe, interviewed Knud Oldendow (1892–1975). Director of the Greenland Administration, Oldendow had not been able to enter the cut-off colony during the war. Now, Oldendow announced that the modernisation of the Qullissat coalmine was under way and that several state investments (for example, in a new power plant and transformers) were planned: "The coal exploitation in Qullissat is being extended [...]. In the course of the summer, the production will hopefully gain momentum".⁵¹ Again, the Qullissat coalmine was presented as an essential part of Greenland's post-war economy.

⁴⁵"Grønlands undergrund. Omfattende ekspeditioner skal sendes til Grønland i sommer," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 4), June 1, 1946, 82–85.

⁴⁶"Dette kulbrud har i de senere aar haft en kapacitet paa 7–8000 tons, men vil nu søge at komme op paa 12,000 tons. Dette kan ikke ske med det material, man i øjeblikket raader over, hvorfor det er meningen at anskaffe en gravemaskine og et transportanlæg." *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁷"Den tid er forlængst forbi, da vi kan betragte Grønland som et naturreservat, hvor Danmarks eneste opgave var at bevare et oprindeligt naturfolk mod civilisationens farer og ganske langsomt opdrage det til europæisk kultur." *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁸"... at staten vil holde fingrene fra den praktiske udnyttelsen af de opdaeglsler, som eventuelt gøres." *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁹Sørensen, "Danske erhvervsinteresser," 385.

⁵⁰The Royal Greenland Trade Department (Kongelige Grønlandske Handel), a state-owned institution established in 1774, held a monopoly on trade in Greenlandic products. The monopoly was formally in effect until 1950. Strøm Tejsen, "The history of the Royal Greenland Trade Department," 451.

⁵¹"Kulbrudningen er ved at blive udvidet ved Kutdligssat [...]. I løbet af indeværende sommer skulde kulproduktionen forhaabentlig kunne sættes betydeligt i vejret." "Om udviklingen i Grønland. Direktør Knud Oldendow udtaler sig i et aabendhjertigt interview med *Grønlandsposten* om sine 23 travle arbejdsaar som landsfoged i Grønland og direktør for Grønlands Styrelse." *Grønlandsposten* (nr. 3), April 1, 1947, 54–72, 67.

The changing tide in Qullissat's future, 1947–1950

Qullissat's prospects changed entirely in the year after Oldendow's interview. In *Grønlandsposten's* coverage on Qullissat, however, there is a gap during months that would prove crucial for the mining community's future. The G-50 Commission, established in 1948, became a central actor in the media narrative that defined Qullissat's role in Greenland's post-war development. Instead of an independent energy supply and a rush for mineral riches, the vision of a large-scale fishing industry had taken over the newspaper's representations. This phase marks a break in the newspaper's narrative which, for the first time, came to revolve around a possible closure of the coalmine.

Commenting on the colonial budget of 1950–51, *Grønlandsposten* reported that the Qullissat coalmine was expected to run a deficit. The news outlet stated that the "uncertain outlook for coal exploitation in general, pay rises in Greenland, and the overall rising expenditures"⁵² were the major reasons behind the poor performance of the mine. The high labour costs that resulted in the mine's persisting deficit, *Grønlandsposten* explained, were central in the administration's deliberations on Qullissat's future. The pay increases had been a consequence of the first organised industrial action by the Qullissat mineworkers in the summer of 1947. In the same year, the cryolite mine at Ivigtut hired Greenlanders for the first time, initially only for housekeeping.⁵³ Many years later, Jørgen Fleischer recalled in his book, *Forvandlingens år* [*Years of transformation*], how the news about the recruitment had reached Qullissat via radio.⁵⁴ The Qullissat workers learned that the wages paid in Ivigtut were higher than those paid at the coalmine, which led them to demand better wages, too. According to Fleischer, in August 1947 the Greenlandic workers at Qullissat had successfully claimed a 60 per cent pay rise and social security measures from Governor Brun, after the workers' spokesman Hanseraq Gabrielsen (Hansepajak) threatened to strike.⁵⁵

For the duration of 1947, Qullissat was not mentioned in *Grønlandsposten* at all. In January 1948, a brief news item informed readers about an explosion in an engineer's house that was presumably caused by household coal.⁵⁶ However, the mineworkers' organised claim for improved working conditions was not mentioned in the newspaper at any point. As labour historians Lars Berggren and Roger Johansson point out, there is little evidence available to suggest that the workers' early wage negotiations actually had an impact on the officials' deliberations over the closure of the mine more than two decades later.⁵⁷

Also in 1948, unwelcome members of the communist party (DKP, Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti) and suspected sympathisers in Qullissat, who seem to have aroused the interest of the young mine workers, were removed from the town by the colonial administration.⁵⁸ A possible connection between strong anti-communist sentiment in the social-democratic governments (which feared the consequences of class-conscious

⁵²"Grønlands finanslov," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 17), October 16, 1949, 209.

⁵³During wartime, Greenlanders had been hired as household help for the managers of the cryolite mine. "Ivigtut kryolitbrud. En samtale med driftsbestyrer ingeniør Juhl," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 2), March 1, 1947, 46.

⁵⁴Fleischer, *Forvandlingens år* [*Years of Transformation*], 128 ff.

⁵⁵Ibid.; Carlsen, "Fra koloni-undersåt til organiseret arbejder" [From Colonial Subject to Organised Worker].

⁵⁶"Grønlandsnyt," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 1), January 1, 1948, 11.

⁵⁷Berggren and Johansson, "Gruvarbetare" [Mineworkers], 141.

⁵⁸In addition to Carlsen's accounts, see telegram communication concerning the teacher Børge Poulsen; e.g. no. 152 (June 15, 1947), no. 893 (August 11, 1947); and Hans Gabrielsen; e.g. no. 310 (June 9, 1947), no. 468 (June 24, 1947), Grønlands Styrelse, Hovedkontoret: Kopier af Landsfogeden for Nordgrønlands korrespondance (1925–1950) 28: 1947 1 10 1 – 1947 6 7 44 m.m., Danish National Archives, Copenhagen.

Greenlandic industrial workers) and the rapidly emerging plan to close down Qullissat is, however, not a prominent focus in scholarly historical accounts.

In *Grønlandsposten*, coverage of Qullissat during these years was closely related to the proceedings of the G-50 Commission. The possible closure of Qullissat was first mentioned in October 1949 in the newspaper's report on a meeting of the Commission's main body. *Grønlandsposten* gave an account of the debate about the possible location of a central administration of Greenland in the event that the two separate counties of North and South Greenland were united, as most reformers hoped might take place. The Commission's chairman, H.H. Koch, called for concentrating inhabitants in larger settlements in the south, as the newspaper reported: "the chairman put forth his opinion that the coalmine in K'utdligssat [Qullissat] should be closed down as soon as possible".⁵⁹ This first mention of the mine's possible closure in *Grønlandsposten* was placed in the context of media debate on urbanisation efforts. The discussion of the mine's closure was not, for instance, presented as the result of its poor production. Instead, the remoteness of Qullissat was highlighted: as a mining town dependent on the shipping of supplies, it was not a viable community.

The Greenland Commission's official report, published in 1950, quickly led to legislation for far-reaching social, economic and political reforms, commonly known as the G-50 modernisation plan.⁶⁰ *Grønlandsposten* printed an extensive summary of the report. Concerning Qullissat, the newspaper announced that "[...] the coalmine will be closed down".⁶¹ It reported that the Qullissat coal was of poor quality, while its final price was higher than that of coal imported from the United States. Once the equivalent of two years' energy supply had been acquired, *Grønlandsposten* stated with reference to the Commission's report, the mining community would be closed down and the mineworkers resettled and retrained for other professions.

In the newspaper's coverage of the G-50 report, expectations that large-scale industrial fisheries would bring wealth and employment had already replaced the vision of a modern mineral industry in Greenland. In October 1949, *Grønlandsposten* featured a five-page interview with the representative of the Royal Greenland Trade Department's steering board, Ebbe Groes. He revealed that the new direction of the state-led monopoly would be modified towards partial privatisation. Apart from the cryolite mine at Ivigtut, Groes stated, he did not expect any profits from Greenland's soil, as the marble mine at Maarmorilik had been closed down and the Qullissat coalmine was a "depressing scene".⁶² Instead, Groes emphasised, Greenland's future lay with the cod fisheries.

Qullissat praised as "Greenland's coal chamber", 1950–1957

Only a few weeks after *Grønlandsposten* announced the end of the Qullissat coalmine on 1 June 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War changed the geopolitical parameters of Greenland's development from "post-war" to a hardening front in the cold war. Securing Greenland's independent energy supply once again became a priority and Qullissat regained its key position in Greenland's colonial governance as an essential energy supplier.⁶³ This

⁵⁹"Forslag om at flytte Grønlands hovedstad til Godthaab-fjordens nordside," *Grønlandsposten* (nr. 17), October 16, 1949, 206.

⁶⁰Gad, *Grønland [Greenland]*, 289.

⁶¹"Kulbrudet i Kutdligssat skal nedlægges," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 11–12), June 1, 1950, 139.

⁶²"Andelsbevægelsen har en mission i Grønland. Direktør Ebbe Groes," *Grønlandsposten* (no. 16), October 1, 1949, 190–94, 192 (reprinted interview that originally appeared in *Andelsbladet*).

⁶³Philip Lauritzen, "En undersøgelse blev pludselig overflødig," *Information*, July 31, 1972.

time, however, it was steered by Copenhagen, which was determined to integrate Greenland into the Danish Kingdom to counteract the island's now close ties to the United States. During this period, the newspaper's coverage was marked by the optimism of scientific experts concerning Qullissat's future, based on new estimations and the modernisation of technical equipment. The Greenlandic mineworkers, by contrast, were absent as actors in these accounts.

As mentioned earlier, once *Grønlandsposten* and *Atuagagdliutit* merged in 1952, the resulting bilingual *A/G* had the character of a newspaper rather than a cultural magazine. For this reason, *A/G* can be seen as a successor of *Grønlandsposten*. Since a comparison with the content of *Atuagagdliutit* has not been made, little can be said at this point regarding the extent to which *A/G* represented an alternative position on modernisation in Greenland. Nonetheless, narratives about Qullissat's future remained relatively consistent, depending on which political, economic and scientific reasonings came to the forefront of media representations.

In 1952, *A/G* reported that samples from Qullissat were analysed in Denmark to determine the coal's heating value and to make improvements in its use. The article announced that the quality of the coal was better than expected and that it had, in fact, "an excellent heating value".⁶⁴ The problem was, the newspaper stated, that many Greenlandic ovens had an inefficient design, which released heat directly into the flue. The article informed readers that the colonial authorities would finance replacements. In 1955, a two-page photo spread praised Qullissat as "Greenland's coal chamber".⁶⁵ *A/G*'s editor, Palle Brandt, authored another article in the same year, titled "Greenland holds an abundance of coal".⁶⁶ Brandt did not, however, make any further comment on the authorities' reversal of the closure of the Qullissat coalmine, which had been reported in the context of the Greenland Commission's recommendations in 1950. Instead, the article spoke of the promising coal reserves that could be accessed in the future and introduced the company Jespersen and Son as consultants in Qullissat in 1953. In this account, hope was placed on the involvement of private actors, although Brandt remained critical that this would happen at "the expense and risk of the Greenland Department".⁶⁷ Negotiating the role of the state and the responsibilities of private companies was the primary activity undertaken in the early years of the G-50 reforms.

In 1955, *A/G* presented the investment plan for 1957–1962 devised by Greenland's Technical Organisation (*Grønlands Tekniske Organisation*, GTO), a subdivision of the state's Greenland Department that was established in 1950. The GTO's goals responded to the declared policy to increase the productivity of Greenland's economy and to make "Greenlandic labour more valuable",⁶⁸ as the Governor of Greenland, Poul Hugo Lundsteen (1910–1988), had put it. British scientist and mining expert J.R. Dinsdale featured prominently in *A/G*'s account of the GTO's investment plans for Qullissat.⁶⁹ *A/G* made it clear to readers that Dinsdale's estimation of Qullissat's coal reserves would have a long-lasting impact on discussions about the mine's future. In the report on GTO's investment plan, this expert was cited as having estimated that the coal deposit was large enough to sustain at least

⁶⁴ "... udmærket brændværdi." "Gode råd vedrørende de grønlandske kul," *A/G* (no. 23), November 5, 1952, 390.

⁶⁵ "K'udligssat – Grønlands kulkammer," *A/G* (no. 20), October 6, 1955, 10–11.

⁶⁶ "Grønland rummer store rigdomme af kul," *A/G* (no. 20), October 6, 1955.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁸ Lundsteen, "Tanker om udviklingen i Grønland," 332.

⁶⁹ "Erhvervs-Rubrikken," *A/G* (no. 23), November 17, 1955, 10.

25 years of mining operations with a yearly production of 40,000 tons (about five times its wartime output). In an interview in December 1955, Dinsdale summed up developments in the mine's operation: "There is steady progress following the modernisation plans that were initiated in 1951. I can say that I trust that the mine will develop in a modern way for the greater good of Greenland's society".⁷⁰ Asked about the authorities' plans for the Qullissat coalmine, Dinsdale assured readers that Qullissat could cover Greenland's complete energy supply for up to 25 years and that the mining operations were currently being extended. The expert had entered the media narrative as a guarantor of the mine's ongoing success. The authority of scientific prediction was at the core of the story that unfolded in the newspaper coverage during this phase from the early 1950s onwards. Environmental historian Sverker Sörlin has identified the "predictive authority of science" as the dominant form of knowledge over the environment since at least the 1920s.⁷¹ In the case of predicting the availability of coal reserves in the face of technical modernisation, changing exploitation rates and profitability, the expert's knowledge of the environment was also transformed into authority over a community's future.

A/G reinforced the picture of the Qullissat coalmine as a modern mine that would not only secure Greenland's energy supply for years to come, but also generate new employment. In 1956, *A/G* reported that a class of schoolboys visited Qullissat, organised by the mine's management, "to stimulate interest in the mining work".⁷² In the same year, the newspaper printed a report by Johannes Kjærbøl (1885–1973), Minister for Greenland (in office 1955–57), of his visit to Qullissat in the summer of 1956. Kjærbøl wrote, "There have been several years of uncertainty regarding the mine's future".⁷³ Now, the results of new investments could be seen. Kjærbøl highlighted the current labour demand and noted that more than 35 additional mineworkers would be employed as soon as new accommodation was built. He observed that there "was noticeable optimism among the English experts on site".⁷⁴

The assurance at the core of these media accounts was more than a positive outlook on the coalmine as an employer for future generations. Its core message was multifaceted. It was a promise to the whole community that Qullissat was the pillar of a modern, postcolonial Greenland. Yet, the narrative also emphasised that the fate of the mining community was in the hands of scientific experts and that the improved performance of the mine was the result of the modernisation measures initiated by the Danish leadership. The Greenlandic mineworkers remained invisible.

Qullissat's unsettled future, 1957–1963

In the late 1950s, the tide turned once again. This time, too, *A/G*'s coverage presented Qullissat's prospects in the light of further efforts to modernise the Greenlandic society and economy, and took into consideration the modification of reforms initiated by the G-50 report. During this phase, the world market and fluctuations in coal prices were primary

⁷⁰"Der gøres stadig fremskridt, hvad angår de moderniseringsplaner man fattede i 1951. Jeg kan sige, at jeg har tiltro til, at minen kan udvikles på moderne vis til gavn og glæde for det grønlandske samfund." "Glædelige fremskridt for minedriften i K'utdliggssat," *A/G* (no. 24), December 1, 1955, 9.

⁷¹Sörlin, "Reconfiguring Environmental Expertise," 19.

⁷²"Fint initiativ," *A/G* (no. 5), March 8, 1956, 21.

⁷³"Vi trænger til Grønlandske foregangsmænd," *A/G* (no. 18), September 6, 1956, 14–15.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

factors in determining Qullissat's future, according to the media narrative. In *A/G*'s coverage, market forces replaced scientific authority as the key driver.

In 1957, the Ministry of Greenland established the Coalmining Commission (Kulbrudsudvalget) – consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Greenland, the GTO, KGH and the private consulting firm, Jespersen and Son – to review production at the Qullissat mine.⁷⁵ The Coalmining Commission's report, published in April 1962, provided no definitive recommendation on whether to extend operations or close down the mine. *A/G* published a lengthy article on the Commission's report, which opened with a statement declaring that, "The coalmine in Greenland has for a few years shown poor production results".⁷⁶ A year earlier, the newspaper had reported on problems relating to the production and deteriorating quality of the coal – without, however, suggesting that any changes were needed other than a minor adjustment to the ore sorting process.⁷⁷ In 1962, the question of the mine's closure again became topical. The newspaper now asserted that the coal allegedly had longstanding quality problems – although the quality of the coal had not been mentioned with any regularity in earlier coverage. *A/G*'s article assured readers that the Coalmining Commission did not recommend a closure of the mine at this point. Instead, it emphasised that the future of Qullissat depended on the development of world market prices for coal.

On the occasion of the visit by the Minister of Greenland, Mikael Gam (in office 1960–1964), to Qullissat in 1963, *A/G* published an article titled "Greenland's only coalmine has a very uncertain future".⁷⁸ It featured an interview with the mine's Scottish manager, Erik Dockner. Production problems and price developments, however, played only minor roles in the conversation with Dockner. The manager stated that by August, the mine had already produced 4,000 tons more than at the same time the previous year, and that the heating value of the Qullissat coal equalled about 90 per cent of British coal. Indeed, technical experts could not justify closing the mine at this point since a new mine entry had just been built and new reserves would soon become accessible.⁷⁹

A/G's report on Gam's visit instead focused on growing social problems within the remote mining community and the ongoing costs of supplying it in the absence of established fishing and hunting industries. The article introduced the situation in Qullissat with the following words:

K'utdligssat has with its 1,300 inhabitants simply become too big. Because of that, it has been necessary to restrict access to the town, especially given the current housing situation.⁸⁰

The authorities had slowed down the building and renovation of houses drastically by this point and according to the article: "ways [were] now sought for reducing the population".⁸¹

The plan to halt Qullissat's growth was in line with the policy to concentrate settlements, proposed in both the G-50 and G-60 reports, which aimed to ensure there would be a larger workforce available for an industrial fisheries sector. However, the vision of an extensive cod fishing industry was already beginning to lose traction by the mid-1960s as the fisheries

⁷⁵Lauritzen, "En undersøgelse blev pludselig overflødig," *Information*, July 31, 1972.

⁷⁶"Kulbrydningen i K'utdligssat bør fortsætte mener udvalget," *A/G* (no. 12), June 7, 1962, 9.

⁷⁷"Nu bliver de grønlandske kul harpet på en bedre måde," *A/G* (no. 10), May 4, 1961, 23.

⁷⁸"Grønlands eneste kulbrud har en meget usikker fremtid," *A/G* (no. 17), August 15, 1963, 9.

⁷⁹Sørensen, *Byen der ikke vil dø* [*The Town that did not Want to Die*], 85.

⁸⁰"Grønlands eneste kulbrud har en meget usikker fremtid," *A/G* (no. 17), August 15, 1963, 9.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

showed signs of collapsing. These years also witnessed the beginning of the definitive end of all mining operations in Qullissat.

Turning against the Greenlandic workers, 1963–1968

In the years immediately before the mine and settlement at Qullissat were abandoned, the Greenlandic workers took on a more prominent role in *A/G*'s coverage. Having been invisible in media narratives relating to Qullissat's modernisation for decades, representatives of the workforce finally had their views on the future of their community published in the newspaper. Their contributions help to illustrate how public discourse shifted during these years. While scientific expertise and market developments had dominated media narratives about Qullissat until this time, it now became apparent that the Greenlandic mineworkers were increasingly accused of having a poor work ethic. Unexcused absences, unreliability, and the generally low morale reportedly exhibited by the workers became central to explaining the mine's deficit and, as a consequence, for justifying the mine's closure.⁸²

In 1965, the Coalmining Commission changed its mind regarding the future of Qullissat. While the Commission had not taken a clear stance in its previous report of 1962, according to *A/G*, three years later the majority of members supported closing the mine after the Audit Department (Revisionsdepartementet) encouraged a new review.⁸³ In 1962 the Commission had demanded a general analysis of Greenland's economy before it would give any recommendation regarding the Qullissat coalmine. By 1965, however, the deficit pointed out by the Audit Department led the majority of the Commission's members to agree that mining operations at Qullissat should end as soon as possible.

A/G's story on the Commission's report stated that the coalmine's deficit equalled the salary paid to the workers during that year. Readers could easily understand this equation as a reference to the source of the problems. The image of the indolent Greenlandic worker that took over the public-political discourse during these years became apparent in *A/G*'s readers' columns and published letters from individuals who reacted to these allegations. During the 1960s, a number of critical contributions by Greenlandic representatives who had close insight into the situation in Qullissat over many years were published. They called attention to the authorities' responsibility not only for the coalmine, but also for the community's future that depended on it. In October 1963, *A/G* published an excerpt from an interview with a young (anonymous) Greenlandic mineworker from Qullissat, which had originally appeared in the Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) newspaper. The worker criticised the poor organisation of meals for the workers. He told the paper that he and his colleagues often worked eight-hour shifts without food. This situation was, the worker stated, the result of the overall badly managed food supply in the town of Qullissat. He also compared the low salaries paid to Greenlandic workers with the wages paid to Danish mineworkers, implying the difference was unfair. Most notably, the young Greenlander emphasised the workers' strong commitment to making the mine a profitable venture:

The Greenlanders fully support a more effective exploitation of the coal in K'utdligssat, even if it costs money for equipment [...]. The work in the mine is sometimes discontinued for a

⁸²Ohsten, "Nedlæggelsen," 167.

⁸³"K'utdligssats fremtid er ikke særlig lovende," *A/G* (no. 3), February 3, 1966, 16.

whole day because spare parts are missing or a tool has to be repaired in town. At the mine, there is neither a workshop nor people who could do repairs.⁸⁴

The lack of investment and the neglected modernisation of the mine's equipment over the preceding years were also central themes in a column by Anda Nielsen, titled "Should K'utdligssat be closed down?" published in *A/G* in June 1966.⁸⁵ Nielsen was a member of the Greenland Provincial Council, the highest elected body in Greenland, which had represented Greenlandic interests since 1950 when the North and South Greenland Councils were merged. Nielsen had also been working for the mine's administration in Qullissat for more than three decades. While in August the previous year he had stated (according to *A/G*) that the "modernisation of the technical equipment in K'utdligssat has proved that a profitable production can be achieved, as the development over the last 30 years has shown",⁸⁶ in his contribution to *A/G* in June 1966, he expressed frustration about the equipment as he reacted to the Coalmining Commission's about-turn. Nielsen challenged the narrative of the unreliable Greenlandic workers who were accused of making the mine unproductive. He claimed that no effort had been made to improve working conditions and safety measures, which the workers had long criticised. Neither had managers shown any willingness to increase the production per worker by modernising the equipment. Regarding allegations that pay rises in the 1960s had produced the enormous deficit, Nielsen argued that this only meant miners' wages had been too low for a much longer time. He asked why retaining the six highly paid Scottish engineers had never been questioned. He also commented on the lower production during 1965, which had been a crucial factor behind the Coalmining Commission's recommendation to close the mine. Since many workers were building a new mine entrance during that year, Nielsen stated, fewer workers extracted coal. This fact was not reflected in the calculations, he pointed out.

Erik Svendsen, a former mineworker and steering committee member of GAS (Grønland's Arbejder Sammanslutning, Greenland's first workers' representative body, formed in 1956), authored a similar opinion piece in *A/G*, titled "The administration is guilty of complicity in K'utdligssat's stagnation".⁸⁷ Svendsen commented on the accusations against the mineworkers and their supposed unreliability as the main cause for Qullissat's decreasing production: "Both the press and the radio barked that the Greenlandic workers were unreliable, and they are set down as being directly responsible for everything".⁸⁸ He also pointed out that in some well-meaning accounts, for instance, in *A/G*, the mine's sinking production had been attributed to the poor and dangerous working conditions in the shaft. Svendsen recalled how he and his fellow workers laughed about this seemingly "new" development. They had demanded improvements in working conditions and safety for years, he stated. Svendsen criticised the mine's leadership for not taking on board the workers' suggestions, even as the increasing mechanisation and lack of training led to more severe and deadly incidents in the mine. Instead, he argued, many workers were laid off in 1963 and afterwards, reputedly due to their low work morale, indifference towards the mine and alleged unreliability.

⁸⁴"Grønlønderne går ind for en mere effektiv brydning af kullene i K'utdligssat selv om det skulle koste penge til material. ... arbejdet i minen kan ligge stille en hel dag, fordi man mangler reservedele og skal have værktøjet reparereret i byen. I minen findes hverken reparationsværksted eller folk, der kan betjene det." "Det bød man ikke en syd-dansker," *A/G* (no. 21), October 10, 1963, 20.

⁸⁵"Skal K'utdligssat nedlægges?" *A/G* (no. 12), June 9, 1966, 2.

⁸⁶"K'utligssat gennem 30 år," *A/G* (no. 16), August 5, 1965, 10.

⁸⁷"Administrationen har også skylden for K'utdligssats stagnation," *A/G* (no. 17), August 19, 1965, 14.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

Svendsen's piece, in particular, shows how, to *A/G*'s mostly Greenlandic readership, the mineworkers were now portrayed as victims of circumstance. The statements by the Greenlandic worker representatives also illustrate their frustration and lack of people power, suggesting that the mineworkers' hard work and commitment had come to nothing. These accounts reproduced, above all, the image of the passive Greenlandic workers at the mercy of the Danish authorities. The paper itself did not take a stance against the mine's leadership in editorials or articles. Instead, disapproval was expressed in letters and first-hand accounts from mine workers. The perceived failure to oppose authority would later contribute to identity and independence debates in the aftermath of the abandonment of the mining community of Qullissat.

In February 1966, *A/G* published a full-page feature article, titled "K'utligssat's future is not very promising", accompanied by a drawing of the mining town.⁸⁹ It explained, once again, that the Coalmining Commission had withdrawn its 1963 recommendation to continue operations due to sinking coal prices and high labour costs. At the same time, the article assured readers that the Ministry of Greenland did not plan to close the mine immediately due to the organisational effort required to relocate the town's inhabitants. In the same month, the closure of the Qullissat coalmine was on the agenda of the Provincial Council meeting, yet it was not discussed further. In February 1967, the Greenlandic radio news announced that the Ministry of Greenland and the Provincial Council had decided to close down the coalmine.⁹⁰

Confusion regarding the finality of the plan to close the mine arose when a suggestion, initiated by Qullissat's local council, to assess options for alternatives was put before the Greenland Provincial Council in 1968. *A/G* reported on the local council's efforts to find solutions to make the mine profitable again. Citing the Provincial Council's chairman, Erling Høegh, the newspaper explained that inhabitants had the false impression that Qullissat's future was still open to negotiation. According to Høegh (quoted in *A/G* on 26 September 1968), the mine's closure and the resettlement of the community's inhabitants had already been decided.⁹¹

A/G reported the end of the mining operations in Qullissat and the planned resettlement of the mineworkers and their families on its front page on 10 October 1968. The article stated that "the decision was reached because of inevitable economic reasons".⁹² In the article's closing paragraphs, Høegh gave a clear statement regarding the council's standpoint: "We from the council are glad to hear that the government supports the council's suggestion to relocate the mining town and did not listen to the members of parliament".⁹³ This statement reflects domestic dissent and the influence of the Greenlandic elite, which certainly contributed to the confusion during the final stages of the decision process. The disorder during this phase remains emblematic of how the evacuation of Qullissat is remembered today.⁹⁴

⁸⁹"K'utligssats fremtid er ikke særlig lovende," *A/G* (no. 3), February 3, 1966, 16.

⁹⁰Sejersen, "Efterforskning" [Exploration], 45.

⁹¹"Sidste ord om kulminen er endnu ikke sagt," *A/G* (no. 20), September 26, 1968, 3.

⁹²"Kulminen skal nedlægges," *A/G* (no. 21), October 10, 1968, 1–3.

⁹³In the above cited article, "Kulminen skal nedlægges," Knud Hertling and Hans Jørgen Lembourn are explicitly mentioned as having articulated their opposition to the closure of the mine. Hertling was one of the two Greenlandic representatives in the Danish Parliament (Folketinget) between 1964 and 1973. Lembourn was a Danish politician and a member of the Greenland Council (Grønlandsrådet) between 1968 and 1974, a post to which he was appointed through the Conservative Party's representation in the parliament. Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 184, 186.

⁹⁴Andersen et al., "Qullissat," 93.

In an interview with a major Copenhagen news outlet, reprinted in *A/G* in January 1968, Eske Brun's successor in the Ministry of Greenland, Erik Hesselbjerg, concluded that, "Greenland will never be a goldmine".⁹⁵ While he doubted that there were any mineral reserves of value, it was also highly unlikely, Hesselbjerg said, that a Greenlandic workforce would again be sent out to such a remote mine as Qullissat, the "famous and unprofitable" coalmine where there were still many problems with the phase-out. After all, Hesselbjerg saw the mine as yet another gift to the Greenlanders from the Danish state:

It is never pleasant only to be receiving, and this is what the Greenlanders have been doing up till now. One understands the Greenlander, the thinking Greenlander, who starts to feel uneasy. What can be done in return?⁹⁶

Echoing Brun's statement right after the end of the Second World War about the Danes wanting to "help the Greenlanders", Hesselbjerg characterised the Greenlandic people as passive and receiving. This time, however, the benevolence of the Danish state lauded by the officials seemed to have reached an end: concerning the unprofitable mining operations in Qullissat, Hesselbjerg portrayed the venture as a well-intentioned gift that turned out to be too expensive to sustain. That Qullissat had once been at the centre of Denmark's governance of the dependency and had contributed to securing Danish sovereignty during and after the Second World War was no longer part of the story.

Conclusion

During the twentieth century, the interplay between colonialism and modernisation set the stage for economic and social developments in Greenland. Eventually, it shaped the struggle for increasing political autonomy which led to the successful Home Rule referendum in 1979.⁹⁷ Literary and cultural studies scholar Kirsten Thisted argues that the dichotomy between a traditional, pristine and passive Greenlandic culture and a modern, Western (Danish) ideal is common to most historical accounts of the modernisation period in Greenland in the mid-twentieth century.⁹⁸ This dichotomy seems to be a relic of past discourses that persists in today's reflections on the historical events. As an idea that can be traced to Danish colonial civil servants, it continues to affect many Greenlanders' views of their own agency and vulnerability.⁹⁹ In this context, the role of media representations is a crucial issue that still needs to be explored in depth.

In this article, the analysis of newspaper coverage on Qullissat provides insights into the narratives about the mining community's future which framed the discourse for both the Danish and Greenlandic audiences.¹⁰⁰ This analysis has been guided by questions relating to how Qullissat's role was represented in the context of Denmark's governance of Greenland, Qullissat's framing in the media, and the definition of Qullissat as a "modern mine". Who or what was presented as responsible for the mine's fate probably had the most significant

⁹⁵"Grønland bliver aldrig nogen guldgrube," *A/G* (no. 2), January 18, 1968, 14.

⁹⁶"... det er aldrig rart blot at stå som modtageren, og det har grønlænderne hidtil gjort. Man forstår grønlænderen, den tænkende grønlænder, der begynder at føle det med ubehag. Hvad kan man give igen. Hvad kan man gøre til gengæld?" *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁷This consultative referendum received considerable support from Greenlanders, with more than 70 per cent voting in favour of greater autonomy from Denmark. This resulted in Greenland gaining sovereignty over social and economic matters in Greenland, including education and natural resource management. Sørensen, *Denmark-Greenland*, 151.

⁹⁸Thisted, "Plads i solen," 38.

⁹⁹Beukel et al., *Phasing out the Colonial Status*, 18.

¹⁰⁰On the impact of media narratives on public perception see, for instance, Davies et al., "Framing a 'Climate Change Frontier,'" 482.

impact on the narratives that emerged, circulated, and persisted in the discourse that connects Qullissat's past to Greenland's present today, making the closure and evacuation a traumatic experience of denied agency for many. From the various media stories regarding Qullissat, the notion of the "unproductive mine" predominated at the time of its closure. Although Qullissat was once considered the epitome of Greenland's hidden riches and the basis for an independent energy supply, as well as a diverse, stable economy facilitated by the Danish authorities' master plan of modernisation, it was eventually presented in the press as a loss-making Greenlandic venture.

During the Second World War and Greenland's isolation from Denmark, *Grønlandsposten* promoted the Qullissat coalmine as the pillar of the island's autonomy and source of its energy supply. The mine was viewed as a symbol of Greenland's economic and social development facilitated by Danish standards of productivity. Significantly, it was not the workers, but the mine's production and the modernisation of its machines that were at the centre of the coverage – despite the fact that Qullissat represents a unique industrial complex in which Greenlanders made up almost the entire workforce. After the war, *Grønlandsposten* became a mouthpiece for the reformers who wanted a radically changed colonial policy, central governance, and a reformed economy modelled after Danish norms. During the immediate post-war years, the newspaper presented Qullissat in another light. Lengthy feature articles on Greenland's riches suggested the possibility of a new phase of governance in Greenland and, as the reformers demanded, a modest opening of Greenlandic production to private capital, which raised public expectations. The modest energy self-sufficiency Qullissat had once stood for no longer seemed essential. *Grønlandsposten* reported on the coal's poor quality and the costly production in comparison to US imports. According to the media narrative, import prices and the anonymous market emerged as new agents to decide Qullissat's future. Moreover, a modern fishing industry and a united, central administration for the island, as called for in the G-50 report, were also affecting assessments relating to the mine's future viability. Why the authorities' optimism towards Qullissat evaporated so suddenly after 1947 and turned into the determined plan to close down the mine and relocate the workers and their families is a question that needs further examination. As *Grønlandsposten* reported, the town of Qullissat was viewed as too remote to fit into the vision of the G-50 Commission. The focus of media coverage shifted from the mine to the town of Qullissat.

In 1950, the hardening fronts of the cold war suddenly changed the setting for Qullissat's future. With the outbreak of the Korean War, *Grønlandsposten* promoted the partial privatisation of the mine – as part of a reformed approach to the monopoly market – and supported the optimism of mining experts. The estimations of coal reserves by British mining expert J.R. Dinsdale, in particular, were reported as the basis for an extensive modernisation of the mine. Expert knowledge acquired a leading role in the negotiation of Qullissat's fate as it was presented in the newspaper. The media accounts highlighted the experts' optimistic estimation of coal reserves, offering renewed hope for the mine's future. After 1952, concerns about Qullissat's unprofitable production once again became central to the coverage in Greenland's largest print outlet, *A/G*. Echoing the report of the G-50 Commission, news coverage of Qullissat argued that the urbanisation policy strongly promoted by the G-60 development plan should be aimed primarily at the town. In *A/G*'s coverage, the town's supply problems were now more prominent than the mine's declining production.

After 1960, the mineworkers attracted more media attention: as the passive victims of harsh working conditions and the coal's declining quality and reserves. While *A/G* did not

actively contribute to the growing public perception of the “unreliable” Greenlandic worker evident in official statements and other media, the workers nonetheless remained invisible in its positive coverage of Qullissat’s future. By contrast, modern equipment and foreign experts were at the centre of *A/G*’s optimistic accounts during phases when the mine was seen as essential to a modern Greenland. The notion of mineworkers as victims of circumstance dominated public discourse around the mine’s final years and closure. The machines could be modernised, but the Greenlandic workers, it seemed, could not meet modern demands. The major Greenlandic newspapers, *Grønlandsposten* and *A/G*, had repeatedly promoted Qullissat as an example of Danish success in introducing modernisation measures and scientific expertise. However, the representation of the mine’s production problems as a failure to meet the demands of modernity from the early 1960s onwards has come to dominate in narratives of Greenland’s modernisation period.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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