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## FRIDTJOF NANSEN - THE MAKING OF HIS WORLD OF MEN

### Introduction: the relationship between the individual and outer nature

In the past several years, scholars in disciplines as diverse as history, geography, social anthropology, sociology, psychology and landscape architecture have wondered how people experience and interpret their physical surroundings.<sup>1</sup> This article follows in this tradition. Its point of departure is the interpretation of nature as part of culture.<sup>2</sup> Nature in this context is important for it includes both the concept in relation to a human being and in relation to the outer nature. The complexity of the latter term will become clearer in a moment.

The discipline of sport history is rife with evidence that suggested that a woman was not meant to take part in sport competitions because of her “nature “ and “natural instincts”; conversely, it was in man's “nature” to do so.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the notion of outer nature involves the element of lived experience and “self-making” as important aspects of its relationship between the human body, culture and idea of the outer nature.

*The body is ... not a “product” of culture but a creation of nature whose existence is the condition of any cultural “work” upon it; the bodies ... remain continually in the making...<sup>4</sup>*

As the above quote implies, the outer nature is not something separate from the individual, an objective physical reality as it were. Rather it is social world that we as

active human agents construct within a historical and cultural context.<sup>5</sup> For example, two different persons who are making the same trip at the same time may experience the journey, the landscape traversed and the interpretation of the natural environments differently.<sup>6</sup>

To avoid the dichotomy and polarity trap (nature vs. culture, constructivism vs. idealism) scholars like Soper (1995) and Williams (1980) assert that one must understand that the concept of nature is among the most complex in western thought. Soper goes on to argue that one must make an analytic distinction between human nature (of a person) on the one hand and the interpretation of nature as a potentiality for destruction or protection by human beings (the outer nature).

Research in sport history and sport sociology has shown that the social historical construction of the male body associated it with descriptions such as strength, physicality, non-fragility, daring and (in the case of Fridtjof Nansen, the focus of this article) the ability to access the environment with relative ease.<sup>7</sup> The same research notes how often female bodies were juxtaposed as the binary opposite of the male counterpart.<sup>8</sup> Here again, one can see the merger of human nature with that of outer nature. I utilize the writings of Fridtjof Nansen and other authors to demonstrate how Nansen's polar expeditions are constructed as a discourse of masculinity of the "Icy North".<sup>9</sup> In doing so, the interpretation of outer nature is inextricably linked with male practices.

### Nansen - the Man

Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) was a legend in his own time, particularly in the Nordic countries. His legendary status makes it possible to situate Nansen in several categories of masculinity: polar scientist, skier, sportsman, athlete, Robinson Crusoe, Norwegian

risk-taker, the man <sup>10</sup>, inventor, ethnographer, nation builder, the politician and the prophet.<sup>11</sup>

Nansen wrote a good deal about his individual and collective activity in his personal diary. He also wrote scholarly books for publication at Godthaab in Greenland and in his home at Lysaker near Oslo. Just as it is possible to place Nansen in different categories of masculinity, it is possible to place him in different discourses: science, education, sport, and nationality.

I am using the term *discourse* as developed by Michael Foucault during what might be called, his structuralistic period.<sup>12</sup> In his conception of the term Foucault highlighted how the human body is constructed through a variety of discourses, such as the medical, scientific, technological and sexual. For Foucault, language and representation, the principle components of any discourse, were of critical importance in the detection of power relations in society. I use here, aspects of Foucault's method - to focus mainly on the linguistic phenomenon of language - to make the constructions of masculinities in the Nansen texts more visible. And in following from Foucault, power relations will serve as a backbone of the paper.

According to the Norwegian historian of ideas, Espen Schaanning, Foucault's method is an “opphavs-traderings-analyse”, i.e., the analysis of the origins of a given discourse.<sup>13</sup> In this context the focus is to localize the historical tradition in which Nansen placed himself; and how he and others constructed and reconstructed this tradition through his, the explorer's expeditions. Thus, attention is centered on the construction of gendered practices and interpretations with a focus on masculinities. This in itself is not new with perhaps Norway being an exception. Tallak Moland`s “Fridtjof Nansen. En Mann” (A Man) and Jørgen Lorentzen`s “Mannlighetens muligheter” (The potentialities of masculinites) are two of the few so far in Norwegian

research. American scholars Anthony Rotundo and Michael Kimmel<sup>14</sup> have conducted male historical research in the tradition. Kimmel wrote:

*“I believe we ... cannot fully understand American history without understanding masculinity... How has American history been shaped by efforts to test and prove manhood... Why do so many contemporary American men feel that they have to “prove it” all the time?”*<sup>15</sup>

And further:

*“...We must... make gender visible to men...”*<sup>16</sup>

Manhood is not a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of any and all men. Rather it is a social construction that changes with time and place. Also, manhood is not an absolute; there exists a multiplicity of masculinities.

If the concept of manhood is applied to the construction of Fridtjof Nansen as a social being, before and after the year 1900, a careful reading of his texts (and those of others) reveal camaraderie, fellowship, intimacy and sometimes the loner in the midst of an untamed nature.

The phrase "The Icy North" may be interpreted as a cultural metaphor juxtaposed against the hegemonic masculinity of the Nansen group. Nansen was an active agent of the Norwegian ski culture of the time. The knowledge he achieved from this practice made it possible for him and his group to cross Greenland.<sup>17</sup> The conception of nature in this way presumes it is an environment that had to be tested and conquered by men: in Norwegian a “mandomsprøve”.<sup>18</sup>

### Nansen and the Norwegian ski culture

It is reputed that the first media-covered ski-competition was held at Iversløkka in the capital in 1868.<sup>19</sup> It was a combined competition in cross- country, jump and slalom. The

legend, Sondre Norheim from Morgedal in Telemark won. By 1879 the competitions had expanded to include the site Husebybakken, near the capital city Oslo. A few years later, in 1833, an established organization, “Foreningen for Ski-Idrættens Fremme”, (The Society to promote Skiing) was arranging competitions.

Nansen would have "lived" this development in the sport. He grew up at Store Frøen – now part of Oslo- but at that time outside the capital. He was able to see the most famous Norwegian ski jump of the time, Husebybakken, from the windows of his home.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Nansen himself took only part in three competitions with a seventh place finish as his best result in 1881. In 1884 he finished ninth in a ski jump in the Husebybakken.

According to Nansen and others the skiers from Telemark had taught the Norwegian people to ski.<sup>21</sup> The myth about the Morgedal skiers was tied to the culture connected to “The Society to promote Skiing”.<sup>22</sup> According to the historian, Kjell Haarstad, Fritz Huitfeldts book “Lærebok i Skiløbning”, (How to learn skiing?), perpetuated the traditions and myths surrounding the Telemark supremacy in the sport.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the Telemark skiers Nansen evaluated his own skiing achievements as poor. He learned, however, how to access good skis and boots for his several cross-country trips outside the competitive field.

The forest north of the capital – Nordmarka -- was opened for skiing after 1864, when Thomas Heftye built a road to Frognasetern, from which people could ski into the surrounding environment.<sup>24</sup> Nansen was among the first skiers to take advantage of this new site.

*Nansen and his brother went skiing in Nordmarka. They were pioneers in that area. Other skiers went to the hills near the capital.*<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Heftye also built a house in Nordmarka, called Heftyevillaen (the villa of Heftye), which is supposed to be the motif of the first Norwegian Christmas ski card in the 1880s. All of these experiences meant that Nansen had the technical skills of skiing and the knowledge of equipment to explore other areas outside the country.

## 2.0. Nansen and the tradition of adventure and frontier stories

To discuss Nansen in the frontier tradition, I concentrate on two well-known expeditions, the exploration of inland Greenland and the Nansen trek to the North Pole. The adventure tradition follows closely the explorer's ski trip from Bergen to Oslo.

Nansen's project has a parallel to American and British history of the same time period. According to the American historian, Fredric Jackson Turner, the border areas between the urban east and the rural west of the United States was a melting pot and the birth place for that which came to be known as American culture.<sup>26</sup> Another American historian, Roderick Nash categorized the period from 1900-1916 as “The Call of the Wild”.<sup>27</sup> Also, Walter Nugent has made a comparative study of frontiers in different countries. For Nugent, a frontier was defined as “*a place where white people are scarce - not where they have always been scarce,...., but where they were (are) scarce but tried not to be.*”<sup>28</sup>

According to this definition the Vikings created frontiers through their colonizing of the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Newfoundland.

While Nansen was alive the Arctic landscape was generally understood as wilderness. As wilderness, the area was regarded as outside civilization, which conjured up ideas of fascination and awe. “Civilization” reached the Arctic first in the 1920s when balloons and aeroplanes were used to access the geographical landscape.

Those individuals that physically entered the regions engaged in what the British considered an adventure, a cultural concept to describe the building up of the British Empire.<sup>29</sup> Green focussed on the gender link between adventure and men, “*because that link has been so important in constituting the idea of manhood*”.<sup>30</sup> Nansen placed himself clearly within the tradition of a male adventurer.

### 3.0. Three “expeditions”

During the end of January and the beginning of February in 1884 Nansen skied from Bergen to Oslo. The events of his trip were published in Aftenposten the same year. The account clearly demonstrates that others saw this trip as a risk-taking project:

*“All sensible friends were of course of the opinion that it was foolhardy to tour the mountains at that time of the year while nodding their heads; - - but youth and madness prevailed...”<sup>31</sup>.*

For Nansen, the mountains represented an inferno of risktaking, where equal measures of muscular strength and calculated risk were critical. In other words, "man" was to match wits with the natural environment; the goal to conquer the latter. This trip was recounted in Nansen's first biography (1896) and in the article called “Friluftsliv”, “Out-door Recreation” written in 1916.

This early ski trip may be interpreted as a rehearsal for the crossing Greenland that took place later.

The scientific visions of this expedition again with the notion that nature was to be conquered, were published in the review “Naturen” (Nature) in 1888. An alternative vision was published in “Illustreret Tidende for barn”, (Illustrated Stories for Children). The description of the landscape presents a graphic image of nature as opponent:

*“There are cracks and cliffs all over the ice. We have to walk carefully and always find the best footing... if one was to fall down into a crevice without a rope around the waist, one was utterly and hopelessly lost; he would disappear into the deep-blue abyss and would never see the light of day again.”*<sup>32</sup>

In 1751 a Danish expedition had been among the first Europeans to attempt to cross the inland ice of Greenland. This and later expeditions began on the west coast of Greenland; one such adventure begun by the American, Robert E. Peary, together with the Dane, Christian Maigaard (1886). The American and Dane, like others before them, did not manage to cross Greenland. Nansen was not deterred by earlier failures but he did make the decision to begin his expedition from the east coast. His motto on commencing his journey tells us something about the man and his commitment to the task at hand.

"There is no choice, but onwards only. The rule would be as follows: Death or the west coast of Greenland"<sup>33</sup>.

Five single men between 30 and 40 years old joined the 27-year old Nansen in the expedition. It included two Lapps and four Norwegians. They left Leith in Scotland in May 9th, 1888, on the Danish ship, “Thyra”.<sup>34</sup> The Danish vessel took them to Iceland, where the men boarded a sealing ship on June 4th. Ten days later, the expedition, now off the east coast of Greenland, disembarked in two boats for the start of their adventure. They were unable to strike directly for Greenland due to severe ice jams. The two boats drifted south on ice flows, with their occupants just barely able to survive. At last the men managed to find open water at the quadrants 61 degrees and 23`. From here the group rowed to Umivik and started skiing/sledging August 25th. After a tough trip from the end of the Ameralikfjord they reached the west coast of Greenland on September 29th. Because the last ship to “civilization” had sailed for the season, the



expedition had to stay in Godthaab until May the following year. It was during this period of forced idleness that Nansen wrote about the first part of the expedition: “Paa ski over Grønland”(Skiing across Greenland) which was published in 1890.

Nansen describes the drifting caused by the ice jams in the following way:

*“The waves are gradually increasing, and are beginning to flood the ice flow on which we are stranded ... but the worst thing is, however, that we are near the open ocean with an ominous prophesy of misfortune. What should we do? If we drift into the breakers, our fate is uncertain... The only thing we can do is to choose a strong flow and wait for ones destiny. The flow we have been on so far is about to disintegrate... Near it we can move onto another thick and strong flow... The breakers are, however, coming nearer and nearer. The noise and force of the waves constantly overtakes us and is breaking the flow on all sides. . The situation is critical... It is undeniable that we are drifting towards the open ocean. Fortunately, our new flow is thick and we do not leave it until we decide to and fortunately, we believe (and hope) that it will last for some while... however, we must begin to plan the launching of our boats into the breakers. It is going to be a wet pleasure; but it is our last hope... Supplies, ammunition and other equipment are divided equally between both the boats. If one sinks to the bottom, we still have one left.”<sup>35</sup>*

On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1889 the Norwegian paper Morgenbladet announced that the Nansen expedition would return the following day. For one Norwegian "kroner" citizens could board one of 13 different ships to meet Nansen and his crew on the coast outside the capital. Interest was keen to greet the returning crew and other vessels, including two naval torpedo boats, had earlier sailed down near Tønsberg and Horten in anticipation of the final disembarkment in Christiania, the former name of the capital. The newspaper Morgenbladet covered the return of the Greenland-expedition” (“Grønlandsfarernes hjemkomst”) as follows.:

*“Yesterday's welcome for the Greenland adventurers will go down in the annals of time. It's as if everyone witnessed their coming home: old and young, men and women, rich and poor – all wanting to show their admiration and pride for the impact that this manly and courageous deed has had upon them... Dr. Nansen talked about his comrades and their courage, stamina and skill. There was no fear in their souls...”*<sup>36</sup>

Their survival, according to the newspaper was because of their athletic prowess and physicality. *“Every man was a trained sportsman with a muscular body”*.

Nansen as well took up this notion of athletic masculinity. In his book *“Paa ski over Grønland”* he constructed skiing into a male discourse, even though for most of the on-land journey, the adventurers used sledges.<sup>37</sup>

The next expedition for Nansen (and this time 12 other men) took place on June 24th, 1893. The Norwegian crew left from Oslo with the aim of reaching the North Pole in what was to become the famous ship *“Fram”*. By this time Nansen was also interested in furthering Norwegian interests and as such, he planned on having only Norwegians on board. When he discovered that one of the crew was a Swede, Lars Petterson, Nansen changed the spelling of his name from *son* to *sen* and thereby reconstructing the Swede as a Norwegian.

Several scientists were sceptical to Nansen`s plan to do research and to reach the North Pole. This scepticism meant that Nansen had to garner support from influential members of his own profession. This support was forthcoming in the person of Professor Brøgger. Brøgger's testimonial assisted in the construction of Nansen as the *“the pure scientist”* before the latter left for the North Pole. But not only was Nansen the scientist, he was the scientist with a fervent and godly search for truth. In fact, the search for truth was the explorer's first priority, taking precedence even before his wife, children and home.<sup>38</sup>

**“Fram” reached the polar ice cap on September 22nd, 1893 and was soon stuck. The ship drifted with the ice flow towards the northwest. Almost six months later, on March, 14th, 1895, Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen left “Fram” at 84 degree and 4 minutes north and 102 degree east in an attempt to reach the North Pole by skis and dog sledges. On April 7th they reached 86 degrees and 14 minutes north, further north than anyone from "civilization" had traversed before. On August 15th they reached Semlja Frantsa Iosifa, where they remained for the winter. On May 19th, 1896 Nansen and Johansen met the Fredrick Jackson`s expedition, whose ship brought them to Vardø, north of Norway, on August 13th.**

**Replicating Sir Henry Morton Stanley's meeting of David Livingstone in Central Africa, Jackson upon spying Nansen is reputed to have said:**

**”Aren`t you Nansen?”**

**“Yes, I am”**

**“By Jove, I am glad to see you.”<sup>39</sup>**

**Meanwhile the “Fram” and the rest of Nansen's crew made for Skjervøy in Troms. When the “Fram” reached the “Honnørbrygga” (The Bridge of Honour) in Oslo on September 9th, an armada of ships welcomed the crew and the capital celebrated the success of the robust and tough explorers. Celebrations continued into the next day with fifty Oslo schools taking part.**

**Soon Nansen became a national hero and his name and picture were visible everywhere: Nansen sugar, Nansen North Pole beer, Nansenbread, the champagne of Dr. Fridtjof Nansen; even the theatrical arts caught the Nansen fever with the Eldorado Theatre composing and performing a Nansen ballet. Nansen was not only a hero in Norway but throughout the world and he toured Europe and the USA to talk about his expedition. His 1897 book “Fram over Polhavet” was so popular that it was**

subsequently translated into several languages. The English version, had the title “Farthest North” and in some ways expressed the British view that Nansen's expedition was only one of several in the competition to reach and conquer the North Pole. Such ambivalence on the part of the British did not seem to concern Nansen. In a subsequent book (Hestmark, 1992) Nansen pays homage to the British philosopher, Carlyle:

*“A man shall and must be brave. He has to persevere and always present himself as a man – erect, strong, and enlightened with the godly spirit who has chosen him and put him at his post.”*<sup>40</sup>

Nor was there was little question of the significance of Nansen's achievement for Norway. The Oslo newspaper, Dagbladet, presented Nansen as follows:

*“ He has made a mark, a cross on the foremost northern part of the earth. A new line has been drawn through the ice-ocean desert from Siberia to our North-ocean, and a new line from 86 degrees and 14 minutes to Frans Josefsland. And that cross that is forever carved on the map...will also mark from generation to generation, the memory of the Norwegian Man, the Nordic warrior (Norwegian: høvding) of the group of heroes whose intelligence, power and courage unconditionally brought this feat home to all of us.”*<sup>41</sup>

“The Norwegian Man” connotes not only an explorer and nation builder. Implicitly it also constructs a hegemonic masculinity, the archetype of man representative of a young nation (Norway) still under the sovereignty of another, Sweden (from 1814 till 1905). And it is not fortuitous that Nansen is referred to as *høvding*. Habberstad suggests that this term was used by the old liberals in their fight against senior civil servants in the National Assembly (Stortinget).<sup>42</sup> Historically the word refers to the proud Viking traditions of Norway. Nansen might have been *høvding* for others but arguably for Nansen, the truly authentic man, those who found their way to the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, or who sailed across the Atlantic to America;

all who personified the image of conquering hero: Pytheas, Ottar, Leiv Erikssøn, Hudson, Peary, Nordenskiöld; all were *høvdinge*.

#### 4.0. The construction of the landscape of the icy north

In all his writings “Paa ski over Grønland”, “Fram over Polhavet” and “Nord i tåkeheimen” (North in the Home of Mist, 1911) Nansen painted a visual Arctic landscape. While Nansen's literal rendering might conjure up images of a frightening, almost impassable terrain, it was also a northern landscape that was fascinating and exciting for those who chose to invade it. But invasion was not without its consequences.

Nansen writes:

*“An endless procession of struggling shadows, heavy frost-encrusted clothes, some marching erect, others bent and weak, barely able to crawl in front of the sledges, several emaciated and dying of hunger, frost-bitten and hostage to scurvy; but all looking towards the unknown, the sunset, where the sole aim of the struggle is to persevere..”*<sup>43</sup>

In “Paa ski over Grønland” Nansen wrote about “mountains of ice that collapsed in front of us”<sup>44</sup>, snowstorms<sup>45</sup>, “big ice cracks”<sup>46</sup>, “breakers thundering against us”<sup>47</sup> and “fighting nearly helplessly onwards”<sup>48</sup>.

Nansen in his "Fram over Polhavet" presented the landscape in poetical and mythical perspectives:

*“Unseen and unheard, in a rest of death, the polar rain dozed beneath its unblemished cloak of ice from the ageless morning. Wrapped up in its white garb was the giant, stretching its clammy ice limbs outwards and brooding over its thousand years of dreams.”*<sup>49</sup>

Fridtjof Nansen's significant accomplishments were recognised in 1925 by St. Andrew's University in Scotland. At the age of 65, Nansen was the first foreigner to be

awarded an honorary doctorate by this prestigious university. In his acceptance speech to the graduating class of students, he used the term “Det frosne Nord” (The Frozen North) to both focus on his exploratory adventures and to express that which makes a man truly alive and human.

*“ It is our continually longing to overcome difficulties and danger, to discover hidden things, to penetrate areas outside the conquered road. It is the lure of the unknown, the yearning beyond the known borders, the godly power, deeply rooted in the soul of man, which urged the first hunters out in new fields - perhaps the basic drive to our most honourable deeds.”<sup>50</sup>*

What did the northern explorers hope to find in the frozen north, he rhetorically asked the students? The polar expeditions were an environmental school in which one learned to be a man. This polar educational experience Nansen contrasted with the inferior learning that was the lot of those content to spend most of their life, living indoors, those who were content to both work and recreate indoors, those content to be inactive rather than face the relentless competition provided by the natural environment.

### Nansen and male culture in Norway

As previously noted, there is little Norwegian research on masculinities in the historical context. The modern break through of Scandinavian literature took place in the 1870-80s.<sup>51</sup> In addition, an intense discourse on gender started in these countries in the 1880s with the focus on the role of women. Henrik Ibsen`s 1879 “Et Dukkehjem” (A Doll`s House) is an example of this focus.

On the celebration of Nansen`s fiftieth birthday in 1911, the Oslo paper, Aftenposten, wrote the following:

*In a period of women`s peace and reform questions one is instinctively yearning for a real and pure male achievement.*<sup>52</sup>

This might well have been a statement uttered in the 1880-90s as well.

The change in Norway from the old patriarchal authoritarian structure to the modern family structure was never problematized with point of departure of the male role.<sup>53</sup> The Norwegian author, Knut Hamsund, of which “Sult” (Hunger) was one of his most famous novels, exemplified this.

According to Hamsund the media coverage after his trip to Greenland has brought a “tendency of boulevard (low culture)” into the culture of Norway.<sup>54</sup> In contemporary language this is a parallel to the tabloid-mediated stories. In comparison to the works of the great authors, Nansen`s recollection of his trip was superficial but received much more attention:

*And the ladies jumped around him and waved with a sandwich in each hand and cried: “God, how modest and sweet he is!” ... Nansen has not mediated any scientific results. With a glance at the men of his expedition, one could not expect otherwise: A military man, a mate, a farmer, two Lapps and one- Zoolog... Moreover, two-three Norwegian explorers have been successful in the tropics, which from a perspective of sport and science had perhaps deserved a “hurrah”. When they returned home, Nansen's countrymen were, however, silent... Nansen is cheered as a king because of the scientific results he has given the world via his travel and because of his achievement as a sportsman... a foolhardy risk, a breakneck act, a stroke of good luck, something to admire.*<sup>55</sup>

Hamsund satirized Nansen`s lack of scientific results which according to the novelist, was nothing to admire. He also questioned the myth about the masculine heroic

deeds of The Icy North. Another Norwegian novelist of the time, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, described Nansen as follows:

*There is too much of a polar bear in him.*<sup>56</sup>

Despite these critics, the image of a Norwegian male hero remained tied to the icy poles, in no small part because there were few Nansens who went to these frozen areas in 1900. In fact, apart from Nansen, Roland Amundsen, is the other famous hero, having reached the South Pole on skis in 1911.

### 5.0. Discussion and ending

I have argued, using Fridtjof Nansen as an example, that the interpretation of outer nature on the one hand and male practices on the other are inextricably connected. Nansen might be associated with different discourses of masculinity (see p. 3-4).

Implicit in the construction of public discourses of masculinity are those discourses that are unspoken or marginalized. In the construction of Fridtjof Nansen as Norwegian hero, skier, adventurer, explorer, is the equally powerful, yet hidden point of departure that presumes other things. For example, it is only some men who because of their heroic “nature” have the potential for reaching beyond the known, to retrace the footprints of previous explorers and adventurers. But more important perhaps, are the unspoken images of femininity that are regarded as oppositional to the public discourses of masculinity. During Nansen’s lifetime bourgeois women were almost always relegated to the mundane of everyday, tiresome life. This in itself a contradiction as Soper points out in the relationship between nature and gender. According to Soper nature is coded “female” together with the implicitly masculine conception of humanity.<sup>57</sup>



*(This) structure incorporates contradictory attitudes to femininity itself, which is either that from which masculinity must assert its autonomy and separation, or that untroubled state of wholesomeness and innocence to which it would return.*<sup>58</sup>

How often are women granted the potential to explore, to invade the unknown, and combat the natural environment without a discourse of the marginal? Fridtjof Nansen himself graphically presumes such assumptions. Men die in battle and Nansen's motto for his expedition to the interior of Greenland: "Death or the west coast" is a telling example of the hegemonic masculinity of his time. In his penetration of the icy north, the awesome, untamed wilderness, where one could not survive without brains, planning and young muscles, it is automatically presumed that it is men, not women who will realize the dream. For it is only (some) men who have the privilege of placing a priority on what life will be led; for Nansen as Professor Brøgger told us, this priority was exploratory adventure above wife, children and home.

And even upon his return from the North Pole, Nansen continued to decide priorities on the assumed hegemonic superiority of men. The conquering hero shut himself up in his library at Lysaker to write about his brave deeds and when he was not writing, he travelled to tell others (mostly men) about his experiences. His was a world of and for men. He organized his expeditions around fit young, tough, and intelligent men. Together, Nansen and his comrades lived on the edge of life and death, which resulted in a resilient and continuing comradeship. It is telling that he dedicated his "Paa ski over Grønland", not to his wife and children who kept "the home fires burning" but "to my five comrades".<sup>59</sup>

In their quest to conquer an unforgiving nature, the Nansen expeditions experienced an intimacy and fellowship that few others have. Nansen as writer presented the tradition of adventure, sometimes integrated with poetic perspective, as a

right of passage of tough, physically fit men with a thirst to experience the magic of the extreme risk-taking.<sup>60</sup> In describing his exploits to others, Nansen and those he wrote about (his men) were constructed as self-made symbols of a young nation; heroic images for future generations.

In this masculine discourse he constructed the nature of man as he experienced it and on the whole reconstructed it and that of the outer nature within a cult of hardness.<sup>61</sup>

According to the Norwegian professor in Nordic literature, Åse Svendsen, Nansen's trip towards the North Pole, especially when he was drifting on a flow was near to foolhardy.<sup>62</sup> Foolhardiness in itself seems to be a male preserve. Nansen suggests as much in his Preface to Scott's diary, in which the Norwegian states the following:

*We do not find any place that it is a more beautiful manifestation of the superiority of the spirit and will of man than in the endless and arduous battle against the power of nature... They were MEN, complete MEN, and MEN until the very last minute.*<sup>63</sup>

Few Norwegian voices have thus far made critical remarks of the deeds of Nansen and the masculine tradition and discourse of the icy poles.

Hamsund, the novelist, satirized the fawning of Nansen and the mediated heroic texts on Nansen. For Hamsund the admiration and the metaphors tied to Nansen as in the Oslo paper, Dagbladet, on returning from Greeland about the Nordic warrior, who had made a "cross that is forever carved on the map", could be interpreted as a degeneration of Norwegian mediated culture.

To be described as a warrior of a proud Viking tradition a Norwegian man had to explore the frozen pole and not the warm tropics. He had to be mediated as a good skier or fighting his way on a flow and not sitting on the sledges. The struggle had to take place in inclement weather in order to prove the will to reach the goal at any cost: "Death or the west coast" is a metaphor for this polar, hegemonic masculinity.

Perhaps future influential and critical mediated texts will come from novelists like those of Hamsund and Bjørnson. Until then, expeditions from different countries will most likely be reconstructed and only overtly changed in a discourse on gender in which men and even fewer women are active agents until the polar regions might disappear entirely because of the destruction of human culture.

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Slettan., D., 1994; Proshansky, H.M. et al, 1983; Grahn,P. 1991; Knopf, R.C.1991; Tani, G. 2001; Greider, T.& Garkovich, L. 1994.
- <sup>2</sup> Williams, R.1976; Thomas, K. 1983; Olwig, K.1984; Soper, K. 1995; Enebakk, V.1999; Kolstad, H. 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> For example Pfister, G.1990, 1999b ; Peyton, Ch. and Pfister, G., 1987; Hargreaves, J., 1994; Lippe, G. von der, 1997, 1999, 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Soper, K.:135.
- <sup>5</sup> Pedersen, K., 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Moi, T., 1998; Pedersen, K.,2000.
- <sup>7</sup> Whitson, D., 1990; Messner, M.A., 1992; Kimmel, M.1996; Moland, T., 1997; Wenner, L.,1998
- <sup>8</sup> Pedersen, K., 1994, 2000.; Hargreaves, J., 1994, 2000; Pfister, G., 1999a, b; Lippe, G. von der, 1997, 2001a.
- <sup>9</sup> In this paper the term discourse is limited to the discourse of language (det språklige).
- <sup>10</sup> Brøgger, W.C. & Rolfsen, N., 1887.
- <sup>11</sup> Norsk Folkemuseum: Nansenutstillingen: brosjyre for utstillingen 10.1096-01.09.97.
- <sup>12</sup> Foucault, M., 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> Schaanning, E., 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Rotundo , E.A., 1993, Kimmel, M., 1996.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid: 2.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.: 3.
- <sup>17</sup> Vaage, J., 1979: 104.
- <sup>18</sup> Svendsen,Å., 1999: 256-257. The first time this term was used in relation to sport was, I believe, in 1972, when a friend of mine and I were taking part in a male sports competition. Lippe, G. von der, „Heresy as a Victorious Political Practice: Grass-Roots Politics in Norwegian Sports 1972-1975”. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35, no.2 ( London: Sage Publications, 2000) pp.181-199.
- <sup>19</sup> Loupedalen, T., 1991:46.
- <sup>20</sup> Nansen, F., 1942: 221.
- <sup>21</sup> Nansen, F., 1942: 57.
- <sup>22</sup> Haarstad, K., 1993: 98.
- <sup>23</sup> Basberg, B., 1994:34.
- <sup>24</sup> Ulvestad, I., 1991: 9.
- <sup>25</sup> Huntford, R., 1996: 30-31.
- <sup>26</sup> Moland, T.,1997.: 97.
- <sup>27</sup> Nash, R., 1970: The inspiration to this title was from Jack London`s novel in 1903.
- <sup>28</sup> Nugent, W., 1994.: 804.
- <sup>29</sup> Dawson, G.,1994: 58. He refers to Green, M.: *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (1980).
- <sup>30</sup> Green, 1993:225.
- <sup>31</sup> Nansen, F., 1942: 24.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid: 71.
- <sup>33</sup> Nansen, F.,1890: 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Nansen, F., 1942.: 99.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.: 135.
- <sup>36</sup> *Morgenbladet*, 1889, May, 31st: 1.
- <sup>37</sup> Lippe, G. von der, 2001a: 82.
- <sup>38</sup> This is from Hestmark 1992: 27.
- <sup>39</sup> Hestmark, 1992.: 346.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid: 520.
- <sup>41</sup> *Dagbladet*, 1896, September, 9th.
- <sup>42</sup> Moland, T., 1997.: 67.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.: 95.
- <sup>44</sup> Nansen, F., 1890.: 367.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 463.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.: 513,525.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.: 227.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 292.

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- <sup>49</sup> Nansen, F., 1897: 1
- <sup>50</sup> Green, M., 1993:
- <sup>51</sup> Lorentzen, J., 1992: 17.
- <sup>52</sup> Aftenposten, 1911, October 11 th..
- <sup>53</sup> Lorentzen, J., 1992:19.
- <sup>54</sup> Hamsund, K., 1889, June, 20<sup>th</sup>.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Sørensen, Ø, 1993:82.
- <sup>57</sup> Soper, K., 1995: 127., Lippe, von der,G., 2001b,pp. 42-56.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.: 126.
- <sup>59</sup> In his “Fram over Polhavet” Nansen dedicated his book to “Her who baptized the ship and was bravely staying home”.
- <sup>60</sup> The last expression: “a thirst to experience the magic of the extreme risk-taking” is from Repp, G., 2001: 329.
- <sup>61</sup> This term is from Bordo, S. 1999: 55. I have a slightly different focus, because the expression is here related to how I interpret Nansen on pictures and written texts he made of himself; the mentally and physically fit body without a smile on his lips. The term of a cult of hardness does not exclude a tendency to male romantism in his texts.
- <sup>62</sup> Svendsen, Å., 1999: 256.
- <sup>63</sup> Nansen., F. 1914. Introduction to *Scotts siste rejse*.