

# FRAMING THE ARCTIC: RECONSIDERING ROALD AMUNDSEN'S GJØA EXPEDITION IMAGERY

Ingeborg Høvik

In February 1907 Roald Amundsen gave a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society, summarising his recent voyage through the Northwest Passage in the vessel *Gjøa*.<sup>1</sup> While the great feat of the Gjøa Expedition (1903–1906) unquestionably was its successful navigation of the Passage, Amundsen emphasised that the primary scientific concern of the voyage was to carry out geomagnetic measurements in order to find the current position of the North Magnetic Pole, first located by John Ross's Second Voyage of 1829–1834 (Amundsen 1907a, 4). Having already informed the public about this aim in a lecture presented to the Norske Geografiske Selskab (Norwegian Geographical Society) roughly two years before he set sail for the Arctic (Amundsen, 1902), Amundsen further reiterated the point in the introduction to his ensuing 1907 expedition narrative, *Nordvest-passagen* (The Northwest Passage), noting how the voyage had combined his childhood dream of attaining the Passage with the “far superior scientific aim: to establish the current location of the North Magnetic Pole” (Amundsen 1907b, 4).

However, Amundsen also returned from the Arctic with a comprehensive documentation of the Netsilik Inuit with whom his expedition was associated for an extended period of twenty-one months while living in Gjøa Haven – a bay Amundsen's crew claimed through naming – on King William Island in Nunavut.<sup>2</sup> The diary Amundsen kept during the voyage contains shorter entries noting day-to-day encounters with the Inuit, which for long periods at a time was a daily occurrence. The diary further includes some longer passages describing certain events and particularities of their culture in more detail. In addition to Amundsen's textual descriptions, the expedition brought back about two thousand photographs (Kløver 2014, 967), including glass plate negatives, rolls of film, and prints developed from these by Godfred Hansen, the assigned photographer of the expedition (Amundsen 1907b, 9). Characterised by an uneven quality and a general amateurism, these photographs were taken by Hansen and, to a lesser degree Amundsen, neither of who were professional photographers.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Amundsen's lecture was subsequently published in the Royal Geographical Society's journal.

<sup>2</sup> In his diary, Amundsen notes that the first encounter with a sub-group of the Netsilik people took place on 29 October 1903. On 13 August 1905, the expedition left Gjøa Haven (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen; NB-Ms.4°3040 Amundsen).

<sup>3</sup> Although Huntford has argued that all members of Amundsen's various expeditions generally took pictures during the course of any given journey, there is little evidence of this practice from the Gjøa Expedition (Huntford 1987, 8). Amundsen's diary includes several notes about Godfred Hansen shooting or developing photographs, but makes no mention of other crew members being involved in such activities. This impression is corroborated in Amundsen's lecture to the Royal Geographical

Like Amundsen's diary, the photographs describe forms of contact between the explorers and the Inuit that further suggests a keen interest for the Netsilik's culture. Drawing on these sources, Amundsen represented his information on the Inuit to the public back home in official retellings of the voyage, most notably through a series of lectures in Europe and North-America in the two years following his return from the Arctic.<sup>4</sup> In the same period, Amundsen published his account of the expedition, which attracted the interest of several foreign publishers even before its release in Norway in the second half of 1907.<sup>5</sup> Like other books of its genre, *Nordvest-passagen* presented a chronologically structured narrative of the explorers' journey through space and time, interrupted by one significant halt: a seventy-page chapter – the longest in the book – titled “Den magnetiske nordpols beboere” (the inhabitants of the North Magnetic Pole). Here, Amundsen gave a thoroughgoing description of Netsilik culture, including aspects of their social customs, housing, clothing, material culture and hunting methods (Amundsen 1907b, 210–81).

My interest in this material is the relationship of the Gjøa Expedition photographs to ideas about indigeneity at the time, in particular how these ideas came to be expressed in Amundsen's *Nordvest-passagen*. The extensive body of photographs shot in the field elaborates the close interaction between crew and Inuit recorded in Amundsen's personal diary and published narrative, testifying to the existence of an active and dynamic “contact zone” (Pratt [1992] 2008) in and around Gjøa Haven. This was based on a shared interest in the exchange of goods, favours and extended social contact. Reflecting a sustained, in-depth encounter with a limited number of Inuit, these original photographs could arguably, if not straightforwardly, be read as a two-way portrayal of the unique individuals Amundsen's crew met. At the same time, a peculiar distancing seems to have taken place as the photographs were selected and reproduced as illustrations for his expedition narrative. That is not to say that Amundsen downplayed the Inuit's presence in the Arctic, or their interaction with the crew and role in assisting the expedition. A defining feature of his Gjøa Expedition was of course its radical adaption of Inuit methods that ensured its success in navigating the Northwest Passage, a fact Amundsen celebrates rather than covers up in his expedition account. What I argue, however, is that despite his often forthright admiration for and use of the Inuit, Amundsen nonetheless attempts, through textual and visual means, to deny their “coevalness” (Fabian 1983), and suppress their individualities.

Arguing that the Gjøa Expedition's photographs, despite their seemingly coincidental, “snapshot” quality, convey particular messages about the so-called primitive, this article begins by situating the photographs, alongside Amundsen's other documentation of the Inuit, within a larger tradition of ethnographic representation. Here I consider Amundsen's activities in relation to patterns

---

Society as well as in *Nordvest-passagen* (Amundsen 1907a, 505; 1907b, 9). In addition to Hansen, Amundsen took photographs during the Gjøa Expedition (discussion with Geir O. Kløver, Director of the Frammuseet, Oslo, 23 January 2015).

<sup>4</sup> His tour in America consisted of seventy-five lectures (NB-Brevs. 480A, 3 June 1907).

<sup>5</sup> Letters of correspondence include French, German, British, American and Finnish publishers (NB-Brevs. 480A; NB-Brevs. 812: 2:b).

established by previous explorers and ethnographers. Building on the premise that the Gjøa Expedition's use of photography formed part of a planned project that intersected with anthropological concerns and practices of its time, the article moves on to a discussion of the rationale behind Amundsen's selection of certain photographs and his re-contextualisation of these as illustrations in his narrative. The focus in this part is three illustrations in *Nordvest-passagen* that all display an ethnographic interest in their portrayal of Inuit in different sites and situations (figs. 3, 4b, 6b). Examining these illustrations against the original photographs on which they were based and related photographs shot during the Gjøa Expedition, my purpose is to demonstrate that a discernible change in the representation of indigeneity occurred between field photography and published narrative — a shift I believe was connected to Amundsen's desire to match his expedition account to existing scientific visual and literary conventions.

### **Amundsen and Early Twentieth-Century Anthropology**

Amundsen's diary and the Gjøa Expedition photographs may be situated within a larger project of ethnographic documentation that included a substantial collection of Inuit material culture. Upon his expedition's return to Norway in November 1906, Amundsen handed over about 1,200 objects to the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo, in exchange for 40,000 kroner from the Norwegian government. This collection was promptly put on what was intended to be permanent display in a space on the museum's first floor, thenceforth referred to as the "Gjøasalen" (Gjøa room).<sup>6</sup> A small selection of artefacts was also gifted onwards to the Bergen Museum (137 objects) and the National Museum in Copenhagen (120 objects) at this time (Nielsen 1907, 120; Gjessing and Johannessen 1957, 124; Taylor 1974, 5).

Amundsen's collection of Inuit culture was not, in ambition, limited to physical objects alone, however. Several times during the voyage he tried to recruit young Inuit men for the purpose of bringing them back to Norway — first, a ten-year old boy named "Kaumallo"; and later a seventeen-year old youth called "Maniratcha" or "Manni", who replaced Amundsen's original choice of "Tonich" (also spelled "Tonnich"), a man in his twenties (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 13 December 1904; NB-Ms.4°3040 Amundsen, 31 July 1905, 14 August 1905; Amundsen, 1907b 196–97, 326–27). Though ultimately unsuccessful — Kaumallo changed his mind, while Manni drowned — Amundsen's apparent desire to acquire "a live specimen" is recognisable within a long European practice. Dating back to the sixteenth century at least, this tradition brought multiple non-Western indigenous individuals (several of whom were Inuit) to Europe as curiosities and exploited them for popular entertainment and quasi-scientific research and dissemination (Feest 2007, 70–72; Harbsmeier 2002, 33–71; Altick 1978). Amundsen's motive for wanting to bring back Inuit from the Arctic fit within a frame that combined scientific interest with a European civilising mission. To Amundsen, a living Inuit not only represented a direct source of knowledge on Inuit culture, but would also give insight into how

---

<sup>6</sup> Objects from Netsilik Inuit material culture collected by Amundsen's Gjøa Expedition are still on display in the Museum's "Arctic Exhibit" on the first floor.

primitives adapted to civilisation in Europe (NB-Ms.4°3040 Amundsen, 31 July 1905; Amundsen 1907b, 437).

Amundsen's comprehensive account of the Inuit – including his intention of bringing back an Inuk for scientific purposes – is well known to scholars concerned with the Norwegian exploration of the Arctic. Yet, the relationship between the Gjøa Expedition's photographs of Inuit and early twentieth-century scientific ideas about non-Western peoples has remained an under-explored area of research. Perhaps owing to the ways in which Amundsen originally presented his expedition, contemporary scholarship has tended to similarly place emphasis on the expedition's geomagnetic research and voyage through the Passage. Indeed, the few scholars that have published on the Gjøa Expedition's photographs tend to portray Amundsen and his crew as photographing the Inuit and collecting objects from their material culture without any particular agenda or conviction (Aarekol 2013; Berg and Lund 2011; Eek 1999, 1998; Huntford 1987). The general notion put forth is that the photographs were expressive of a rather neutral and unbiased, secondary interest in Inuit culture, which seems to suggest that the explorers' activities were somehow detached from the broader discursive field of their time and society, including a body of textual and visual representations of Inuit by previous explorers to the Arctic. Overall, the concern has not been to investigate the latent meanings conveyed by the images, with their relationship to existing scientific ideas about indigenous peoples and an associated tradition of ethnographic imaging remaining unexamined.

This is odd considering that Amundsen's Gjøa Expedition travelled through the vicinity of King William Island, a territory previously visited by several explorers who had repeatedly encountered and represented bands of Inuit living in the area. Examples include John Ross's Second Voyage of 1829–1834, as well as three separate Franklin Search Expeditions led by Francis L. M'Clintock, Charles Francis Hall and Frederick Schwatka between 1857 and 1880, all of which Amundsen refers to in his published expedition narrative (Amundsen 1907b, 211–12). Ross's sustained interaction with the Netsilik Inuit in the early 1830s is of particular importance, with Ross and his crew having spent about a year and a half living in close proximity to the same people Amundsen's expedition would document some seventy years later. Of the many visual and textual productions Ross created following his Second Voyage, was a two-volume expedition account that included in-depth descriptions and numerous illustrations of Netsilik Inuit based on his on-the-spot sketches (Ross 1835a; 1835b). Ross's account was a work Amundsen knew well and frequently referenced in lectures and publications.<sup>7</sup> Amundsen's diary mentions his use of “the vocabulary in Ross's book” and references Ross's illustrations when explaining the appearance of Inuit clothing for men and women (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 2 November 1903).

Amundsen's knowledge of these expeditions suggests that he was aware of the distinct possibility of meeting and documenting Inuit already in the planning stages of his expedition. In his later memoirs, he even explains how collecting Inuit objects

---

<sup>7</sup> John Ross's Second Voyage is mentioned in Amundsen's lectures to the Norske Geografiske Selskab and the Royal Geographical Society, given in 1901 and 1907 respectively, both of which were published subsequently (Amundsen 1902, 168–69; 1907a, 494).

had been a projected ambition of the Gjøa Expedition right from the start, with many small items packed for bartering (Amundsen 1927, 48). The men also packed a large amount of photographic equipment – including as much as 1380 glass plate negatives and fifty rolls of film (FM, Knudsen 1903; NB-Brevs.812: 2: b, Knudsen 1902–1903).<sup>8</sup> This suggests that visual documentation of the Inuit – like the collecting of objects from their material culture – was intended from the outset, an assumption that is supported by the fact that the majority of the surviving photographs from the expedition are concerned with Inuit.

During their voyage, Amundsen collected from and documented the Inuit with a clear understanding of the scientific value his finds would have. Indications of this include an entry in his diary, wherein he comments that Godfred Hansen’s “eskimo photos will make a great impact”, and a letter Amundsen wrote during the expedition to Yngvar Nielsen, the director of the Etnografisk Museum, informing Nielsen about his activities concerning the collecting of Inuit material and the photographing of Inuit (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 30 July 1904; Eek 1998, 118). In his memoirs, Amundsen also explains that his method for collecting – based on the principle of acquiring one item of every kind of object of Netsilik material culture – formed part of a planned project to pass on knowledge about Inuit culture to the popular-scientific context of the museum (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 8 January 1905):

I began to collect a complete set of exhibition materials for the museums, which could illustrate the life of the Eskimos. Before I was finished, I had more of these types of sets, which are now exhibited in Norwegian museums. I received samples of practically everything these Eskimos owned, from clothes used by both sexes to samples of all types of cooking and hunting equipment. (Amundsen 1927, 48)

To his large and geographically wide-reaching audience, Amundsen’s multifaceted documentation of the Netsilik must thus have served as an authoritative source of popular-scientific knowledge about primitive peoples in the High Arctic that went beyond random gathering.

In fact, Amundsen was at times rather clear about the intersection of his own research with the practices and concerns of turn-of-the-century anthropology. An example of this is the lecture he delivered to the Royal Geographical Society in 1907. As well as underlining the importance of his finds by drawing attention to the Netsilik Inuit’s remoteness and isolation from Western society, Amundsen touches upon scientific notions of objective method that were in circulation at the time in describing his approach to data collection. He also places specific emphasis on his expedition’s photographs of Inuit, which are seen to play a key role in a claim to scientific credibility:

---

<sup>8</sup> This information is based on two receipts for photographic equipment. The date for one of these is rather broad (between 1902 and 1903), but is assumed to be Amundsen’s order of photographic equipment for his Gjøa Expedition (NB-Brevs. 812: 2: b, Knudsen, 1902-1903).

What I have to tell about them, however, is based partly on careful observation, and partly on information from the Eskimo themselves, and this being the case, I venture to think that my information regarding one of the most interesting and least-known races of the world is correct. What adds greatly to the value of these searches is the series of splendid photographs taken by Lieut. Hansen during our sojourn in those parts. (Amundsen 1907a, 505)

Here Amundsen asserts his position as an ethnographer in different ways, not least through establishing the relevance of his finds as an account of a people who represented a prime object of study for anthropology. Amundsen further stresses the scientificity of his fieldwork (based on observation and conversation) by pointing to his personal relationship to the Netsilik, made possible through his long-term interaction with them.

Sustained contact was, of course, a common enough situation for explorers of the preceding century. However, these early expeditions had in general been rather concerned to maintain clear hierarchies and divisions, at least officially, between explorers and natives. By contrast, Amundsen was quite open about the intimacy between his men and the Inuit, which included overnight stays with Inuit in igloos and long-term visits of Inuit on board the *Gjøa*. In his narrative, Amundsen notes for example that they could have up to thirteen Inuit “night guests” on board during their second winter on King William Island (Amundsen 1907b, 207).<sup>9</sup> This change in what was considered acceptable forms of socialising may be connected to new scientific ideals of anthropological research. As Henrika Kuklick has noted, anthropologists in the late nineteenth century questioned the value of information collected by passing European travellers, arguing that only long-term residence among the natives would elicit reliable data (Kuklick 2008, 63). Amundsen’s choice to live within instead of outside Inuit society may in part result from a desire to follow the scientific practices of his day. In doing so Amundsen – like Fridtjof Nansen, whose *Eskimo Life* (1891) was based on a winter’s co-habitation with Greenlanders – could lay claim to a solid period of fieldwork that answered to current anthropological demands to ethnographers for a long-continued intimate interaction with natives. Whether consciously or not, Amundsen responded to ideas promoted by leading anthropologists such as Franz Boas, who had conducted fieldwork among the Inuit on Baffin Island in the early 1880s. Boas emphasised that ethnographers should learn the indigenous language and use this to gain inside knowledge of the culture under study (Barnard 2000, 101), a practice Nansen had pursued during his stay in Greenland some fifteen years before Amundsen’s *Gjøa* Expedition (Nansen 1891, v; Kleivan 1961, 444). Like these men, Amundsen believed he had obtained a high enough level of the local language so that his translations of statements made by the Inuit were essentially correct (Amundsen 1907b, 211).

---

<sup>9</sup> For other examples of visits between camps, see Amundsen, 1907b, 122–28, 184–6, 201, 283–84.

### **Amundsen and Photography in the Field**

Like anthropology, photography and the way in which it came to be used in the latter half of the nineteenth century can be understood as a phenomenon and symptom of modernity and a related Western need to accumulate, order and systematise knowledge about social and ethnic others in a rapidly changing reality characterised by industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation through colonisation and capitalism. If the science of anthropology rose out of a Euro-American desire to understand and order cultural multiplicity and the relation of non-Western others to self, photography was its visual tool par excellence (Tagg 1988, 5–11; Banks and Ruby 2011, 2–3). The Council of the Anthropological Institute's 1892 edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* – an influential manual or guide to anthropological research pitched at travellers and other non-professionals, replete with readymade lists of questions on an astounding range of topics – underlined the importance of visual records, arguing that these were in fact more valuable than written accounts, mostly due to the liability of local informants. In the prefatory note to the volume's second part, on ethnography, the vice-president of the Institute, Charles Hercules Read, advised on how to properly prepare for fieldwork, arguing that,

The best plan seems to be to devote as much time as possible to the photographic camera or to making careful drawings, for by these means the traveller is dealing with facts about which there can be no question, and the record thus obtained may be elucidated by subsequent inquirers on the same spot, while the timid answers of natives to questions propounded through the medium of a native interpreter can but rarely be relied upon. (Read 1892, 87)

As Read argues, visual records superseded the problems of translation and comprehension that were seen to characterise textual records based on oral accounts – an issue here crudely framed as a fault with the subjects of study, whose intelligence Read goes on to claim is lacking and on a considerably lower level than the mind of the male, white traveller (Read 1892, 87).

The typical positioning of the camera outside the realm of art and creativity made it especially useful to anthropology. The mechanical and indexical nature of the camera enabled the photographer, so it seemed, to accurately and indiscriminately produce images of what was in front of its lens – a process often considered more reliable than drawing, which in contrast depended on the skilfulness, aesthetic preference and attention of the artist or draughtsman (Sontag [1977] 1990, 4–8). In bringing along this equipment, Amundsen's expedition followed the example set by other recent voyages to the Arctic, which similarly embraced the ideal of the modern explorer and based their visualisations of indigenous others on the medium considered most conducive to producing solid and truthful descriptions (Lewis-Jones 2008, 21).

Yet there is an underlying amateurism in the Gjøa Expedition's photographs that seems to work against Amundsen's claim to scientificity. The quality of the photographs is in many instances rather questionable, something a quick comparison



Fig. 1: Godfred Hansen / Roald Amundsen, (Inuit woman with child on board the *Gjøa*), 1903–1905, paper positive, 12.0 x 18.0 cm. National Library of Norway, Oslo.

with Robert Flaherty's highly composed studio portraits of Inuit individuals makes clear (see Skare's article this volume). The photograph of a Netsilik man (most likely) and woman with two children below deck on the *Gjøa* is typical for its poor composition and technical faults (fig. 1). Here, the exposure time was ill-considered against the light conditions (the source of light being the open hatch in the ceiling), resulting in blurring, which is particularly apparent in the child seated on the woman's lap. These problems, together with the awkward framing of this scene, are repeated features in many of the other photographs from the expedition, as are signs of a meagre handling more generally, including dirt and finger marks on the negatives and image deterioration, possibly caused by poor fixing and too brief a rinsing in the final stage of processing.<sup>10</sup>

Expressing the modernity of its time, this type of "bad" image points to the inherent democratic qualities of photography, including the accessibility and abundance of images for production and consumption in the early twentieth century. Like

<sup>10</sup> Discussion with Harald A. Østgaard Lund, Oslo, 4 December 2014.



other photographs from the Gjøa Expedition, this image's poor quality obscures a reading of it, failing to reveal with certainty both the appearance of the sitters and details of what is taking place. The lack of clarity may not only explain why the photograph was not chosen to illustrate Amundsen's narrative, but lends credence to understandings of this material as, in Roland Huntford's words, little more than immediate and coincidental "snapshots" (Huntford 1987, 8).

While this image may well be a snapshot, it was not necessarily one without intent. One comparatively longer entry in Amundsen's diary, which he later reworked for publication in his expedition narrative, concerns the way Netsilik infants and toddlers were kept naked and carried skin to skin on their mothers' backs, from where they were quickly pulled out when relieving themselves (NB-*Ms.4°1550* Amundsen, 30 December 1904). Amundsen was clearly intrigued by this practice, in particular how the small children seemed unaffected by being taken out into the cold and kept exposed to temperatures as low as  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$  for several minutes at a time, and it is not unlikely that he sought to further document this phenomenon through photography (Amundsen 1907b, 225–26).

My suggestion, in other words, is that when considered in relation to Amundsen's wide-ranging ethnographic commentary on the Netsilik, even seemingly random, meaningless photographs like this one start to acquire at least the outlines of a clear rationale. This becomes even more apparent in the case of many of the photographs of Netsilik that were ultimately chosen to illustrate Amundsen's expedition narrative.

### **Publishing Photographs**

Despite the special relationship of photography to reality, the "evidential force" (Barthes 1981) of the photograph was still manipulated, with several possibilities presented in the processes of developing and selecting images, as well as by the new narrative contexts in which they were then placed. By cropping or retouching, for example, backgrounds could be faded or removed completely, details could disappear while other elements could be enhanced, with the result being a subtle adjustment of "what was there" to better fit a certain format, style or mode of presentation – and, by extension, the meaning that was to be conveyed.

Scratching the surface of three illustrations of Netsilik Inuit featured in Amundsen's expedition narrative reveals that, consciously or not, the decisions involved in the selecting and re-presenting of photographs for publication were anything but neutral. A closer reading of these illustrations, the original photographs behind them, and a selection of unpublished photographs related to them, suggests that Amundsen not only aspired to follow established conventions for ethnographic imaging, but did so to support an underlying notion prevalent in anthropological discourse at the time – that of the assumed temporal separation and distance between non-Western indigenous and Euro-American societies.

In different ways, the three illustrations from Amundsen's expedition narrative that I consider here are portrayals of Inuit individuals: the first shows four unnamed people covering their faces; the second an unidentified woman displaying a tattooed arm; and, the third a full-length portrait of a woman named "Magito" (figs. 3, 4b, 6b). In terms of the background and siting of these photographs, they are representative of the Gjøa Expedition imagery overall, as they were shot in spaces



Fig. 2: “Summer scene from the deck.” In Roald Amundsen, *Nordvest-passagen*.

repeatedly used by Hansen in his work – inside the igloo, on deck, and in the cabin of the *Gjøa*, respectively. Many of the photographs capturing these spaces hint at a vibrant contact zone, one example being an illustration in Amundsen’s narrative showing a seemingly informal snapshot of him and a group of Inuit seated on boxes and barrels on the *Gjøa*’s deck (fig. 2). Paying little or no attention to the camera, they appear to be socialising in a rather relaxed manner. This impression is reinforced by the caption – “Sommercene fra dækket” (summer scene from the deck) – that eventually accompanied this image in print, imparting an everyday normalcy to this image.

At the same time, it is notable that this illustration of interaction between crew and Inuit features in the main, chronological narrative of Amundsen’s published expedition account, while the photograph of four Inuit, only, in an igloo interior is by contrast included in the chapter devoted solely to his ethnography of the Netsilik (fig. 3). Together with three other scenes in igloo interiors in Amundsen’s narrative, this image represents a recognisable category within previous Arctic exploration imagery

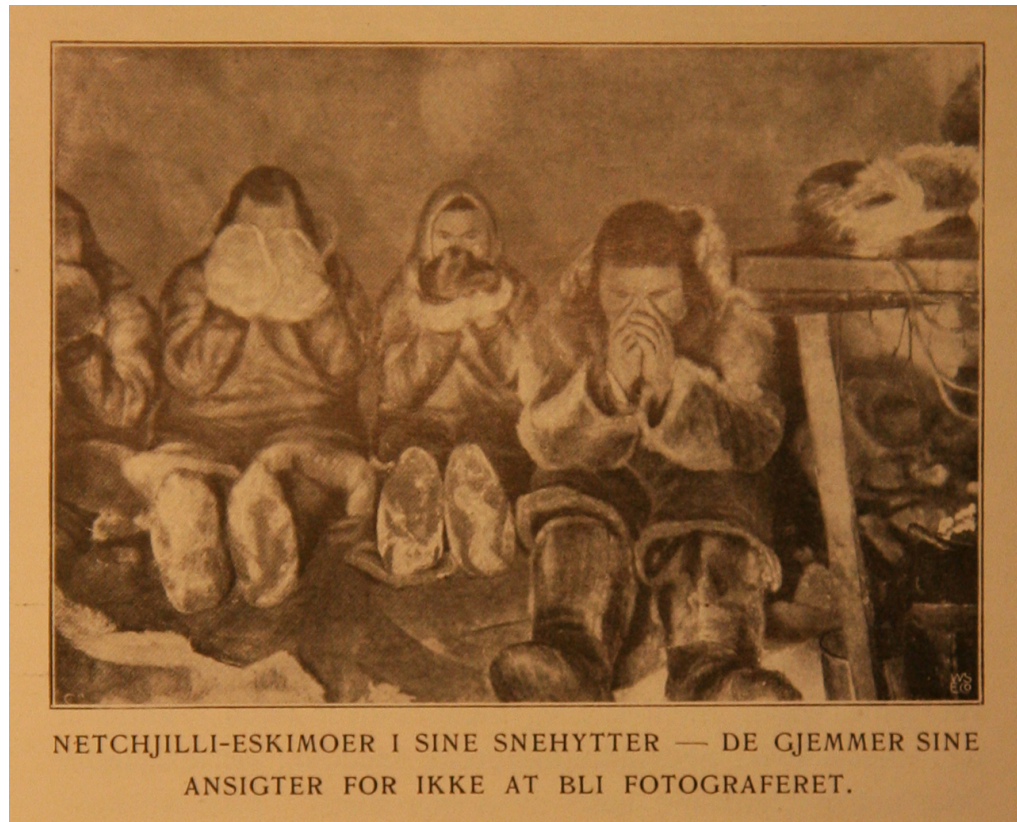


Fig. 3: “Netsilik Eskimos in their Igloos – they hide their faces so as not to be photographed.” in Roald Amundsen, *Nordvest-passagen*.

– most notably employed by John Ross, whose account of the Netsilik Inuit contained in the second volume of his 1835 expedition narrative features three portraits set inside an igloo. Reminiscent of Ross’s series of images, the igloo interior further links to past traditions of ethnographic imaging in its exclusion of crew members, as seen in the illustrations accompanying the ethnographic parts of expedition accounts published by William Edward Parry (Parry 1824 492–560), George Francis Lyon (Lyon 1824, 306–74), Fridtjof Nansen (Nansen 1890, 2:255–356; 1891) and Eivind Astrup (Astrup 1898, 73–173, 264–323).

This is, in fact, the case for all seventeen images that illustrate Amundsen’s stand-alone ethnography of the Netsilik Inuit. Although the selection of photographs for this chapter may have been coincidental, the absence of any explorers beyond the implicit presence of the photographer indicates a distancing from the Inuit, potentially a desire to capture something “authentic” – a pre-contact culture before its inevitable absorption by Western modernity (Clifford [1987] 2002, 160–61). Indeed, in his final pages to this chapter, Amundsen laments the Euro-American influence they witnessed on certain bands of Inuit they came across in the course of their voyage. Arguing that, “the happiest, healthiest, most honest and content” Inuit were those who lived in complete isolation, Amundsen concludes his ethnography with the telling pronouncement that, “My best wish for our friends the Netsilik eskimos is that civilisation may *never* reach them” (Amundsen 1907b, 280–81).

The latent “salvage paradigm” (Clifford [1987] 2002) at work here is further suggested by the specific choice of igloo scene. Sub-captioned with the explanation that the four Inuit pictured are hiding their faces in order not to be photographed (Amundsen 1907b, 251), this representation is at odds with other records from the Gjøa Expedition, not at least in terms of visual sources. In the ample selection of igloo scenes that forms part of the expedition’s total photographic production, no other surviving photograph testifies to a similar occurrence. On the contrary, in most photographs (taken in igloos or elsewhere) the Inuit are seen posing in front of the lens, smiling and looking back at the photographer or, conversely, taking little notice of the camera, as in “summer scene from the deck”. Moreover, Amundsen produced no other written records claiming that the Inuit feared the camera or harboured any superstitions related to it. If left somewhat hanging in the context of Amundsen’s narrative alone, the illustration of Inuit covering their faces does however draw on a recognisable trope in Western discourse on others – including Africans, native American tribes and Australian Aborigines in particular (Strother 2013, 189–90). Denoting the other’s primitiveness by drawing attention to what was considered a clear case of irrational beliefs, this trope similarly functioned to separate non-Western indigenous societies from the modern, technologic and scientific West.

The tattoo was another identifiable feature of primitive society circulating in current notions about non-Western indigenous peoples. Amundsen, who had plenty of examples to choose from on King William Island, where tattooing was common practice for Nestilik Inuit women, duly presented the phenomenon to his readers, including in his published narrative an image of a woman displaying her tattooed arm in the cabin of the *Gjøa* (fig. 4a, 4b). Titled “Tatoveret arm (Utkohikchjallik-eskimokvinde)”, it is paired together with an image of a woman’s tattooed thigh featuring on the opposite page bearing the similar caption “Tatoveret laar (Netchjillieskimokvinde)”.<sup>11</sup> Though neither illustration is accounted for in the surrounding text or chapter in which they feature, Amundsen briefly mentions tattoos in two other chapters of his narrative – first in a description of an Inuit woman named “Nalungia” he encountered during a visit to an igloo; and later, a rare instance of a man with a tattoo (Amundsen 1907b, 124–25, 301). At least six additional unique images of tattooed women exist in the surviving visual material from the Gjøa Expedition. Of these six additional images, two are arranged in the same manner as “Tatoveret arm”, portraying a female sitter in three-quarter profile seated behind a table with her bare arm resting on a light-coloured piece of fabric or paper to give the best view of her tattoos (figs. 5a, 5b). The other four are zoomed-in views of body parts, three of arms and three of thighs.

The explorers’ curiosity about this phenomenon is also apparent from an entry in Amundsen’s diary describing the tattoos he had observed, which he further compares to the tattoos pictured in the second volume of Ross’s 1835 expedition narrative (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 31 July 1904). In identifying tattooing as something meaningful for documentation, Amundsen and Hansen were well attuned to a specific anthropological interest at the time, as evidenced by the *Notes and Queries*

---

<sup>11</sup> “Tattooed arm (Utkohikchjallik Eskimo woman)” and “Tattooed thigh (Netchjilli Eskimo woman)”, respectively.



Fig. 4a: Probably Godfred Hansen, (Inuit woman displaying tattoo, hand covering face), paper positive, 13.0 x 18.0 cm. Museum of Cultural history, Oslo.

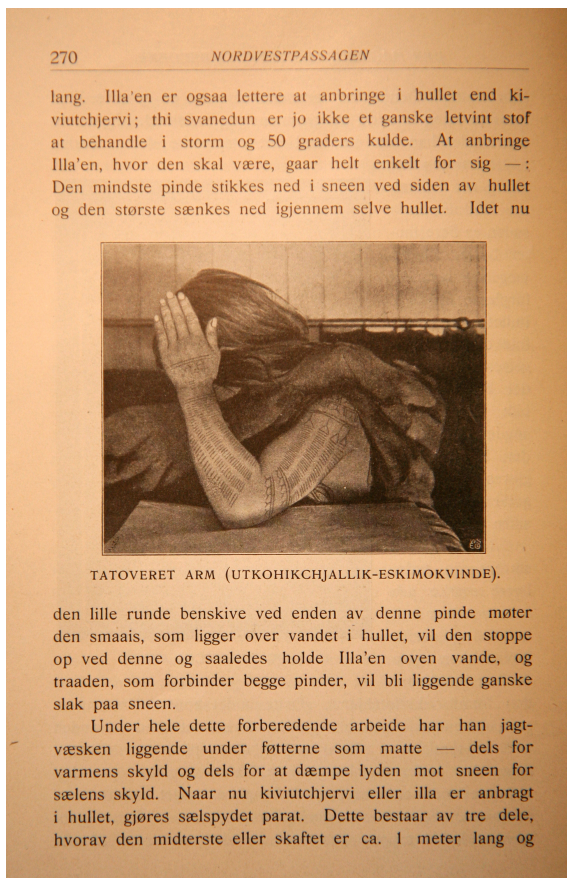


Fig. 4b: “Tattooed arm, Utkohik-chjallik Eskimo woman.” In Roald Amundsen, *Nordvest-passagen*



Fig. 5a: Probably Godfred Hansen, (Woman displaying tattoo, holding cylindrical object), 1903–1905, paper positive, 13.0 x 18.0 cm. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.



Fig. 5b: Probably Godfred Hansen, (Woman displaying tattoo, with baby on back), 1903–1905, paper positive, 13.0 x 18.0 cm. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

on *Anthropology* handbook. Following chapters on “Clothing” and “Personal Ornaments”, the manual’s section on “Painting and Tattooing” included no less than seventeen questions concerned with tattoos. With several of these queries being focused on the look of the tattoo – “What are the designs employed?”, “Is the tattooing symmetrical?”, “With what part of the body does it commence?” – it was clearly a case where visual documentation was seen to be particularly useful. As noted at the end of the series of questions, the guide concluded that, “It would be very desirable to obtain drawings of a few characteristic designs” (Franks and Harrison 1892, 92–93).

In all the images the intention was of course the same – namely, to display the characteristics of Netsilik women’s tattoos. Yet in the one Amundsen chose, this ambition is taken to rather more extreme measures, with the sitter put in an unnatural pose, hiding her identity by looking away and covering her face with her hand (figs. 4a, 4b). Whether consciously or not, the reason this image was chosen over the others seems linked to the alteration in posture and gaze.

Attached to codes of social inferiority, the returned gaze in photographic portraits of social or ethnic others often signifies “bluntness and ‘naturalness’”, in addition to suggesting exposure and the accessibility of the sitter (Lutz and Collins 2003, 360; Tagg 1988, 36–37). While this mode has frequently been used in ethnographic portraiture and representations of social outsiders generally, some of the Gjøa Expedition photographs of tattooed women that were not chosen for Amundsen’s published narrative became perhaps too blunt and natural for comfort. In the case of the photograph featuring a woman holding a cylindrical object for example, the sitter seems to reveal a degree of discomfort and resistance (fig. 5a). Her eyes and facial expression may be read as visual testimonies to the awkwardness of the situation, something Amundsen recorded in his diary. In his only written record of this particular photographic practice, Amundsen describes a moment when Hansen was photographing a woman named “Kabloka”. Visibly distraught by being asked to expose her arm in front of the camera, Kabloka reluctantly complied when offered a needle in exchange (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 31 July 1904).

While Amundsen found it amusing to observe her fear and the way in which she self-consciously covered the rest of her body during the shoot,<sup>12</sup> the photographs resulting from this type of interaction were possibly less desirable as illustrations, revealing too clearly, perhaps, the gendered and racial power relations at work between the photographer/explorers and sitter/Inuit women. This may particularly hold true for the stereoscopic photograph of a woman and baby, whose startled look is certainly a little unsettling (fig. 5b). This feeling is amplified by the direct and uncompromising gaze of the mother, which seems to betray her full awareness of the fact that her body – by way of the photographer’s lens – has become the object of attention for a male, white audience. Whether challenging or provocatively inviting, her knowing eyes seem to expose the viewing of her as neither neutral nor dispassionate.

---

<sup>12</sup> “Det var rent fornøieligt at se, hvor ræd Kabloka var for at blotte sig. Hun sørgede godt for at dække sig til forøvrigt” (It was simply amusing to see, how scared Kabloka was to expose herself. She took great care to keep herself otherwise covered) (NB-Ms.4°1550 Amundsen, 31 July 1904).



Fig. 6a: Godfred Hansen / Roald Amundsen, (“Magito”, full-length), 1903-1905, paper positive, 13.0 x 18.0 cm. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

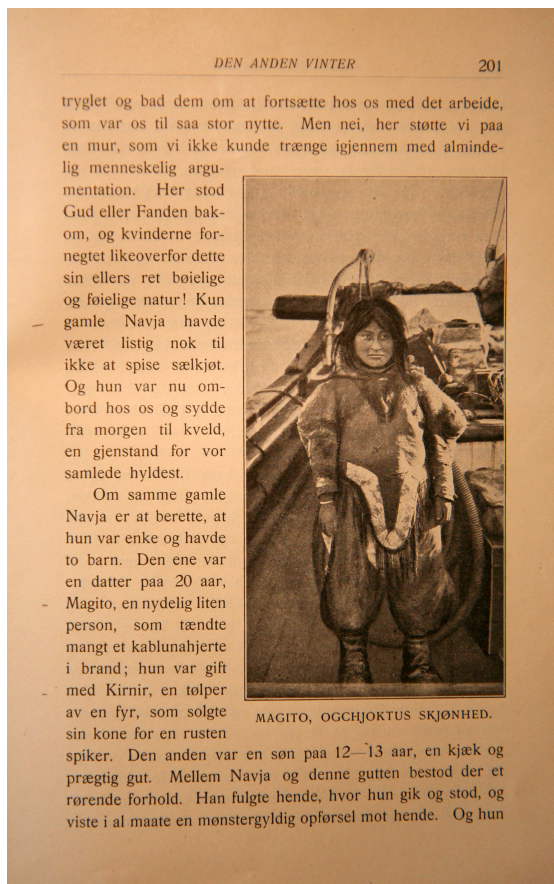


Fig 6b: “Magito, Ogchoktu’s beauty.” In Roald Amundsen, *Nordvest-passagen*.



Unlike these potentially challenging subjects, the image that was selected to illustrate *Nordvest-passagen* seems to fit without difficulty in the category of scientific “record” (figs. 4a, 4b). With the altered posture and gaze, there are no eyes looking back at us here. Rather, the viewer is allowed to freely scrutinise the sitter’s tattooed body. Silent, static and generic through concealment, she is presented as merely an exemplar, unnamed in the caption, whose tattoos are meant to stand in for all Inuit tattoos.

What is at stake here more generally, then, is a tension between ethnographic image and portraiture – or, between generic specimen and unique individual. This problematic is further distilled in the case of the imaging of a woman called “Magito”, who was photographed at least twice, in both instances on the deck of the *Gjøa*. One of the photographs shows her in full-length, and was reproduced – cropped and retouched – as an illustration in Amundsen’s narrative (figs. 6a, 6b). The other is a half-length, close-up view that, by comparison, comes across as a personal portrait (fig. 7).

The overriding impression given off by this second image, which remained unpublished, is of a photograph taken impulsively, to capture the reaction and character of Magito in a fleeting moment. Half turned, with her mouth a bit open and eyes fixed on something or someone – possibly the photographer – Magito appears to be responding to an action or question. The implied intimacy between sitter and photographer and, by extension, viewer, makes her a potential object of desire for a particularly male heterosexual audience. This reading is supported by Amundsen’s three passing descriptions of her in his narrative as: “Ogchjoktu’s beauty” and “very pretty”; “about twenty years old” and “exceedingly beautiful”; and, “a lovely little person, who set many a *kabluna*’s [white man’s] heart on fire” (Amundsen 1907b, 137, 230, 201). Openly admitting his attraction to Magito, along with that of other members of his crew, Amundsen further suggests her sexual availability by way of her negligent, go-between husband who “sold his wife for a rusty nail” (Amundsen 1907b, 137, 201). Despite the latent sexualised subtext of the photograph, however, Magito is seen as actively engaged, with the expression of a clear awareness of her presence in and influence over the imaging of her.

Against this, the full-length, en-face version of Magito that ultimately featured in Amundsen’s narrative presents her rather statically, with the retouching of her hair and face serving to at least partly anonymise her. This is further achieved through the sub-caption given to the illustration, “Ogchjoktus Skjønhed” (Ogchjoktu’s beauty), which simultaneously attempts to eroticise her. The subtitle not only repeats the title of another illustration found in Amundsen’s narrative, a portrait of two Greenlandic women titled “Eskimoskjønheder fra Godhavn” (Eskimo beauties from Godhavn), but also draws on what was by then a much used phrase in expedition imagery – seen for example in Nansen’s *The Crossing of Greenland* (Nansen 1890, 1:347) and Carl Lumholtz’s *Blandt Mexicos indianere* (Among Mexico’s Indians) (Lumholtz 1903, 205), as well as European and American images of non-Western women more broadly. In its sexualised objectification of the sitter through captioning, the illustration of Magito published in Amundsen’s narrative is further reminiscent of the “odalisque” motif of nineteenth-century Orientalist painting.



Fig. 7: Godfred Hansen / Roald Amundsen,  
 (“Magito”, head and bust), paper positive, 13.0 x 18.0 cm.  
 Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

While the caption corresponds with the feelings Amundsen expressed about Magito in his narrative, it is strangely out of step with the illustration it describes, which is rather more suggestive of an un-eroticised, generic “eskimo” that, to the inattentive reader, could be either female or male, child or adult. Indeed, in form and interest, the image seems to follow an established convention of ethnographic imaging dating back as far as the sixteenth century with John White’s drawings of Algonquians, and repeated in the visual material resulting from James Cook’s voyages at the end of the eighteenth century (Smith 1992, 79). The ethnographic convention was similarly employed by Arctic explorers in the century preceding Amundsen’s Gjøa Expedition, including George Francis Lyon, John Ross and Fridtjof Nansen (fig. 8). Drawing on this tradition for representing unknown peoples encountered in the contact zone, the illustration of Magito in Amundsen’s narrative implies data collecting. The sitter is presented and understood as a representative sample of her tribe. Her clothing and, to a lesser degree, stature, are the primary focus, with the natural and social surroundings – now cropped – playing little or no role.

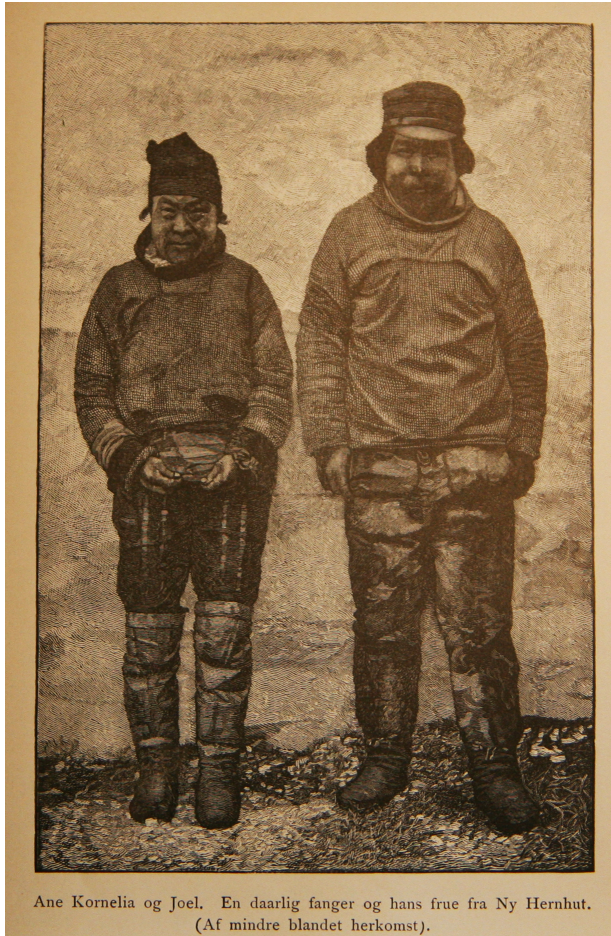


Fig. 8: “Ane Cornelia and Joel. A poor catcher and his wife from Ny Herrnhut. Of mixed heritage.” In Fridtjof Nansen, *Paa ski over Grønland. En skildring af Den norske Grønlands-ekspedition 1888-1889*, 1890.

### Reconsidering Arctic Photography

The processes of transformation that saw the original field photographs from the Gjøa Expedition shift into illustrations for Amundsen’s published expedition narrative betray an interest and ambition that were discernibly anthropological. In the selecting, cropping, retouching, captioning and placing of images in his narrative’s text, Amundsen was drawing on templates and traditions established by explorers, travellers and ethnographers before him. In doing so, he was equally picking up on the inherent anthropological notions of those conventions, in particular the assumed temporal separation between Western man and the indigenous non-Western subject of study (Fabian 1983).

This conceptual framing of the Netsilik was similarly apparent in Amundsen’s writing, where it was by no means hidden or sub-conscious. Already within the first couple of pages of the ethnographic chapter in his expedition account, Amundsen aligns himself with the evolutionist thinking that was still dominant at the turn of the century. He not only contends that the Netsilik were more or less frozen in time – “a people of the Stone Age” – but implies that studying them would gain insight into Europe’s primitive past and help make sense of current Western society in terms of evolutionary stages (Amundsen 1907b, 212; Johansen 2008, 275–76). When suddenly faced with this people one was, according to Amundsen,

transported without transition several thousand years back in time, to a people who still did not know any other way of making fire than by rubbing two pieces of wood against each other. And who with much toil and difficulty managed to make their food barely lukewarm over seal liver oil in a slab of rock, while we in a minute boiled our food with our modern cooking apparatus. We arrived here with our most ingenious, modern inventions of firearms to people who were still using the lance, arrows and bows of reindeer horn. (Amundsen 1907b, 212–14).

Here Amundsen begins by clearly articulating a temporal distance between the Inuit and his men, who may be understood as messengers of a future-oriented modernity. Amundsen's repeated use of the word "still" (*endnu*) is noticeable, and corroborates the underlying idea that the Netsilik's present was somehow caught in the past, untouched and unaffected by time, history or external influences. Beyond a European-centred understanding of culture and societal difference, Amundsen's statement conflicted with his explicit appreciation of indigenous methods as being, in many cases, best suited for the Arctic environment. This he expresses elsewhere in his narrative and diary through descriptions of the explorers' adaptation of Inuit techniques for living and travelling in the Arctic, in particular concerning clothing and igloo-building (Amundsen 1907b, 310–11, 118, 122; NB-Ms.4°3040 Amundsen, 13 July 1905).

This duality is repeated in the visual material wherein the Inuit featured are seen to break out of a frame that was not too rigid to start with. There are, in addition to some of the examples treated in this article, a number of striking and engaging portraits of Inuit individuals to be found amongst the photographic material surviving from the Gjøa Expedition. This type of visual representation speaks to the positive portrayal of Inuit culture, as coeval and compatible with European culture, that certainly also exists in Amundsen's writings. However, in the case of the Gjøa Expedition's photographs that were published in Amundsen's narrative, it is arguably more a case of the sitters having affected the imaging of them to claim some positive ground. In exploiting the inherently dialogic quality of photography – as an interplay between photographer and subject, in which the ambitions of the photographer and the sitter can be seen to be constantly competing, overlapping and interchanging (Barthes 1981, 10–15) – the Netsilik individuals documented by the camera effectively side-tracked ethnographic intent into varying degrees of self-representation.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Ann Christine Eek (Museum of Cultural History, Oslo), Harald Østgaard Lund (National Library, Oslo) and Geir O. Kløver (Fram Museum, Oslo) for their time and assistance.

## References

- Aarekol, Lena. 2014. "Heroic Stories or Indigenous Perspectives? Polar Expedition Photographs in Norwegian Museum Exhibitions." In *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien, 149–64. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate.
- Altick, Richard D. 1978. *Shows of London*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Amundsen, Roald. 1902. "En paatænkt undersøgelsesreise til den magnetiske Nordpol." *Det Norske Geografiske Selskabs Aarbog* 12 (1900–1901): 167–76.
- Amundsen, Roald. 1907a. "To the North Magnetic Pole and Through the North-West Passage." *The Geographical Journal* 24/5 (May): 485–513.
- Amundsen, Roald. 1907b. *Nordvest-passagen. Beretningen om Gjøa-ekspeditionen 1903–1907*. Kristiania: H. Aschehoug og co. (W. Nygaard).
- Amundsen, Roald. 1927. *Mitt liv som polarforsker*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
- Astrup, Eivind. 1898. *With Peary Near the Pole*. Translated by H. J. Bull. London: C. Arthur Pearson.
- Banks, Marcus and Jay Ruby. 2011. "Historical Perspectives on Visual Anthropology." In *Made to Be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology*, edited by Marcus Banks and Jay Ruby, 1–18. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Barnard, Alan. 2000. *History and Theory in Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Berg, Siv Frøydis and Harald Østgaard Lund. 2011. *Norske polarheltebilder, 1888–1928*. Oslo: Forlaget Press.
- Clifford, James. (1987) 2002. "The Others: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm." In *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, edited by Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt and Ziauddin Sardar, 160–65. London and New York: Continuum.
- Eek, Ann Christine. 1999. "Roald Amundsen (1872–1928). Fotografier av netsilik-folket 1903–05." In *Bildet lever! Bidrag til norsk fotohistorie 7*, edited by Anne Aune, Vegard S. Halvorsen and Kristin Halaas, 10–30. Oslo: Norsk fotohistorisk forening.
- Eek, Ann Christine. 1998. "The Roald Amundsen Photographs of the Netsilik People, 1903–5." In *Imaging the Arctic*, edited by J. C. H. King and Henrietta Lidchi, 116–24. London: British Museum Press.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Feest, Christian F. 2007. "John White's New World." In *A New World: England's First View of America*, edited by Kim Sloan, 65–78. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Franks, A. W. and J. Park Harrison. 1892. "III. – Painting and Tattooing." In *Notes and Queries On Anthropology*, Second edition, edited by John George Garson and Charles Hercules Read, 92–92. London: The Anthropological Institute.
- Gjessing, Gutorm and Marie Krekling Johannessen. 1957. *De hundre år – Universitetets etnografiske museums historie 1857–1957*. Oslo: Forenede trykkerier.

- Harbsmeier, Michael. 2002. "Bodies and Voices from Ultima Thule: Inuit Explorations of the Kablunat from Christian IV to Knud Rasmussen." In *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, edited by Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin, 33–71. Canton, MA: Science History Publications.
- Huntford, Roland. 1987. *The Amundsen Photographs*. London, Sydney, Auckland and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Johansen, Anders. 2008. "Innledning." In *Kulturanalyse. En teksthistorie*, edited by Anne Eriksen, Anders Johansen, Siv Ellen Kraft and Erling Sandmo, 275–80. Oslo: Pax Forlag.
- Kleivan, Helge. 1961. "Fridtjof Nansens *Eskimoliv* – Bakgrunn og perspektiv i 100-året for hans fødsel." *Tidsskriftet Grønland* 12: 441–54.
- Kleivan, Inge. 1999. "Mere om 'Kallihirua, Polareskimoen i Canterbury'." *Tidsskriftet Grønland* 3: 85–120.
- Kløver, Geir, ed. 2014. *Roald Amundsens dagbøker: Nordvestpassasjen 1905-1907*, Oslo: Frammuseet.
- Kuklick, Henrika. 2008. "The British Tradition." In *A New History of Anthropology*, edited by Henrika Kuklick, 52–78. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lewis-Jones, Huw. 2008. *Face to Face: Polar Portraits*. London: Conway.
- Lutz, Catherine and Jane Collins. 2003. "The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*." In *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, 354–74. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lyon, George Francis. 1824. *The Private Journal of Captain G. F. Lyon, of H. M. S. Hecla, during the recent voyage of discovery under Captain Parry*. London: John Murray.
- Nansen, Fridtjof. 1890. *The First Crossing of Greenland*, 2 vols. London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Nansen, Fridtjof. 1891. *Eskimoliv*. Kristiania: H. Aschehoug og Co.s forlag.
- Nielsen, Yngvar. 1907. *Universitetets ethnografiske samlinger 1857–1907. En historisk oversigt over deres tilblivelse, vækst og udvikling*. Christiania: W. C. Fabritius og Sønner.
- Parry, William Edward. 1824. *Journal of a Second Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific; performed in the years 1821–22–23, in His Majesty's Ships Fury and Hecla, under the orders of Captain William Edward Parry, R. N., F. R. S., the commander of the expedition*. London: John Murray.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. (1992) 2008. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Read, Charles Hercules. 1892. "Prefatory Note." In *Notes and Queries On Anthropology*, Second edition, edited by John George Garson and Charles Hercules Read, 87–88. London: The Anthropological Institute.
- Ross, John. 1835a. *Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of a North-West Passage, and of a Residence in the Arctic Regions During the Years 1829, 1830, 1831, 1832, 1833: Including the Reports of Commander and Now Captain James Clark Ross and the Discovery of the Northern Magnetic Pole*. Paris: A & W Galignani.

- Ross, John. 1835b. *Appendix to the Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of a North-West Passage and of a Residence in the Arctic Regions During the Years 1829, 1830, 1831, 1832, 1833*. London: A.W. Webster.
- Smith, Bernard. 1992. *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Sontag, Susan. (1977) 1990. *On Photography*. New York: Picador.
- Strother, Z. S. 2013. “‘A Photograph Steals the Soul’: the History of an Idea.” In *Portraiture and Photography in Africa*, edited by John Peffer and Elisabeth L. Cameron, 177–12. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Tagg, John. 1988. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press.
- Taylor, J. Garth. 1974. *Netsilik Eskimo Material Culture: The Roald Amundsen Collection from King William Island*. Oslo, Bergen and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget.

## Manuscripts

The National Library, Oslo:

- NB-Ms.4°1550, Amundsen, Roald, diary from the Gjøa Expedition (16 June 1903 – 16 May 1905).
- NB-Ms.4°3040, Amundsen, Roald, diary from the Gjøa Expedition (27 May 1905 – 31 August 1906).
- NB-Brevs. 480 A, Contract between Roald Amundsen and Harry Randall, 3 June 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 480 A, Letter from Albert Langen, Verlag für Literatur und Kunst, München, to Roald Amundsen, 10 June 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 480 A, Letter from Ricard, Libraire Hachette & Cie., to Leon Amundsen concerning the publication of Roald Amundsen’s expedition, 13 April 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 480 A, Contract between Roald Amundsen and Messrs. Archibald Constable & Company, London, 15 August 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 480 A, Letter from Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, Kustannustoimisto – Kirjapaino – Kirjansitomo, to Leon Amundsen, 27 September 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 812: 2: b (Forretningskorrespondanse 1902-03), From Peter Knudsen Eftf., Copenhagen, to Roald Amundsen, receipt for purchase of photographic equipment, 1902-1903.
- NB-Brevs. 812: 2: b, From Archibald Constable & Company, London, to Roald Amundsen, 21 September 1907.
- NB-Brevs. 812: 2: b, From Isidor Nielsen to Roald Amundsen, 13 December 1906.

The Fram Museum, Oslo:

- FM, From Peder Knudsen to Godfred Hansen, receipt for purchase of photographic equipment, 28 March 1903.

### About the Author

Ingeborg Høvik (ingeborg.hovik@uit.no) is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Women's and Gender Research, UiT The Arctic University of Norway. She is a member of the Arctic Modernities Project. She received her PhD in History of Art (2013) from the University of Edinburgh, which included a Caird Short-term Research Fellowship at the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich, London), and has previously lectured in History of Art at the University of Tromsø.

### Summary

In 1906 Roald Amundsen's Gjøa Expedition returned to Norway after three years in the Arctic. The first to complete a Northwest Passage by sea, the expedition also brought back a substantial amount of ethnographic material concerning the Netsilik Inuit, with whom Amundsen and his crew had been in sustained contact during their stay on King William Island in Nunavut between 1903 and 1905. This material included a large number of photographs, forty-two of which were included as illustrations in his expedition narrative, titled *Nordvest-passagen* and first released in Norwegian in 1907. Focusing on a selection of published and unpublished photographs from Amundsen's voyage and their interrelationships, this article examines the degree to which the Gjøa Expedition's use of photography formed part of a planned project that intersected with anthropological concerns and practices of its time. My purpose is further to demonstrate that there is a discernible change in the representation of indigeneity that occurs when particular photographs were selected and then contextually reframed as illustrations in *Nordvest-passagen*.

On the one hand, the extensive body of photographs taken in the field elaborates the close interaction between crew and Inuit recorded in Amundsen's personal diary and published narrative, testifying to the existence of an active and dynamic contact zone. In this regard, the original photographs could arguably be read as a dialogic portrayal of the unique individuals Amundsen's crew met while in the Arctic. On the other hand, a peculiar distancing seems to have taken place as the Gjøa Expedition's photographs were selected and reproduced as illustrations for Amundsen's expedition narrative. Likely connected to a desire to match his expedition narrative to existing scientific visual and literary conventions, this shift suggests Amundsen's attempts through textual and visual means to deny the Netsilik Inuit's coevalness.

### Keywords

Roald Amundsen, Netsilik Inuit, Indigeneity, Photography, Ethnography, Arctic.