

Chapter 9

Heroic Stories or Indigenous Perspectives? Polar Expedition Photographs in Norwegian Museum Exhibitions

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The contribution of polar explorers to a broad visual culture was greatly accelerated by the development of photography. Conversely photography afforded polar exploration a new visibility. The camera became an important tool for documentation of the actual journeys and bestowing both authenticity and authority of the locations visited, the objectives achieved, and the methods and tools. However, the climatic conditions in polar regions made photography difficult and it was not unusual for many of the expedition photographs to be taken in advance or as a reconstruction afterwards. Upon returning home the photographs took on an important role as visual evidence of what had been experienced and achieved. In this way they contributed to strengthening the stories about the expeditions in various publications, and were from the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century used both as the basis for graphic illustrations, reproduced as xylographs (wood block prints), and printed photographs (Larsen 2011: 12–13). Photographs were also an essential part of the lecture tours following the expeditions, where they were used both to inform and obtain funds to pay off existing debts or to finance new expeditions. Thus the varied afterlife and receptions of photographs are valuable for the understanding of Norwegian polar history. In this chapter I consider the afterlife of specific images as they are used in museum spaces.

A large number of more or less spectacular photographs from different expeditions are now to be found in archives and private collections in Norway. Significantly too, these photographs have played an important part in the production of museum exhibitions on polar themes. According to Susan A. Crane, photographs in museum displays, ‘both illustrate the past they represent, like any other artefact, and, working in the background, offer a highly flexible platform from which to launch interpretations’ (Crane 2013: 123). An investigation into the history of the expedition photographs, their cultural contexts, and their use in exhibitions, can provide an understanding of how these images are contributing to creating the collective memory of Norwegian polar history. In this chapter photographs, as integral to this narrative serve as an entry to a discussion of how polar history is presented in Norwegian museums. My starting point will be three

different photographs associated with the expedition experiences of the famous Norwegian polar hero, Roald Amundsen. What kind of work are such images performing in polar history exhibitions? Which narratives and perspectives do they communicate?

The Hooded Portrait

In 1920 Roald Amundsen (1872–1928) was photographed in Lomen Brothers' studio in Nome, Alaska.

At this point Amundsen had spent nearly two years on an expedition with the ship *Maud*. He planned to sail through the Northeast Passage and then let the ship freeze into the ice and drift over the North Pole. However, the expedition was delayed owing to difficult ice conditions and to the critical state of Amundsen's and the expedition's finances. Nine years had passed since the expedition with *Fram* and the conquering of the South Pole, and Amundsen's popularity had diminished (Bohmann-Larsen 2003). Even though the scientific results of the expedition later were considered as extremely important, the whole adventure was regarded as more or less a failure at this point, mainly because of the delays in realizing those scientific objectives.

It was during this period that Amundsen allowed himself be photographed in what became a polar iconographic style, with his parka hood on. Lomen Brothers studio in Nome probably had long experience in photographing people with hoods, usually Inuit people. The term 'hooded portrait' was first used in the recently published, *Norske polarhelbilder* [Norwegian polar hero portraits] with the following explanation: 'A polar hero is known by his hood. The hood protects against howling wind, the fur against the biting cold. A hood forms the link between the person and the polar, between the hero and Northerner's land' (Lund and Berg 2011: 22). Amundsen is thus, in this context, portrayed as the polar hero who makes the native clothing his own. He is the masterful Western man, who like the indigenous inhabitants, lived in and mastered the polar environment (Lund and Berg 2011: 22).

At the Polar Museum – Tromsø University Museum – two copies of the hooded portrait are displayed. These are two of many other photographs of Amundsen in the permanent exhibitions, where his polar life and work are presented. A framed version of the hooded portrait is placed in a display case together with other objects: a lighter, a knife with engraved walrus tusk, and a Japanese box. These artefacts, and the portrait, previously belonged to dispensing chemist Fritz Zapffe, who was a good friend of Amundsen in Tromsø and considered a central character in local connections to polar history. For instance, it was Zapffe who helped Amundsen to recruit a crew from the local community for a number of his expeditions. The text in the display case explains that Zapffe had his own 'Amundsen exhibition' at home in his living room consisting of these artefacts that originally belonged to Amundsen. The explanatory text to the photograph underlines this significance: 'Framed portrait of Roald Amundsen, with his signature', as if the two traces of



Figure 9.1 Roald Amundsen: the hooded portrait: Photograph: Lomen Bros/© Nasjonalbiblioteket, bldsa_SURA0055

Amundsen are lending authority to one another. In this context the photograph is characterized as an object through the location within the showcase. It seems as if the signature is stressed to make the photograph more valuable, even though every copy of this photograph has the same signature, because the original positive was probably signed.

In the same room, two metres away, the other copy of the hooded portrait is mounted on photo-board and placed on a pedestal with a bust of Amundsen. The accompanying text informs the visitor that this is: 'Roald Amundsen. Bust made by sculptor Karl G. Nilsen, Tønsberg 1934'. There is also a painting on the wall in the background; a portrait of Amundsen signed 'Sverre Groth, 1926'. Together the painting, bust and photograph form a memory installation of Amundsen and mark the entrance to the rest of the exhibition on this polar hero. It may seem unusual that two versions of the same portrait appear, especially so close to one another in the exhibition. Perhaps this serves the emphasis Amundsen's dominant position in Norwegian national polar history, but the juxtaposition and different formats also stress the reproducibility of the photograph as against the singular object.

The Amundsen exhibition and this use of the photographs must, however, be viewed in relation to the Polar Museum's history and general design. The museum was established in 1978 and the current exhibition was constructed after a reopening in 1986. In subsequent years there has been some updating and new material added, but the fundamental form of the exhibition and its content has not been substantially altered. The exhibition narrative is transmitted mainly through traditional means such as factually oriented texts, photographs, object and tableaux.

While photographs in more recent exhibitions often serve as pure design elements (Crane 2013: 137), they clearly do not have this function at the Polar Museum. The photographs are mounted individually, each with its own explanatory text in an exhibition that has a hybrid character – part chamber of treasures and part cabinet of curiosities. The absence of modern exhibition design further emphasizes this impression. The building housing the exhibition is a custom house wharf from the 1840s with roughly hewn timber walls, an uneven wooden floor, a low ceiling, and a complex room arrangement which bears traces from its original use, also play a part. The use of the building as part of the 'scenography' of the display dispels any sense of the 'neutrality' of the exhibition space, it even smells of tar. While Amundsen's participation in different expeditions has been a determining factor in the exhibition narrative, paradoxically neither the objects nor the photographs are presented chronologically or by the original order of the expeditions themselves. This contributes to creating an impression of a timeless perspective, where the authenticity of the objects (and framed photographs) is the main point; they represent treasures safely secured behind glass (Aarekol 2012: 97–108) – direct connections to the 'hero'.

The establishment of the Polar Museum is connected to Amundsen's disappearance on 18 June 1928. On that day he was seen for the last time as the aircraft *Latham* took off from Tromsø to fly across the Barents Sea, on a rescue mission for the Italian explorer Umberto Nobile. Both Amundsen, the crew and the aircraft disappeared without a trace. The Polar Museum was opened on the fiftieth anniversary of the disappearance, while in 1994 – and on this occasion, which also coincided with the two hundredth anniversary of the town Tromsø, a bust of Amundsen was placed outside the Polar Museum. This was the fourth of five versions of this bust, all made after the same original plaster version allegedly

made by the artist Alonzo Victor Lewis in 1921, and later reproduced in bronze by the Norwegian Einar S. Pedersen (Stevens n.d.: 351–3). The way Amundsen is represented through this bust – the pose, hood, gaze and whip around the neck – has, however, a strong resemblance to the hooded photograph of Amundsen. It seems likely therefore that the photograph was known to the artist in 1921. Whether Amundsen posed for the bust is, however, difficult to ascertain, but there are clear similarities which again suggest the persistence of the hooded figure of the polar hero. In iconographical interplay with the photographic portraits within the exhibition, the bust outside the Polar Museum serves to create an element of recognition and thus also to underline the significance of Amundsen as a heroic and important character in the polar history.

The now rather dated display of the Polar Museum exhibition can be compared with more recent exhibition productions concerning similar themes. In 2011 Norway celebrated the Nansen–Amundsen anniversary year, a celebration through which the government agendas aimed to ‘expand knowledge about and engagement surrounding Nansen and Amundsen’s lives and achievements’, as well to illuminate ‘their role in nation building and as polar heroes and contributions in the scientific and literary areas’.¹ The anniversary led to a renewed focus on polar history, and a number of new exhibitions on this theme were produced. But did the occasion lead to new narratives, perspectives or representations on this particular history? And how was photography incorporated in these exhibitionary narratives?

The Inuit at Gjøahavn

Amundsen’s expedition had been successful. Not only was he the first to sail through the Northwest Passage, he had also succeeded in achieving his goal to carry out geomagnetic measurements to identify the magnetic North Pole. The expedition, however, also produced important documentation of the encounter between the expedition participants and indigenous inhabitants on King William Island in Alaska. When Amundsen overwintered with the *Gjøa* expedition, he and his crew met the Inuit people who lived in the area. According to Amundsen’s own account of the expedition *Nordvestpassasjen. Beretningen om Gjøa-ekspedisjonen 1903–1907* [The north-west passage: Being the record of a voyage of exploration of the ship *Gjøa* 1903–1907] the expedition members were in close contact with the local inhabitants (Amundsen 1907). During their stay they assumed the role of ethnographers. In addition to photographing the people they met, the expedition members collected and purchased nearly 1000 objects from the area. These objects and photographs were later used to disseminate knowledge about the Inuit, both in written expedition accounts and through oral presentations such as lectures. A young Inuit boy, Manni, had been invited to return with the expedition to

1 See <http://www.nansenamundsen.no/nansen-amundsenaret-2011>.



Figure 9.2 The Inuit and Gjøa photograph. © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

Norway, but had drowned accidentally while hunting from a kayak (Hanssen 1941: 65–6). Amundsen wrote the following concerning the episode: ‘It was a heavy blow for us all to lose Manni in this way. We had all become so close to him and had a great interest in bringing him with us back to civilization to see what he could have achieved’ (Amundsen 1907: 437).

Of a crew of six, First Lieutenant Godtfred Hansen was the expedition’s second in command and served as ‘navigator, astronomer, geologist and photographer’ (Amundsen 1907: 9). In the book Amundsen writes little about the actual practices of photographic documentation apart from a couple of episodes. He describes the lieutenant’s camera equipment that went ‘click-click’ when the first Inuit came on board *Gjøa* and how Godtfred Hansen used the summer season with abundant access to freshwater to develop his photographic plates (Amundsen 1907: 86, 162). One of the photographs in the book also documents Inuit people on board the *Gjøa*. There were probably other crew members who also took photographs on the expedition, but it was only Hansen who had photography as an assigned task. It was in all likelihood Hansen who had organized the Inuit pose in front of the ship with their sleds, hides, children and dogs. In the book about the expedition this image is reproduced as a half-page photograph with the following caption: ‘Netchjilli eskimos come to visit. Anana, Onaller, Kabloka, Umiktuallu’ (Amundsen 1907:

175). The book is richly illustrated with 138 printed photographs and drawings, obviously based on original photographs (probably because the photograph quality was too poor for reproduction) spread over a total of 541 pages. The meeting with the Inuit is amply documented through text and photographs, with a majority of individuals identified by name. This closeness to indigenous people, conveyed through photographs and texts, contributed to them being brought to life for the European public in both lecture and exhibition contexts.

The polar explorer's photographs of meetings with Inuit in the north have much in common with pictures of indigenous peoples by missionaries and colonialists more generally with a broadly ethnographic focus on clothing, tools and material culture. The selection and subsequent distribution of photographs played a major role in the way in which, for example, African or Inuit people were imagined (Gullestad: 2007: 22–3). The photographs brought back by the polar expeditions, and the way they were used in the polar heroes' own publications, have likewise contributed to shaping and delineating the view of indigenous people in polar areas.

This iconography was reinforced by the way in which it was embedded in text, both in Amundsen's words, and as we shall see, in the museum. The combination of photographs and text as 'an area of tension, a contradiction, a supplement or reinforcement' (Gullestad 2007: 22). Amundsen's message is ambiguous, multifaceted and partially contradictory, when he describes the Inuit as ugly, beautiful, kind, bad, skilful, stupid and both with and without a sense of humour. The encounter with the Inuit people seems, however, to have had a strong impact on him and the other members of the expedition. For example, he writes the following about the meeting with the Inuit in the *Gjøa* photograph:

Kabloka was too Mongolian to be beautiful, but impressed with a childlike and innocent disposition. Uglen's mother was the previously mentioned Anana, who lived with him. While Umiktuallu, his older brother, controlled the entire family; this was a frightening and unpleasant looking fellow, but a skilful seal hunter. His wife Onaller was pretty, but a frightful scold. (Amundsen 1907: 143)

However, while the text projects a condescending attitude towards the Inuit, the photographs contribute to a different understanding, assuming an 'honorific quality' (Sekula 1989: 345) as proud hunters, beautiful women, and happy children.

This tension follows the photographs into the museum space and becomes a key site of negotiation and concerns about representation. The photographs taken of the Inuit during the *Gjøa* expedition are an interesting example because they have been used in three different exhibitions that were opened in connection with the Nansen–Amundsen Year in 2011: *Snowhow: What the polar heroes learned from the Inuit, the Sami and the Arctic seafarers* at the Tromsø University Museum, *Arctic Experts: The seal people's meeting with Roald Amundsen* at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, and Fram Museum's new permanent exhibition in Oslo. The *Gjøa* photograph has been used in each of these exhibitions. Consequently

I will now look more closely at the exhibitions and the placement and captions which frames the photograph.

The exhibition *Snowhow* opened on 23 January 2011 and was a part of the launch ceremony for the Nansen–Amundsen Year in Tromsø. The intention of the exhibition was to convey knowledge, centred on five concrete themes that the different expeditions particularly learned from people living in the north: food, the sledge, ice, *Annoraaq* [anorak] and *Qayaq* [kayak].² Furthermore the exhibition was intended to present something other than a traditional chronological presentation of expeditions or polar hero biographies. Key activities emphasized were the knowledge of nutrition, dressing, dog sledding, paddling a kayak and navigating on and in the ice – skills that the polar heroes had learned from the Inuit, Sami and Arctic peoples. By focusing on knowledge instead of chronological presentation of expeditions, *Snowhow* tried to move away from the usual demand for ‘authenticity’, which is often dominant in polar historical presentations (Aarekol 2012: 103).

The exhibition design featured large fabric banner posters on the walls, where photographs form part of a visual totality. The polar heroes’ view of Inuit knowledge is communicated through quotes, such as Amundsen’s formulation about Netsilik Inuit equipment: ‘The apparently primitive objects proved to be so well adapted to the existing needs and conditions that only centuries of experience and trial could have produced them’ (Amundsen 1907: 14). The *Gjøa* photograph is placed amongst 11 photographs on a banner within the theme ‘the sledge’ with the caption ‘Roald Amundsen’s *Gjøa* expedition 1903–1906’. Despite the exhibition’s emphasis on the flow of knowledge between Inuit people and the expedition, there is no additional information the people in the picture who are seen as anonymous, even though Amundsen himself mentions them by names in his book. Instead the visitor’s attention is focused on the sledge.

The exhibition *Arctic Experts*, in contrast to *Snowhow*, addressed only one expedition – Amundsen’s *Gjøa* expedition. The starting point for this exhibition was the museum’s collection of more than 900 ethnographic objects that Amundsen purchased or obtained by trade from the Netsilik Inuit whilst overwintering with the *Gjøa*. The quantity of artefacts in museum’s collection made it possible to exhibit multiple examples of each artefact type, displaying variation, diversity and aesthetics. The majority were utilitarian objects identified in the Netsilik Inuit language, Inuktitut, where functionality was main objective in the majority of captions, such as: ‘Man’s anorak of reindeer hides for winter use. Double layer reindeer hide, the inner with the hairs facing inward and the outer with the hairs

2 The author was the project leader for the exhibition and therefore is well acquainted with the background and production of the exhibition. The project group included photograph archivist Ann-Kristin Balto and historian Harald Dag Jølle. The five themes are all titles in the exhibition. *Annoraaq* and *Qayaq* are used in Inuit as a title because these are loanwords we use from Inuit.

out, is the warmest one can wear.³ In this exhibition the majority of photographs have named individuals in the captions. The caption to the *Gjøa* photograph is a rewriting of the photograph's caption in Amundsen's book: 'Netsilik visit Gjøa in Gjøahavn. From the left: Anana, Onaller, Kabloka and Umiktuallu'. With this caption the persons in the photograph also appear as individuals, as the people that Amundsen and his crew met during the overwintering, and as sources of objects and knowledge, and not merely as examples of the indigenous inhabitants. With such a strong focus on the presentation of artefacts and their function, Netsilik Inuit knowledge about life in the Arctic is emphasized in the exhibition narrative, while Amundsen is given a secondary role as the one who provided the artefacts that are found in the museum collections. Furthermore, by stressing the point about the ways in which Inuit knowledge became important to the Norwegian polar expedition, the exhibition presented the Inuit as the real Arctic expert and not merely as the suppliers of ethnographic objects.

Finally, in this survey, is the new permanent exhibition opened on the 150th anniversary of Fridtjof Nansen's birth in 2011, at the Fram Museum in Oslo (Kløver 2011–12: 42). In addition to the polar vessel *Fram* which still is centrally positioned in the museum, the visitors can now experience a spectacular northern lights (Aurora Borealis) show on the ceiling, watch a polar ice simulator in a refrigerated room, listen to growling polar bear, and study an ice mummy. The other parts of the exhibition are placed on balconies in three storeys around the boat and have a more traditional narrative style with wall charts, photographs, texts, films and tableaux. This is a highly ambitious and comprehensive exhibition with an almost encyclopaedic presentation of Norwegian polar history associated with the ship *Fram*, Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen. In addition to the main text in English, with Norwegian subtitles, the exhibition is translated into eight languages on digital screens. The presentation of information is especially tailored to the many foreign tourists who visit the Fram Museum. As such it constitutes the largest exhibition window for information on Norwegian polar history aimed at tourists in the Norwegian capital. The exhibition is too extensive to be discussed here, instead in line with the discussion above; I will again consider the use of photography in relation to the presentation of indigenous people.

In the exhibition Amundsen's encounter with the Inuit is accounted for as follows: 'In addition they established good contact with the nomadic Inuit, particularly the Netsilik people, and Amundsen learned from them about how to survive and travel in Polar Regions.' The text continues: 'Here he learned about dog sledging, building igloos, about food and clothing and other survival strategies. All of this knowledge contributed to the success of his South Pole expedition in 1910–1912.' This is almost all that is said in the exhibition about the polar hero's contact with the people who lived in the Arctic, as this is the history of the expedition – and not the population in the Arctic areas. In addition, the current

³ The caption from the exhibit *Arctic Experts* is transcribed by the author. The exhibition was dismantled by the end of 2011.

situation of indigenous peoples in the Arctic is given little attention. Under the heading *Exploration of the North* is the following text: 'For thousands of years, the High Arctic inhabitants were only small, nomadic Inuit groups. The ice blocked explorers from travelling by ship from further south'. One possible implication of this statement is that it was only when explorers managed to conquer the ice that the area was first truly inhabited. This perspective is reinforced again by the lack of Inuit names and identities in the photograph, but presented as in the caption to the *Gjøa* photograph: 'A group of Inuit visit *Gjøa* to exchange goods'. This marginalization of indigenous people in the construct of national heroics, represented through the ship itself, sets the tone for the whole exhibition.

Only one of these three exhibitions, *Snowhow*, was reviewed in the journal for Norwegian museum professionals, *Museumsnytt*. Here Swedish historian Anders Houltz reviewed the exhibition favourably, but he also raised some interesting objections questioning the ways in which voices were being heard through this exhibition project: was it those of the 'heroes', or that of the indigenous peoples' voices or both (Houltz 2011: 14)? In his view the voice of the polar explorers dominated the exhibition. Nansen and Amundsen are presented as the active collectors of knowledge, while the indigenous people are given the role of passive recipients. The use of photographs is essential to this reading. With photographs' captions where indigenous people are not named, but only refer to the polar explorers that have taken the photographs or the expedition they originate from, this perspective is further emphasized. Conversely, one could argue, that the very large number of photographs of indigenous people in the exhibition nevertheless provides a sense of a saturating presence of the people who lived their lives well adapted to the climate and environment in the areas they inhabited. In this sense it is the photographs that complicate the reading of the exhibition.

The way the photographs worked in these three different contexts exemplifies this reading. Consequently one could argue that if the exhibitions *Snowhow* and *Arctic Experts* were to be shown side by side, they might complement one another well. As *Snowhow* and the Fram Museum primarily present a perspective from the history of polar heroes, *Arctic Experts* seeks to present a perspective as seen from an indigenous viewpoint. This exhibition foregrounds the objects and people, while placing the expeditions in the background.

The Icon from the South Pole

I want to turn now to two final tropes of the polar hero – the tent and the flag. As with the hooded parka, the tent and flag have been important recognizable symbols in polar iconography. When unknown places and the poles in particular were photographed, it was important that these tropes were included. In polar history there are many examples of the placing of these defining objects (Lund and Berg 2011: 266–9). These tropes mark the most heavily symbolic and decidedly most widely disseminated photograph in Norwegian polar history, and they



Figure 9.3 Tent and flag: The South Pole. Photographer: Olav Bjaaland.
© National Library of Australia, an23814300

were also utilized heavily in the anniversary year of Amundsen's famous polar expedition, 2011. This photograph was taken at the South Pole on 14 December, in 1911 by Olav Bjaaland, the day that Amundsen and his men reached the Pole. The photographic scene gives an impression of being carefully arranged: the four men with their bare heads facing the tent and the Norwegian flag, as if the moment was a performance of a formal contemplation. The iconic position of this photograph is probably also due to this simplicity: the men, the tent and the conquering of the unknown space.

The expedition's first contact with civilization was Tasmania, where the news was telegraphed to the world and Bjaaland's photograph developed by photographer John Watt Beattie in 1912. The original negative no longer survives, but the image has been copied and distributed extensively since 1912. In a photo album from Beattie's studio there is, however, a print that stands out from all of the reproductions that otherwise has been used in Norway. In this particular print of the subject there are many footprints in the snow, the stomach in Amundsen's anorak is slacker than usual and there is less wind in the flag (Lund and Berg 2011: 270). After this print became known, it has also been given a dominant role in the narrative about Norwegian polar history. Today this print is referred to as the original version of the photograph.

The photograph was used in the exhibition *Snowhow* under the heading *Annoraaq*. It is presented in the centre of a large (c. 6m × 3m) banner that covers the wall and accompanied by the caption: 'On December 14, 1911 Amundsen

and his men reached the South Pole, as the first in the world, after an intense race against the British. Everyone is wearing anoraks.’ The rest of the banner covering the wall comprises photographs from a number of expeditions showing both Inuit using their traditional clothing and polar heroes wearing this type of clothing on polar expeditions. The captions and photographs otherwise tell us that the use of the anorak is functional and originates from a traditional Inuit item of clothing. None of the persons in the photographs are named, only the names of the expeditions on which the photographs were taken. The triumphant South Pole photograph in the middle implies that the polar heroes had learned something from the indigenous people, but still by not giving the native a more prominent position or personal voice in the exhibition contributes to reducing this group to an understanding of their role as merely passive in this part of the history.

The Fram Museum has also used this photograph. With the title *The race to the South Pole*, the South Pole photograph of Amundsen and his men is greatly enlarged to bigger than life size and given the form of a diorama. The men are cut out from the scene and from a hand coloured slide version of the photograph. These photographic details have been printed on aluminium plates which gives stability and clarity, and placed in front of a copy of the tent that was left at the South Pole and the Norwegian flag. The diorama is arranged as a mirror image of the photograph, but also as an identical copy of the men, tent, flag and the white landscape. The only thing missing is the photographer, Olav Bjaaland, who is also, of course, absent in the original photograph.

But the photographic installation in the gallery is also used to present a patriotic claim to exploration dominance. On the opposite side of this diorama, which can be characterized as a representation of a complete triumph of Norwegian exploration, the Fram Museum has placed a diorama showing a scene from the British polar explorer Robert F. Scott’s parallel expedition in the race to be first to reach the South Pole. Here Scott’s ship *Terra Nova* is still at the edge of the ice and the crew of the expedition are working hard with the motorized sledges and dogs across the ice. The images of the men are about 10 cm in size and the diorama is placed so that the public look down on the scene from a bird’s eye perspective. The triumphant diorama from the South Pole thus stands in stark contrast, and in opposition to the representation of the British expedition who are still working and struggling beside the ship with their equipment – literally and metaphorically diminished. The text also reiterates this reading noting how the Englishmen lost the race to the South Pole.

The photograph, however, went through yet another iteration in a major piece of patriotic art. Following a competition, a new national monument was unveiled on 14 December 2011 outside the Fram Museum at Bygdøyenes (Orheim 2012: 54–8). The winner of the competition was the artist Håkon Anton Fagerås. The jury made the following statement on their decision:

The artist has taken his starting point from the famous authentic photograph which marked the achievement of the goal. Not only with the original five

persons in the photograph minus the photographer, but with all those who reached the South Pole. The five participants are presented equally, but with Amundsen in the centre. (Orheim 2012: 57)

The photograph from the South Pole was thus used as a the foundation for the monument of Amundsen and the five men with their hood off who stand next to one another facing south, but without the tent and flag. The committee perceived this as an authentic photograph of the historical moment, a key marker that serves as a foundation for a new national monument for Amundsen, where the men's placement emphasizes the camaraderie between them. In this way, the Bjaaland photograph still makes its mark. Reproduced three-dimensionally in both diorama and monument form, it is used as a platform for understanding the history of the Norwegian nation and its relation to polar explorations.

The Museum's Polar Conservatism

As I have argued, the photographs from the expeditions have an important role in the presentation and understanding of polar history. The photographs create a context and convenient frames of reference, and key tropes for the collective memory that is embodied within them and their institutional use museums. The hooded portrait represents the cultivation of the hero that appears in the museum exhibitions, where Amundsen meets the gaze of the visitors in a factually oriented narrative that emphasizes authenticity and historical truth. The photograph of the Inuit at Gjøahavn represents both the polar heroes' relationship to the indigenous inhabitants and the exhibition's presentation of this relationship. With the new exhibitions opened in the anniversary year 2011, there was more of an attempt to widen rather than challenge the prevailing understanding of this theme. That Amundsen and Nansen were actually willing to learn from the indigenous people contributed to strengthening their hero status rather than opening up for alternative stories that included an indigenous perspective. The discussion of the South Pole photograph illustrates how an iconographic photograph within the expedition genre continues to be both an important element in the narrative of a successful polar history and a source of new developments within the Norwegian national narrative. Unsurprisingly, the museological narratives about the polar heroes emphasize the many successful expeditions and conquests. Factually based accounts with a focus on authenticity have largely dominated the exhibition stories, while narratives about the indigenous people in the Arctic often continue to be absent from in the museums' representations of the past. Photographs and the way they are used play an important part in this misrepresentation or disavowal of history.

The polar photographs are used as if they were neutral, unmediated and truthful photographic evidence of expedition life. Thus they illustrate how the production of exhibitions has not necessarily developed in line with recent academic scholarship. While such scholarship has adopted new perspectives of

indigenous people, colonization, and power and powerlessness – and on how photographs work as cultural constructions, the museum's exhibition practices and uses of photographs have not visibly changed. When exhibitions are planned and produced, there are in my experience, certainly reflections regarding which photographs are selected or rejected and how this is done. But this process is seldom explicit. In the polar historical exhibitions the museums themselves seem to be conservative, unable to recognize or address the nature of the production of knowledge that is taking place in the process of producing such exhibitions. Thus there is something unresolved – something which allows the traditional stories of the polar heroes to appear, again and again – with photographs as silent witnesses.

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