

MASTER THESIS

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BORDERLINE LIFE

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Preface

In 2015 I was handed the book, *Uten Land, På Fredsveien Gjennom Verden* by Johan Galtung. Directly translated the title would be: *Without Country, On the Peaceroad Through the World*. I didn't know much Galtung, or if I did, I had forgotten or not stored it. I guess you can say I had been pretty spaced out for years. Leaving Television behind over 10 years ago, for the mix of tragedy and war and mindless entertainment, images and information, was depressing me. I was sad a lot during my youth, sad for the world, sad for not knowing what really was wrong, just everything I saw made me feel wrong, and maybe in the end I thought I was wrong. The constant information of media had me overwhelmed and I had decided I needed out in the world to see it for myself. So I think I blocked out the media-world for a long time. Blocked out all the 'important' information shooting at us, blocked out anything that felt like a forced truth, to try to see for myself. Eventually I tried to bring that back and into the same media I had run from, by studying photojournalism.

But on this day in February 2015, I had knocked on the door of Georg Ivanovitsj in Neiden, heading an invitation to coffee I had gotten three years earlier at the opening of the Salmon-season in the town. Over this coffee, talking to him about philosophy, he handed me this book. It became the start of what spurred this essay. I discovered a world where Galtung was ridiculed by the same media I had left behind years ago, and I decided to take him seriously. Reading the book I found logic - arrogance for sure, but logic mostly, and a way of thinking that tried to embrace all levels of life, confronting established perspectives, never discriminating. I found him utterly refreshing in a world so set on charging forward by all the same principles that had gotten us to the current world state as I saw it: war and chaos. What in my safeness of living in one of the richest countries on the world I had never really experiences, just felt the wrong in the totality of the global situation. And I loved the random way it all came about. Just how my life had been since I decided to go out and discover it and see whatever it brought me. Just as random as that, this essay came about.

In looking at topics I thought could help me mentally organize and explain what developments has been in play in the past, that makes up the present, this essay has become quite demanding. To write, and probably to read, but my aim has never been to offer conclusions. In the mix of personal experiences, fieldwork and theory, this thesis will be a written journey of how I have tried to dismantle established 'truths', by looking at terms and definitions, and the history behind them. I hope you can follow, and I hope you enjoy.

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Introduction

– You are not from here originally? I noted out loud. I was squatting on the floor next to a man I estimated was in his 60’s. We were way into a small-talk interview at his table in the restaurant called “Surf&Turf” in Kirkenes. The place hosted an event called “Poetry Slam” as a part of the towns annual Literature Festival, and it was my first assignment as a young journalist working for the newspaper, *Finnmarken*.

The man, who had been smiling and friendly seconds ago, hardened his stare and I felt my body stiffening as he responded. “I am a *Finnmarking*”, he bolted at me, following up with a rant on how he’d lived there for over thirty years and no one was going to tell him that he was a “Søring”. He almost spat the word “Søring” out. Belonging to the term myself, “someone from the south”, I wasn’t sure how to respond, so I apologized if I had offended him. I told him that I had only reacted because I could hear a different origin in his dialect, but the wall was up. The elderly man had turned his back to me, back to the table where his group was rating the poetry-performance, and had stopped acknowledging my existence. I moved quietly on to the next table to continue my job.

The term “Søring” was quite new to me at that time. I knew Norway had divided our nation in communal areas (municipalities) and had given them names, and also that we had this loose split of North and South of our country - but having been out travelling, living in the States, studying in Bangladesh, sailing and working in the Caribbean, crossing oceans - Norway had for me just become one unit.

But from up here now, looking down on the rest of the world, it seemed everything below the municipalities of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark, was “The South”. And sometimes it seemed even narrower – that Finnmark was viewed as the only real (True?) North.

Within this short story lies the premise for what this essay will be: Identity. Looking at life-experiences - my own and others. In the dialogue between us I’ve focused on what has determined our views of the world and our identities. Researching what this term is made up of I seek to find what defines us, what governs us, what separates us, not to describe a total truth about the world, but to look at existing structures and the elementary in what connects us. The obvious of that all life is connected, as we are part of the same planet, seems to have been forgotten or disguised in attempts to protect different visions/life-styles and mentalities.

Evolution has brought us to a current world state where physical borders have become mental limitations, where organic/natural flow are blocked, territories are owned and “protected”, and I will try to look at what has brought us to what we are now, through history and fieldwork in the specific border-zone of Norway and Russia.

BORDERLINE LIFE

Borders

We stand on the edge of being able to leave history (McKenna in Bergmann, 2017¹).

It was a return to the north, that time in the beginning of 2012 when I had taken the job as a Journalist in Finnmarken, and met the elderly man that caricatured a split of our country for me. For years I had been following my friends that had started a mushing-life, and when they moved to Pasvik, the job appeared and I applied. I had been following them for the interest of dog's, animal communication and photographing a life-style so different than what I had ever known: building and leading a whole pack of dogs with the goal to have a team to compete with. Looping around from the southern parts of the world to different parts of Finnmark had me realize that I had a physical northern pull. Or maybe it was just a pull to move between the places that had now started feeling like home; by the more time I spent there.

Every time I was away, or was based for a longer period of time in Oslo, I started feeling like I was missing something, and a wordless voice from somewhere unknown inside kept pulling me back north, and I followed. It lead me to accept the invitation to start this masters in Borderology in 2013, and to start the thought process in the study. The initial thought I had was that there might be a stronger invisible border that divides our nation across, than the one mapped up: alongside, bordering to other nations: Russia, and Finland in the northernmost parts of Norway.

It was the first time I really put into words that there might not be unity in our country. That the term ‘Norwegians’ refers only to an appointed definition on people originating from within a specified geographical area. Not offering a common identity or a feeling of belonging apart from by being in a given term. Like a given name becomes what you are

¹ In video, *True Hallucinations*, by Peter Bergmann, published 4th of March 2016 on Youtube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MG5gFtZ3U8&t=3552s> : 1:33:35

known by and how you identify yourself when meeting others. It's just a means of presentation for orientation. But the more I spent time in the north, the more I discovered emotional and historical ties over the national border: a familiarity to a country that was quite a distant for me - the more it disoriented what method of orientation I had been given. Not only had I unknowingly crossed an emotional border from south to north, but also found the emotions extended over a physical one, mapped and regulated – the national border to Russia.

Crossing these borders on a personal level, I found them dissolving the concretes of my thinking, by a row of random events that I have described in my two previous essays; *Limitless Within Limitations – a chaotic mental journey* (Winge 2013), and *Everything and Nothing – a return to beginnings* (Winge 2014). In particular, when my betrothed died in 2012 I lost my placing in life by mentally floating on the borer between life and death, but as the random normality (randomality) of my life would have it this time too, it overlapped into starting this Borderology study that provided place and tools to examine myself and my surroundings. Choosing to keep moving provided me a new beginning, and maybe a more conscious one this time.

My starting point in life when born was the capitol Norway. If you see life as a learning journey, you could argue that being born and discovering/learning about life is much like a scientific approach itself. You start with a thesis; you, consisting of whatever you are and mainly what you are taught to be, and you research your environment by gathering information and asking questions to validate you theories, and create you. And then you can place that thesis in different settings/environments to see if it can be validated further? In such a manner, my growing up in set surroundings (culture/nature/nation) would found the basis of me, and me being placed (placing myself) in other surroundings than my origin, would be (scientific) an attempt to verify my truth.

I would be tempted to state that I was confirmed as a thesis, thoroughly in finding love, but I argued in my first essay (Winge 2013), that loosing my partner was a loss of our mutual created identity, of my Identity. So when starting this study my vantage point was a very different one. It felt like all mental parts of me had exploded into the universe. I was a newborn again, but instead of having a slow learning curve of expanding my horizon, I was beyond the horizon. My new start now was the endless unknown of the universe. I returned to my beginnings through the second essay (Winge, 2014), and the work to reassemble myself

became about finding stability in being fragmented with a limitless horizon. I found I didn't belong anywhere anymore, but I also found I belonged everywhere.

Both – and

When I started my Joint Master in Borderology, I had initially the idea that I would focus on the geopolitical borders drawn as lines on a map contra the cultural invisible borders. As earlier mentioned, the random events of my fiancé dying shot me into a world-wind of confusion and pain. I ended up writing about life and death and the meaning of life. The first essay “*Limitless within limitations – a chaotic mental voyage*, ended with the statement and the question:

For it is what death offers to those left alive - A new beginning. I am done questioning the meaning of life. In my blankness of future accepted and embraced with it's void of meaning, another question is arising and ringing louder and louder in my mind; If there is no meaning to life, at least our existence, why is it so important to survive (Winge 2013)?

The second essay, *Everything and Nothing- A return to beginnings*, concluded with the suggestion of a method for this current essay:

Not picking a specific method to be a part of measuring this world, but to be a part of a global, organic dialogue in a Socratic approach – in the search for truth we make the search our goal, not the truth itself. The master thesis will be a reflection on the relationship between the inside and outside in seeking, “the seek” being the instinct that is the premise of every investigation/research creating understanding, and have already created the basis of what we now see as our existence (Winge 2014).

This approach was highly influenced by two philosophers, and came about as a sort of merge between their attitudes towards life: the Norwegian peace-researcher, Johan Galtung, and Alan Watts, a British Philosopher. In common they have a focus on eastern religion/culture/attitude.

Where Watts helped ‘ground’ me in the vastness of the universe, Galtung inspired me, by his very practical visualization of how to work out people-to-people challenges, in what he calls the “Buddhist bookstore”. This metaphor came out of story about a couple he had intervened with, a story told me in a personal interview with Galtung. I found him attending a peace

symposium at the official opening of Hardangerakademiet, an institute for peace, environment and development in Jondal, 31st of July to 2nd of August 2015.

The Buddhist bookstore is a story about a couple in their forties with children out of the nest were left without projects and had relationship problems. He a businessman, she turning to Buddhism;

I told them, after talking with them for a long time ‘would you possibly consider creating a Buddhist bookstore?’ And it is completely clear what I was thinking: ‘bookstore for the businessman, Buddhism for her’. After a week of running it I told them strongly that it’s a good idea to separate 50-50 of the capital. Another week went by and her interest for sales and profit increased and he started wanting to know more about what he sold, so he read a book about Buddhism -and I noted a success.

(Galtung, 2015).

Galtung has a very specific way of telling stories where the focus is clearly on his own achievements, but I recognized the idea of this as similar to the Barents regions focus on people-to-people cooperation. I will get into the background for this region later and for now leave it at that the region is governed from Norway via the Barents secretariat situated in Kirkenes. It’s an extension of the Norwegian foreign ministry, founded on the idea of supporting collaboration on ground level, over the borders – mainly the Russian/Norwegian one².

Galtung's story exemplifies in a very direct way, that building projects together where two parties invest in it together, could create a motivation for taking an interest in “the others” perspective. Whereas there was complete opposition before the couple had a project together, soon they had forgotten what they fought over in the first place. This along with his chosen attitude on how to view the world as “both-and” instead of “either-or” had me determine my method for working on this thesis, already described in my previous Essay, *Everything and Nothing, A return to beginnings*:

Therefore the method I use in my research, which also is reflected in the structure of this essay, is not a traditional choice of either qualitative or quantitative, the method will through this essay develop in an attitude shift best explained by Johan Galtung, the worlds first researcher of peace. In his autobiography, Johan Uten Land, På

² <https://barents.no/nb/motoren-i-norsk-russisk-samarbeid-i-nord>

Fredsveien Gjennom Verden. Here he introduces that instead of relating to the world from a viewpoint of “either-or”, he chooses to embrace an attitude of “both –and”, and its close relative ‘neither- nor’, as he exemplifies with his reaction to a question asked at a student gathering in Soviet, February 1953:” – Who started the Korean War, south or north? The one asking, belonged to a school that has a strong hold in Norway too; “the either-or”-school. I was 22 years old and tried a new tune; – Neither- nor. The split in 1945 is to blame, and you were a part of that. Who attack after an atrocity like that, is less important (Galtung in Winge 2014).

In this quote, I seems to me Galtung discards logic, in the term of “either-or” as the premise for a conflict solving method, to turn towards a Bakhtinian open dialogue, described as “both-and”, suggesting it might be the only “weapon” we have against war. Discarding logic and embracing dialectics, is the perspective that says you cannot understand a phenomenon without seeing its opposites – what contrasts and also connects. This is the approach I have always had, instinctively, but has found it’s way in Galtungs terms (Ibid: 4).

Pseudoscience

My understanding of Borderology as a study has changed in dialogue with my tutors over the years. Asking several times what we are doing, the answers have altered from being an extension of the Barents secretariats ideology of people-to-people cooperation over the border, to ‘philosophy of science’, to ‘political philosophy’. What seems to be the umbrella overall is ‘philosophy’ on the road to peace. My professor defines in his essay *What is Borderology?* what is different from social anthropology and history, but offers no conclusions:

“The first point is that borderology as the study of cooperation in border regions is primarily interested in peace-processes, and therefore also contains references to political theory” (Rossvøer, 2006).

Being a study where methods like fieldwork and reflections are used, the category of science might be tempted to embrace our approach. A general definition of science found on the worldwide Internet states it’s as “systematic knowledge of the physical or material world gained through observation and experimentation”³. I find this approach similar to what my work has been about, but different. So to not to fall into the trap of failing to meet the requirements of what science is defined as, I’d like to put my work into the box of

³ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/science>

‘pseudoscience’⁴. Primarily because I find the category of ‘science’ often offers only a two-dimensional perspective of the world, and I’ve wanted to see more.

Nothing of my work has been systematic, and it has never had the goal to systemize but has had to organize. It has been a chaotic, maybe even desperate journey through dialogues and experiences, entering into different parts of the world wholeheartedly. The goal? If I’m being completely honest, I’ve always wanted to know the meaning of life – just not how to get to the answer. Being discarded in my youth by replies like ‘there is no meaning, don’t waste your time’ or that there is some invisible force (God) governing it all from above, I just decided to live as much as I could. To not so much gather information for systemization – more so to travel through information and hopefully wake up smarter every day. Creating meaning in moving with a purpose: of discovering along the way. On this path I’ve found that the road to finding how to ask the question, were paved with construction that had to be analyzed. Analysis necessary to answer not what the meaning of life is, but why and how we came to where we are at now. So I guess I have turned that initial ‘want’ for meaning, into looking for what questions to ask.

The concretization of this halfway analytical journey and full on living experience - process, began in my first essay with challenging Camus and his theory on the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Here I embraced his attitude of ‘all is well’ in relation to the human accepting his constant struggle with rolling a rock repeatedly up a mountain, but criticized this to be a two dimensional perspective of a constant. In a way this was also a suggestion for the premises of this work: when life offers no reasonable answers to existence, when the past is created by others theories carried out, failing to be a working global solution, what else can you do but to review the situation from how we got there, and see if there is something hiding outside our blinders:

If recognizing the true nature of life is being aware of its historically created illusions to avoid the unknown, then “absurd” should be another word for just that – the unknown. If what I cannot hear or see for either I am deaf or blind, or simply overlooking what is there, or not looking for it, and maybe even not asking the right questions, it doesn’t mean it can be discarded as fiction (Winge 2013: 6).

I never disagreed completely with Camus; I just thought he was looking for conclusions.

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience>

Looking to offer a constant truth, and there is where I thought his theories could be a diving board for further thought. Camus left his protagonist at the bottom of the mountain concluding with that 'one always finds one burden again' (Camus, 1991), and I wanted to not be a part of that ending. I want there to be other things than rolling rocks up and down mountains and accepting burdens. I argued life to be a polyphonic discourse, where once what out of tune is embraced; it merges into what can be describes as harmony. I argued that 'absurd' was just another word for the unknown, and in that lays the possibility of exactly that, what we do not yet know, but what might slowly make sense to us as we evolve and dare to open our eyes to (Winge, 2014).

Never being trained in scientific method, on the contrary very trained as a feature photojournalist – telling small stories with an ethical approach to facts and people, just small stories to enlighten small topics, I have brought this method into the writing. I feel like this mix is the best way to convey others and mine experiences, as representative of how they were as possible. By offering my voice, and to be the voice of others in a larger discourse of life I hope I achieve a broader sensation of the topics.

Always keeping in mind that a concrete truth was out of my reach, and the purest attitude I can hold is to stay true to myself, I have 'gawked a lot' as Watts describes a 'philosophers action'. And in that sense I fit into the philosopher category. But if I were asked to define my work in its entirety – if having to categorize my work for others to have a term to understand is necessary, I have found the "pseudoscience" category. This seems to be the only one embracing all the levels I touch on; social, political, and philosophical, and this hybrid of method for writing. Pseudoscience being described as 'false knowledge' by that the work can not be validated by scientific standards⁵, offers me the freedom to embrace even more levels of the poetic, aesthetic, individual, spiritual (natural) and soul experiences. It gives me the liberty to offer my small part of understanding, to a larger dialogue and hopefully not be attacked for failing to convey any absolute truth or conclusions. And it opens up for others to continue with what I have started, if better validation or proof is needed. Placing myself in this category means that my work can have different parts that can belong to all the different categories, but can merge and build across and beyond what trying to fit into only one, would be a limitation.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience>

My field

In my previous essay I defined my field as ‘Identity in the border zone’ where my starting point was the border between Norway and Russia. I called it an abstract field that needed a very practical angle as a starting point to breach into what was still unknown to me:

My field was initially the border zone of Norway and Russia, but within this geographical place you cannot avoid the historical events that have shaped the culture here - the still living memories of World War 2 (Ibid).

Having found Galtung's approach to ‘both-and’ defined and supported what I was already doing, I was set on finding a way to embrace this fully. I wanted to continue my fieldwork while analyzing it and writing this essay, and also expand my field simultaneously in something as general as what I called ‘the seek’.

During this approach, in the seek - the constant dialogues, the organic journey of saying Yes to both – and, I started gathering the factors I felt were needed to keep in mind when trying to understand life. To have as base layers when looking at structure, always keeping in mind that the factor of the “unknown” makes it impossible to ever offer a constant truth or solution. Randomly I encountered a Finnish student of geo-politics, who lent me her book, *Building regions – the regionalization of the world order*. Its preface offered support for my thoughts: “It is often said that the reality studied by social scientists is a moving target. It changes while studying it”⁶ (Building Regions, 2013: preface). Another argument for wanting to belong to a category some might say is bullshit, is just that, that instead of working towards fitting into something in a correct way, I’ve given myself the opportunity to create something new.

Back to my own previous essay, my suggested approach to this masters of both-and from Galtung was supported and expanded by the Buddhist practice described by Alan Watts as a discipline for changing perception of the world's form:

... You say, ‘let’s go look over the edge, wouldn’t that be fun? But to get to the edge, we must be very careful not to walk in circles. So, you perform a discipline. You go steadily and vigorously westwards, along latitude 40 or something, and then when you get back to the place where you started, he is convinced that the world is at least cylindrical. By experiment. By Reductio Ad Absurdum of his premises. And so in the same way, the guru, whether Hindu or Buddhist, performs a Reductio Ad Absurdum on the premise of the skin-encapsulated ego⁷ (Watts, 1960’s).

⁶ Building Regions, 2013: Preface

⁷ Alan Watts on Philosophy and existence (Great talk) - (The relevance of oriental philosophy):

I had an idea that I would take all my experiences on a physical and limited journey to contrast the circling pattern of my life, and I had imagined travelling by train on the Trans-Siberian railroad for this. This didn't happen. By life's continuing randomness my direction shifted and the physical journey changed. I did end up travelling, but not east to west. I ended up commuting south to north, and having to perform the discipline by drawing an imaginary line from my current me back to my origin, trying to make out the stops along the way that had shaped me, and made me who I am. I did sort of organize, or maybe re-construct who I was by all the fragments of what I had been, combined with new experiences. A somewhat daunting task, as in doing a conscious job of making yourself, deciding who is 'you' you are taking on a lot more responsibility for your actions in life - as conscious taken actions can no longer be excused by ignorance. So in a way I created a basis for my perspective in any future research/life.

Border Identity

“You said there might be something called “border-identity?” I asked, trying to get the old woman back to the topic. Topics often slid away from us to images of dead Russians, wounded German soldiers hanging off cars, to rats that had come during war-time and disappeared with the troops. Weather conditions and status of the current year's berries seemed to offer welcomed breaks from the heavy past. We were sitting in the ladies family house in the small town situated close to the Russian border in northern Norway. She had opened up for me coming around to talk as research for my masters. The initial idea had been to start off by contrasting two older women and their life experiences from each side of the national border, and see what occurred:

“We aren't like the rest of Norway,” she offered and I followed up with: “How is the rest of Norway?” but suddenly a voice from outside the living room, broke our focus: The lady's son had arrived without us noticing, and was suddenly engaged in our talk from a distance: “How can you say that – do you feel like a foreigner?”

The reply was a steady one:

“No, I feel like a “Sør-Varanger”.

When I chose my fieldwork, I felt obliged to contrast something national between Norway and Russia. Growing up I always questioned history-books. I questioned them for the mentality that had grown out of them, that somehow they had become the star-gallery for the world and if you were to be remembered, you needed to be noted in them. All the books seemed to involve a conflict or war as a premise for a grand gesture that could be honoured and memorable. The rest was just numbers, casualties, millions of people grouped up as “just a consequence” of the fight for political dominance – in various aspects of who had an idea they had to kill for to prove right. I empathized with the casualties, being one of the common people. And when I chose subjects, I wanted the perspective of someone who was “only” that. I wanted people that had the longest experience in life; real war life experience and I wanted women. Not just from a feminist standpoint, or maybe – but the main thought being that where were they in history when I grew up? Hardly mentioned.

To place the project within the study of Borderology, I found my subjects in the border zone. I started without questionnaires on the Norwegian side, armed with the one that I knew was needed; “border”. The question was “ what is a border-resident”? It was like wanting it all, but having to start somewhere and this term fascinated me. It was officially introduced in 2012 while I was still working as a journalist in Finnmarken, and as a border-zone was established in cooperation with Russian authority. Now, if you had been living more than 3 years within a 30km radius, appointed by officials, you were special and you could apply for a special visa to travel across the border freely: the border-resident visa (grenseboerbevis).

The lady from the story, from our northernmost border area was the chosen one, and I asked her everything. I wanted to know all she knew, and by that maybe have her touch on defining the categories I was now trying to organize myself in.

When first starting to understand that it was my Identity I had lost to the death of love, my work would have to be about that. For without me as a subject, a thesis, there was just everything and nothing. No grounds for comparison. So I attempted to divide the different levels of where Identity plays a part in a person (me):

Personal

Group

Regional

National

Planetary

Universal

And...

Within the ladies statement of feeling like a “Sør-Varanger”, she exemplified a hybrid of these categories. What she felt like is a term that defines a geographical area, and when analyzing what that actually meant, I found it was an embrace of all of the levels. The question arose, if she felt like “Sør-Varanger”, could it be that she also was a representation of the area?

She was asked to introduce herself, she was asked to tell her life-story, and in every story she told I tried to follow up in the conversations to have her analyze herself. The elderly lady asked me at some point after the first meetings, what I was looking for in her stories. My then reply that I didn't know, but I hopefully would once we were done, might have confused her, but she accepted the challenge and rolled up her mental sleeves, and joined the circus. In conversations with her, a set of questions was developed. These would later be used in conversation with the chosen Russian counterpart when she and my co-student also joined in on the adventure.

The Russian lady had a different story than the Norwegian who had been born, raised and still lived in the same area. It proved hard to find living citizens in the northern parts of Russia that had been born there, as the regions off-limit military areas that follow the border, distance the Russian public from their neighbours. The woman we found that was willing to share her story, had come to the area after the war for work, and was a part of the workforce made up these towns within the military sections, providing technological advances such as her work on the power plant. The plant and the town built around were situated in proximity to the neighbouring country, Norway, and she could tell tales of watching each other fish the same river. Never speaking, never allowed to make and movement of recognition to the counterpart. When starting interviewing the Russian lady, the set of questions already developed, proved helpful to keep the track of topics, cause this woman didn't take direction or wonder what we were doing. Our two subjects proved miles a part in approach to the situation. Where the Norwegian would wait for direction, the Russian grabbed every opportunity to direct herself. I watched as my co-student quietly waited for her rant of words to still, or for a pause by needed to fill her lungs with air. Her story was important. I could feel it. Sitting filming her and observing during interviews conducted in Russian, a language I

do not know, I could still feel that she had something to teach us. Working with her, and little by little get snippets of translation I would get here and there, it would become more and more clear to me that all her stories, all her poems, all her singing – every word she would share with us, carried a plea for peace.

Sør-Varanger

The municipality of Sør-Varanger is located in Norway's northernmost county, Finnmark, and is geographically in a unique position. It borders only to one other Norwegian municipality to the west; Nesseby, and aligns with two Russian in the east; The Pechanga district and Murmansk oblast. Looking southwest you'll find Finland's Inari. The area's history is complex from being part of open frontier areas with little settlement besides by indigenous nomadic tribes, such as Sami. Moving east with herds, to west for the coastline with fish and back east for trade, was the organic set up for these tribes who had their own systemizing and dividing of the lands they roamed. This organic flow started being disturbed thousands of years ago, by the entry of territorial settlements in the name of nationalism, to the northern lands.

In a broader perspective, the rise of groupings expanding territory within the term nation seems to be a return favour for the attempted Norse expansion. As Vikings jumped off the coastline to expand more west, meeting England, the kings there mobilized nationalism to stand their ground on their territory. We can all see how that went, since at current state, England still has a sovereign kingdom, and the religion there that served as a unifying factor, spread back to the Norse countries and have continued to establish, to the point where maybe the northern parts and the Sami's might be the last remaining opposition to oppose the merge into the governed and systemized ways of the western policies.

In 1826 the national border was established in a border convention, and to this day this has been constant on the Norwegian side, whereas shifting ownership on the other side. After the Second World War, the borders were re-established when Petsamo were handed back to the Soviet Union from Finland, and have remained stable in their sense since. But alongside this confirmation of national territory, after the fall of the Soviet Union, a new regional cooperation plan was established. The Barents Region was the name given this trans-international region that covers 1.75mn km² in total and with a population at about 5 million inhabitants. The cooperation was formally opened on January 11, 1993, initiated by Norway

under foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, and in 2012 an official border-zone was drawn up, defining citizens in a radius of 30 km on each side of the Russian - Norwegian border for “border residents”⁸.

Maybe this is what the woman feel, when she feels like a “Sør-Varanger”? Maybe “Sør-Varanger” is the closest to stable and constant that she knows, in a world around that has been constantly changing?

“Imagine, here, the civilian population disappeared,” she states. Sitting in her house: same woman, same chair, same coffeepot – different day. This day our conversation is about the war, the Second World War that physically embarked on northernmost parts of Norway. First by Germans waging war with air strikes on the last resistance within Norway to then occupy the area before marching towards Russia.

During the war it might have been about 300 Norwegians living in their town, she tells me, and about 3000 Germans she believes. That’s a more than 10 times enlargement of the town’s population by foreign invasive immigration - changing within days their status from the majority to minority: “Several thousand Germans - Norwegians disappeared”, is added to point out the change.

The lady was 12 years old at the time. When asked how she could bear the situation, she just shrugs her shoulders in acceptance. ‘You just did what could with what was given’ is the general feeling from all the times. I asked this question. Most often I got the shoulder shrug with the “ I can’t complain”, and then she would wander in thought to tales of the everyday life of being occupied. How there were beautiful German boys, nice friendly people, and Austrians. How no one there wanted war. It seems to be an adaptation/acceptance of reality/ conforming to a “normality” of life whatever it would bring.

The land/nature didn’t change, except from the alterations made by humans. It’s interesting to look at the origin of the word ‘nation’:

The word nation came to English from the Old French word *nacion* – meaning "birth" (naissance), "place of origin" -, which in turn originates from the Latin word *natio* (nātīō) literally meaning "birth". The word **nation** stems from the Latin *natio*, meaning "people, tribe, kin, genus, class, flock"⁹.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barents_Region

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation>

And from this origin it has been used as a synonym for a government, which controls a specific territory, belonging to or not to a specific ethnic group. I guess the usage of the word has changed alongside the ‘progress’ of debating ownership of territory.

Would it have mattered at all if the transferring of jurisdictions happened peacefully - if they didn’t live through the action on the frontline/frontier? Can the repeated invasion of their borders, national, town wise, even house wise and personal, have narrowed their identity to “Sør-Varanger” as their only comfort zone? Did the exposure to change of ownership and culture in the territory and the neighbouring ones, matter at all, or was life always so changeable, so unpredictable that they just accepted what around as merely the surroundings? Conforming to rules out of fear and/or the mere acceptance of lack of power? Just like Norway the country, they became insignificant and walked all over as Germany under the flag of Nazism heading towards Russia? When the surrounding world is unstable, is what create stability your closest surroundings, making the statement to feel like a “Sør-Varanger” a distinction on feeling separate to the rest of the world? In a sense it could point to that they removed themselves from anything forced on them and narrowed their feeling of belonging to their immediate surroundings and those with the same experiences.

Belong

The verb has kept coming up through this work. Whenever I try to differentiate between cultures, people within nations, sides of borders – understand Identity, it seems the word to describe an emotional connection to anything is “belong”. But what is the meaning of this word? What lies within it, when looking behind its surface/appearance?

Its simple form in English is just a set up of two words; “be” and “long”, and its meaning is so plainly direct to me – it has to do with longevity. Somewhere, someone or something you are connected to for a long time. I use it in speaking and writing English so often and so easily and never thought to stop and look at the actual meaning before I suddenly wanted to translate in to Norwegian. I found what is used, as a translation of same meaning, has nothing in common. In Norwegian the word “tilhøre” is set up out of two words “til” and “høre” and their direct translation to English is “to” and “hear”. Now, I am no linguist, and maybe the word “høre/hear” has an origin that means something less audible than what I know of. I’m not going to go that deep into etymology, but I did find this interesting. It could point to an

origin of what Norwegian describes as where they belong has something to do with what is audible, or maybe what resonates?

I started asking around in my network of multilingual friends and first found the words from the representative languages of the Barents Region:

The Swedish “tillhöra” is exactly the same as Norwegian. In Finnish “Kuula” is the verb for belong. It also has the meaning “to be audible” and has the same word body as “kuulla”, which means, “to hear”¹⁰. In both Skolt Sami: “Kuullâd”, and North Sami; “Gullelašvuhta” resembles the word of hearing ¹¹.

Russian is the only language of the region where the word seems to have a very different origin:

In “Принадлежать” you can find the word: “надлежащий”, which means appropriate, or might be that something is ought to. (Ought to be done). “При” is a very curious prefix that might mean by someone, by someone's side. It might be originated from 'be a part of', 'be characteristic for something', 'be a property', for if you take this word 'принадлежать' without a prefix, it would mean 'appropriate', 'needed', 'right, suggesting it might be connected to meaning 'be a part of something by right'¹²

I personally came from an upbringing where the Norse Saga’s for bedtime stories as a kid had taught me that Norway had been gathered into one united kingdom. One king had vowed to not cut his hair before doing so and achieved the name of “Harald Hårfagre (Harald HairFair), and growing up I never thought to think otherwise. Norway was one. We were Norwegians. It was told, stated, the ‘truth’ given to me as little, or digested by me to find it’s place in my subconscious storage, kept on the back shelf, more and more dusty as I started leading a life of constant movement. I guess I haven’t stayed in one place long enough to notice what met me after I left the environment of my childhood home; the life outside, society and expanding experiences with the structure of the world. I tend to forget what met me, everywhere I went, and maybe why I’ve kept on moving. I tend to forget this split or groupings that one can not only see, but also feel, when one is stationary over time, and how uncomfortable it makes me – maybe why I do keep moving or if I rest; I rest in solitude.

What met me every time I expanded my physical presence was opposition by territory: Geographical areas inhabiting competitive mindsets of ‘where it is best to live’ and who

¹⁰ Personal correspondence with translator of Finnish origin, Katja Jylhä, June 22.06.17

¹¹ Personal correspondence with Skolt sami from Neiden, Christina Mathisen, 2017

¹² Personal correspondence with Russian translator, Nina Mikhaylenko, 20.06.2017

belonged or not. Where I grew up, the deciding factor of where you belonged was divided by “east or west of the European highway nr.6 (E6)”. I of course came from the eastern side, what I would later come to know as in general being the ‘bad side’, but before encountering this idea, I didn’t know more than where I came from and that the world was bigger. So at first, when wandering ignorant outside my given territory to meet the war of youths in bullying words, harsh glares and physical ‘borders’, I was shocked. Growing into this, I would slowly start infiltrating parties on the Westside, and I remember the excitement I felt when entering this different world. But the excitement was always accompanied by uncomforted in the alienating, condescending looks I would get - for it was noticeable by my clothing style, my dialect and whatnot, that I was not from there. I never became a professional infiltrator or tried to change - I was too proud of who I was, too proud of where I came from, too attached to wanting the world to make room for me instead of me merging with the walls of the spaces I entered into, or leaving the room. Too curious, and I just decided that this was wrong, and right would be if we all could get along.

Even from kindergarten-times I can recognize the phenomena of opposition, when remembering the sentence: “My father can beat yours” as a favourite amongst the kids when having a fallout. This argument would often appear at the end of discussions that couldn’t be solved, before it turned physical we would involve non-present parents in a threat before walking away from the situation (mostly). Whatever the conflict was, it was never solved, and probably just kept us silently begrudging each other for an amount of time. I remember contemplating at that time, that this was so strange, because I didn’t know how strong their fathers were, I’d never really paid attention to them before I one day was suddenly set up in an argument like this. So I started, looking at fathers - and when caught in this next time, I suggested setting up a real date for our fathers to fight it out. It never came to fruition and I really never encountered the threat again. Not in kindergarten anyway. But it’s interesting that even then, even around just 5 years of age, us kids were waging war.

I never think when I travel, that this is what I will meet. I didn’t think before going north in 2012 that I would encounter racism and judgment for my origin, and for sure not an origin I shared with the one judging me. I guess I always try to leave pre-experiences and pre-conceived notions behind, and hope for different - a kind of chosen naivety. So I was mystified when meeting the man from the Poetry Slam. Not for too long though, the mystification at encountering attitudes like that shortly is replaced by short burst of disappointment before moving on.

Choosing this topic of identity I again found myself meeting this mentality of divide and conquer. Working in an area that once was surrounded by Germans, then Russian, close to a physical border that once neighbored Soviet before Finland in 1920 and now Russia again – and that’s only going as far back as 1533. Looking further you find the indigenous Sami’s with their complete other system of dividing ‘territory’, the Siida’s.

I can’t help but wonder: Did these changes have an effect on the people there? Thinking about the woman growing up there, they didn’t have the step-by-step expansion of their world my upbringing was. She had complete chaos and loss of order, or change in order, so much that I can’t help think that it shaped her way of thinking.

And would it have mattered if all the changes happened peacefully? If she hadn’t lived through the action on the frontline/frontier? I return to the question if the repeated invasion of their borders, national, town wise, even house wise and personal, could have narrowed their identity to “Sør-Varanger”?

Personally I always felt a belonging to the term Norwegian, and that in theory ensued the whole country, but that never discarded feeling a belonging to the whole world just for being. I really never felt like I was limited any the definition, nor that I was any different from the rest of the worlds humans, but that was just my feeling. Meeting the animosity I’ve described in the previous stories, every time I stepped outside of what you can call a comfort zone – which I now will define as an environment where inside it you do not see the conflicts and have space and time to think and feel your authentic self, I had started feeling like I didn’t belong anywhere. It turned into a paradox for me this belonging nowhere and everywhere, and I guess a process started in me to keep the feeling of being a ‘world citizen’ wherever I went. I tried to keep in mind that being born Norwegian just meant my starting point was different. That I originated from a different part of Norway than the older ladies from the north would be a factor to include in trying to overcome the boundaries that might exist between us.

It’s interesting to look at the sons part in the earlier conversation about border-identity: He didn’t seem to like that answer that stated being a Sør-Varanger made you different than others, and he countered that there weren’t that much difference between people. He as I do, represents a different perspective by a different generation: a life experience lived only in peaceful times of the near surroundings. Being a Norwegian citizen now makes the most of the world accessible to enter, even to Russia at current state. And the advantage of having

access to crossing borders and meeting different “others” might be quite different from when it was all closed off, and the governing political mentality that was arising was strict definitions on what is “I” and “we”.

Knowing that across the line was an unknown “other”, and in their life-experience, often a threatening other entering over their borders and occupying their life. In a sense, the son representing the younger generation might be the product of growing up in a different world state. Sør-Varanger for the old lady will always mean her life experience, which few others can relate to.

On the other side

The small village.

Just a spot on the map.

Do not find it on the map.

Near the river named Paz

It is not like any other place in the world and it will make an impression.

Tiled roofs, buildings in green trees,

The waves hit against the dam.

Cold winters, a pier for boats

The sun, which doesn't set, is shining in the night.

The small village,

just a spot

Do not find it on the map.

Better places can be in the world

But I will not forget this village.

The Russian lady recites her own poem to us, about the place she first met and made home in the border-zone. The chosen wordings of “just a spot on the map” refers to how she ended up there, when working further south, she was offered a job in the north: “The head of the meteorology centre called me; he laid the map of the Kola Peninsula and told me: ‘Point at the place on the map and you will go there’. That is how I got to the Pechanga district”, she told us.

“We belong not to the border zone, but to the borderland” she distinguishes about the settlement, her ‘spot on the map’. Placed almost in the border.

So what does the border mean to her, we ask:

“What does a border mean to me?” she repeats our question as if it needed to be in her own voice for it to make sense, and then she continues:

“I do not really feel it you know. I know one cannot get there, but that is it. Everything else suits me. I am a law-abiding person; I do not cross the border

If I see people who are living there, we just exchange bows and that is all”.

This polite recognition of that the border is, and life on the other side happens, it just isn’t for her to poke her nose into, resonates in the Norwegian’s responds to the same question:

“We never think about the border. I never thought about it, that there is a border there...” she words, but then she lingered in silence and I watched her. Her eyes blinking, her brain wandering to images, memories maybe? Where she goes in her mind I can only guess, but her silence have me wondering if both their statements are correct to their past reality. What does it mean, this not thinking about the border? With all the changes happening on the other (Russian) side, the war that physically ended there, that the Norwegian subject was a direct part of – occupied by Germans aiming for the border, Russians pushing them back again over the border - how can you not think about it? I’m again guessing that it’s a conforming to the set boundaries of the border as a regulated restricted area. A way to not feel restricted by it is to integrate the restriction to the subconscious and feel free within your boundaries.

So when asked direct about it, the situation is so integrated in her that she is not aware anymore that she ever thought about the border. Now it just is.

For the Norwegian, crossing the restricted border was never something she felt the need to do:

“We went skiing, but we kept away from the border, and then there was only joy, so to say. Didn’t notice it”, she states. She mentions those who tried to cross but shrugs that act off as “not necessary”. For most of her lifetime the border was so restricted that even now, with an open border even with the border-visa, she feels no need to travel over or for cheaper goods and fuel, as so many has started doing in the latter years. And the opportunity of establishing friendships cross-border is left “...for the next generation”.

Working and living in visual proximity from the Norwegian side after the war, The Russian tells that they would see each other over the river/the border – the Russians and Norwegians. They would put up their hand in recognition of the other, but never talk. She remembers a time they went fishing, and suddenly three cars appeared:

“You know this round type of cars (VW Beetles). Then women get out of the cars instantly; they pitch a tent. So they are all dressed in bikini. That time there was no such kind of a swimsuit in Russia. We used to have swimsuit with shoulder straps, bras. You could say it was the whole corset. We hid behind the bushes... The fishing was over, and since then we were trying to go fishing when they were not there, not to disgrace ourselves”.

She also thinks it’s probable that it was her Norwegians visited for the first time in the Soviet Union, in 1969. During the years after she has been several times over to Norway for meetings, celebrations and gatherings in honour of those who fought to end the war. 8th of May is an official day in both countries. When asked: “Is there something in common between the people living on each side of the border”, she answers: “It is certainly the wish for peace and stability. They don’t want to fight, neither do we” and has the support of our Norwegian counterpart, who says that Russians and Norwegians are alike, except for maybe the appearance – crooked eyes and moustaches she uses as an illustration of those she met during the war. And when asked if cooperation between the countries is important she states:

“Yes, if there is to be peace”.

The main difference in the storytelling of the two women is that the Norwegian has a “matter-of- fact” approach to her history. Everything is recalled as plainly just what happened, and something to deal with. Only body language and eyes slightly reveal how it affected her personally and suggests what she carries inside of her (Shields others from?). Whereas the Russian embroider her tales with sentiment and emotion:

“I was feeling it by myself what is to be without parents, what is the war, what is the suffering of children, suffering of adults. It hurts when you miss and suffer”, she says in an attempt to explain why we shouldn’t do war:

“I want everything will be good, calm and there will be no war anymore. I will not wish it for anyone, even to the worst enemy. Let it be no war. Let it be the peace”, she pleads. And the wish for peace is certainly something they have in common.

This is one of the last things she tells us, the Russian, responding to an open question where we ask her if she has a message to the world, what would it be, and she tries to use her personal experience translated into words, to stop the future generations from entering more into something that is just pain.

The (fucking) war

“There is much that is not written about, from here - from Finnmark. They have not bothered too much about it, them southwards, they just tell about down there”.

She has just picked me and my co-student up from town, and in the car we meet her childhood friend that shares this statement and joins in our communication about the border-zone. The two women make the war come back alive for us, by sharing their stories while we are out driving around in their municipality, but her statement stays with me. I get a feeling her quote might just be touching on the core of what I’ve previously mentioned; the emotional split of our nation. It most certainly tells a perspective of an experience of a southern indifference towards the north, that she points out to me:

“People here have not received any help after ... neither a psychologist or anything. We’ve managed by ourselves and have not become ill”, she states, asserting to the never-ending consequences of war.

These ladies really did experience an immense part of the war: Only Malta had more plane attacks than Kirkenes. The roads we are driving as we speak, were constructed during the war, by war-prisoners, they tell me:

“The Norwegian teachers was also here, in captivity,” they say.

The Nazis considered Norwegians belonging to the “highest specie of all”, so the invasion here differed from Eastern Europe, where people were hunted, oppressed and killed just for

belonging to lower species. But in our nation the acts of punishment mainly happened to whoever rejected the incoming regime, and among them were the teachers. 14000 teachers resisted Nazi demands that schools should be a part of indoctrinating the youth to be ‘Good national-socialist’, and in 1942, 1100 male teachers were arrested and about 500 were sent north, to Kirkenes¹³.

“It was them who built the Jakobsnes road,” they inform me.

Military interest charged an immense development of infrastructure including the building of railroads up to Nordland and finishing the Highway all the way up to Kirkenes. The workforce: prisoners. My main Norwegian subject was only 12 years when the war started, but even at that age war wasn’t unfamiliar to her:

“We had some idea what war was because we had the Finland War in 39, and Finnish refugees came here. And we helped them; So we knew somehow what was arising, although we never had it that close- there was the burning both in Boris Gleb and just across the border here then. It was Finnish [area] before the war.

What she calls the “Finland War” is better known as the Winter War, a charge from the Soviet Union months after the official start of World War II, when Germany invaded Poland:

“Germans had promised Russians that they were going to get Finland or half of Poland; they were going to share, before they started the war against each other. The Russians and

Germans were together and took the countries in the east, but then they turned on each other” she explains.

My brain tries to wrap around what she just told me. These high political changes in form of information through radio, voices carrying information about a distant reality; first two superpowers in ‘friendly’ collaboration on conquering the world, pressuring from both east and south with the threat of destroying everything that wouldn’t merge with them. To flip the coin and turn on each other creating world turmoil, making Norway and its border area the point of collision. Germany versus Russia, and stuck in the middle where the people inhabiting the area, which would find their reality in the midst of the clash.

The actual colliding on the final battleground proved chaotic as well when the infantry from both sides in summer uniforms, got caught in a storm:

¹³ https://snl.no/Norge_under_andre_verdenskrig#-Motstand

“They said they found the dead soldiers, both Germans and Russians, on one another. They had not known where they were - so bad was weather. So they dropped a lot of people on Litza” the women tell me, and then points out another change in their surroundings when Finland switched allegiance, turning on Germany in the finally months of the war:

“We weren’t sure who flew the planes, if it was Finnish or German pilots”, she tells .Yet another level of surroundings/environment that might have forged their identity/mentality; Instability in form of never knowing who is friend or enemy, making the unpredictable the only predictable. Surrounded by actions of political play, we find our then young girl, trying to live her life with different military forces trampling around her crossing all sorts of borders:

“It went fast. When they came they were everywhere”. Her first meeting with Russians, is the prisoners held by Germans:

“There was a lot of sad to see. They marched right here. They had a big camp on the other side of the river. And, we saw the way they were treated by the Germans and it was not a pretty sight. They had a lazaret for Russian prisoners, and we saw them leap on stumps on the roof and - no it was not pretty to watch”.

The sad visuals she was surrounded by on the ground was accompanied by the beating from above. From when the Germans went towards Russia in 41’ they were bombed continuously, especially on clear winter nights. It seems to me she was in a situation that easily could be justification for anger and bitterness: occupied, prohibited to live their normality, in conditions of fear, mistrust, violence. And isn’t it just in such a suppressed reality Nazism picked up and found its strength? Picking up on a broken situation after World War 1 and uniting against enemies? Going back to the origin of fascism you find the simple idea of strength through unity: one rod is so much easier broken than several in unity, and in further symbolic from Ancient roman symbolic is *fasces*; a bundle of rods tied to an axe - this to illustrate the power of the magistrate and the right to punish. It’s a simple logic in neatly organized (rods) people forming unity to empower the (axe) authority.

The authority in the hard, sharp, deadly form of axe leading the direction of punishing what opposes unity, and in this lies the mentality of “us” and “the other”. What is interesting is that the Norwegian ladies don’t seem to have this mentality, even after growing up and out of a chaotic surroundings of war, destruction, pain and suffering. One story is particularly clear to her:

“The Germans flew eastwards with a bunch of planes, and my neighbour had been standing outside with a Gestapo and the Gestapo had said, ‘Now they are getting breakfast over in Murmansk’. And then later one time the Russian planes had come our way and my neighbour had told the same Gestapo; “ now the Germans get their supper”. The Gestapo hadn’t responded to that.

So I return to the facts of ever-changing scenarios, never knowing who are friend or enemy, and even more the importance of individual meetings in the midst of it all:

“I remember Mom washing clothes; we had a well out there and a German came over to mom and gave her his woollen blankets, because ‘he hadn’t more use for them’ – he counted on not coming back”. I asked if he ever returned and are told that not many returned from ‘there’. They tell of the few that did, that ‘had lost their minds over there’.

On 7th of October 1944 was the day the Red Army countered the pressure from Nazi Germany. They went full strength offensive along the entire front. By October 18th they had entered Norway and the Germans evacuated the northern areas. When withdrawing they burnt and destroyed what they left. This by Hitler’s directive "Compassion with the people is not in place."¹⁴

The frontal combat at Litza had taken an ugly turn as both armies were wearing summer uniforms when a storm hit the area. Loosing sight and freezing, the battle turned chaotic:

The ladies refer to the German withdrawal from what met them on the Russian side as “noise” (Bråk):

“They hung on the sides of cars, wounded. There was plenty of wounded soldiers who were trying to fit anywhere in a car, and they said ‘ you must not be here, you do not know what's going to happen’, but we knew. Well, nobody knows what's going to happen - but those were supposed to scare us. But we did not listen- that's when we started making a hut (Gamme) where we could be”.

About a week after the warning an orderly came to their house with a written letter restricting everyone to their houses after midnight. The family and neighbours feared that meant that they would have to withdraw with the Germans, so they then fled to the wilderness, to the Gamma. But they hadn’t counted on that walking right into the action. From the 21st of October (From 21- 27 October) they were 12 people stashed in that shack, for a week. And

¹⁴ <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murmanskfronten>

suddenly found them surrounded by Russians, and then the shooting began, to where they were hiding:

“They were shooting from Tjelmøya, an island in the fjord. They had seen the Russians came to us. For them lit lots of little fires, for there was dark, and them probably were cooking some food or have light. The Germans, they were on the other side of the water and we saw there was a green light there. Therefore Germans shot exactly where we were for they saw that the Russians had arrived”.

Running between the thousands of Russian, they shouted “Norveski, Norveski”, and by what they called a miracle, no one was hurt that day. They are so distant to it all, always the same factual approach, and it hits me emotionally, suddenly - This isn't just a fictional story, this they were smack in the middle of, and I have to say: “ it sounds scary”. The oldest one respond:

“It was scary too, but right when you are in the middle of it, you don't notice it”.

Around this is when the conversation turns towards if they still carry the feeling of their experiences, a notion they reject at a conscious level, but the younger tell me that she does walk in her sleep. She could be pointing to that her brain still remembers even if her method of coping with it all is blocking the thoughts out and just ‘adjust’:

“What else can you do [but adjust]?” they, question me back when asked of how to deal with all the changes:

“And then you just push it behind– cant walk around thinking about everything that was done of madness”.

This is what impresses me about these women, surrounded by so much madness on every level - they seem so stable. So grounded, maybe even at peace. There exists no bitterness in them – not that I can pick up on anyway. The only indignation found in their stories is towards the English that came after the war, ‘expecting to be received as heroes’:

“They came here and thought we would welcome them with open arms as liberators, but we were already liberated” the elder states, and continues to tell how they would cut off the hair of girls suspected of having relationships with Germans, an act the elder calls ‘nonsense’.

“I wonder what the Norwegian soldiers did in Germany; don’t you think they dated girls there?” the youngest question, and by that simple question she illustrates Galtungs Buddhist bookstore approach - to try out the perspective of “the other”.

So out of everything that happened upon them during five years of war, t with the Germans burning down the town to leave nothing behind as they escaped - this entry from ‘southerners’ again, into their lives, acting out of ignorance to what had actually been going on in the north, is the only irritation I can hear from them. It doesn’t sound like bitterness, even this, more like they are annoyed at acts done out of stupidity. I wonder, why they don’t carry grudges and the elder offer the solution:

“There is no use, it just affects oneself” and the younger agrees:

“There’s no use... they who live now haven’t been a pat of it. You cannot carry a grudge to the ‘Germans’ for what their grandparents was in the war.

I wonder again if their life experiences has narrowed their safe place to within themselves and if there ever existed a static perspective of “us” against “the others”, it was dissolved by never knowing who is the enemy or friend, by getting to know both enemy (Germans) and liberators (Russians) intimately and seeing the individuals within a governing indoctrination.

I ask both the Russian and Norwegian who won the war, and the Russian replies: “Of course Russians won. It goes without saying” and she starts reciting a poem about victory day. The Norwegian answers from a different perspective:

“No. It wasn’t so...” She smiles awkwardly with her hands clasped around her stomach, sitting in her chair, in her house, next to her sister, in the little border town where it all happened, now over 70 years ago since it happened:

“Nobody wins in a war”.

Multi-polar world

Both women have an acceptance of the border as just there. They don “feel” it as the Russian say, and “never think about it” as the Norwegian describes it. Both statements convey the acceptance of a limit. There is shyness in these women. A curious shyness towards their neighbours. And maybe even a controlled distance to strangers. It’s found in the Russian story of how they watched Norwegian women in Bikini, a huge contrast to how female conduct was in Russia at the time, and in how they dealt with it: hiding in the bushes and avoiding future

exposure to such situations. It seems like a good metaphor for putting on blinders. Knowing there is different out there somewhere, very close but by the acceptance of the limit, that within her 'world' the state is like it is – you keep your distance.

What is found on the other side is not threatening to them, it's just people, different but the same, and important to keep cooperating with if peace is the to be kept. The worries they share are for higher political actions that will affect their daily lives (again). The Russian is worried about what happens if 'they' are provoked and the Norwegian supports that worry of response to provoking actions, asking the question 'why they should feel what the consequences of what goes on 'down there' (implying the situation in Ukraine). I feel that this worry shows that the war is very much alive on the political level, as a tension ordinary people carry on daily basis. But for those living in actual experience of what is on both sides of the border, having lived in the middle of the physical actions of political though, and the interconnectedness that happens when there is no black and with – when enemies are also friends, when friends turn enemies, there, the perspective arises that peace is possible. Maybe that is what 'border-identity' is: Actual experience with that what ever limits us, divides us, sets us up to be a part, when the border is crossed or breached, even forcefully broken down and we look into each others eyes – we can feel that we are all the same. We are all just humans, evolved monkeys, trying to live our lives.

These women embody without even having met, the willingness to have a dialogue through us students. The individuals wish for peace and a better future has them opening up over protecting themselves. They have in them more than the worry for the future; they have in them the acceptance of their life-experiences and the knowledge that they will survive whatever comes their way and still be ok. But tin he wish to avoid such a future for them and next generations, they share. The Russian offers her view of how to live in peace:

"Honestly, I would love to see the multi-polar world. We are all different, but we should be living in peace. We should live in peace and mutual respect. We are very different so it should be a versatile approach: You live your way, we respect you; if you live differently we respect you as well. But then we are to be respected too".

When I ask the Norwegian if the opening of the borders, the mutual agreement on the border-zone and creation of the border-visa is a possibility for her to go make more Russian friends, she looks at me a bit tired. Reminding myself of the life she has had, I can understand. She's conveying to me the importance of border-crossings and meeting people to people as a

‘strategy’ towards peace, the kind of ‘folk-to-folk’-diplomacy Rossvær is proposing through the study of Borderology. But in her previous mentioned response, I feel that she has already done so much in her life, that this is not her job,

“That’s for the next generations”.

And I agree.

Borderology

In Viggo Rossvær's essay, *What is Borderology?* He describes the invention of the actual term ‘borderology’ a hybrid of languages for the purpose of fulfilling it’s potential. In a sense the term transcends the borders of correctness and creates a new term in progress of defining itself. A part of this process is the creation of the study on how ‘to speak’ the border, the study I’m currently undertaking. Highly influenced by Kant, Rossvær argues for the study’s potential through ‘empirical studies of man and the ideal world tribunal there is a place for a new knowledge where the borders run through people. He justifies Borderology as a type of regional knowledge where “the border we are investigating lies within man himself” (Rossvær, 2006: 26).

Or “the border we are investigating lies within and woman’, or just plainly ‘human’, as I would have phrased it. The point though, as I understand, it would be that the borders exist within people and because of people. There would not exist borders if there weren’t for humans. They are all man-made restrictions, sometimes imprisoning, but who really knows – maybe out of necessity? Describing the study as how ‘to speak’ the border I find limiting. Or maybe it describes the end goal of the process this study is, but I would like to add how ‘to hear’ the border as well as how ‘to feel’. Those three senses wouldn’t discard the use of the rest of our senses, but they would create a starting point for what I feel this study is really about: How to relate to the border.

Rossvær introduces a shift in attitude of (scientific) research for this study when proposing a shift in mentality of thinking, maybe even a break from the ancient roots of our historical past by noting its restrictive qualities: “This type of knowledge is not consistent with the traditional Greek view of the human condition, that outside our known border are only the barbarians, a view that has been influencing European thinking deeply since antiquity” (Rossvær, 2006: 26).

There is no critique in this statement, more what I read as asking for a change. But how to change a mentality that has been maintained for centuries? A different approach, an opposition to ‘normality’ would necessarily be considered either a threat or discarded as madness?

Terence McKenna, and American ethno botanist and advocate for the responsible use of psychedelic plants are placed in the term ‘pseudoscience’ for his novelty theory on time. It’s easy to discard him as a raging lunatic mentally ‘ruined’ by mushrooms, but if you take the time to listen to him as I did watching the video *True Hallucinations*, you find most of what he says is within logic:

It’s almost as though western science was fascinated by energy. For 5000 years we pursued understanding energy. And this process ends with thermal nuclear explosions in the deserts of the American southwest. We can light the fire that burns in the heart of the distant stars. We know how to do that. That’s what the western mind achieved, political issues aside. The eastern mind was not interested in energy - it was interested in time. And they spent 5000 years deconstructing it, looking at it, and you don’t use atom smashers, you don’t use enormous physical pressure - it’s a different problem and you bring different tools to bare – you meditate, you look inside yourself, you study the movement of water around pebbles, you consider the situation, you study history (McKenna in Bergmann, 2016: 1: 19:56).

Here, McKenna describes perfectly the very difference of mentality between the east and the west, and touches upon what Rossvør contrasts with Kant’s philosophy on political theory to the European mentality through the relationship of the words ‘border’ and ‘frontier’:

Let us concretize the difference between the Hobbesian and Kantian thinking, contrast ‘border’ with ‘frontier’ in one sense the meaning of these two words is the same, in another sense totally different. A frontier like the Western frontier, the Cowboys and Indian kind of frontier we know from the European expansion in North America. The expansion is from the European side described as an advance into an empty land. From the other side it is described as the invasion that destroyed a complete cultural space and small nations (Rossvør, 2006:23).

It could seem from this example that the word ‘frontier’ is merely used as an excuse, to expand into ‘free’ territory for so to claim said territory with ‘borders’. Once within the term of ‘border’ the ownership is established and by the western mindset ‘what belongs to me is

not for others', protected by restrictions. With an attitude of: 'Oh, you haven't marked your boundaries in our way; drawn them on a flat piece of paper, wired up around you, or even hashed out regulations for entering in and out of what you merely see as your environment to live in? That gives us the right to take it, and by our hand- and self-made laws that you should have read up on in our books that you haven't had access to, govern it. Instead you savages were wasting your time living, dancing and looking at stars. You loose!' (Or something like that). Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the 'frontier' then would probably not even know there could be a difference between 'frontier' and 'border', they merely lived and treated their areas as home, until they were marked, defined and discarded as without rights.

These two so very different vantage points seems so extreme it's hard to believe it is real. That this is our history. But the more I research the evolution of history, as I touched on earlier with how nation-building came about and was successfully distributed by the unity of religion, it seems that these problems exist because powerful civilizations have governed with a worldview of opposing groups in the 'us' vs. 'them' or 'others'. And I feel sick. I wonder where this sense of entitlement has come from, that have had men that roaming the earth not only to investigate and explore, but elevating themselves over both different and same specie. Why this approach to the unknown or the foreign, this approach of not asking but taking? The voices of 'madmen' like Galtung and McKenna comes back to me. Somehow it's comforting to know that they have asked questions, and devoted their life to finding different approaches:

"In a world were we are just buffeted, used, set against one another, mislead, misconstrued, lied to and controlled, nevertheless you can just push between the tents of carnival robe and walk out into he woods, and there you find the spiritual life waiting...

...It's a matter of courage. Nature loves courage. Nature is an infinitive of the doorways opening into authentic being. Calling to us with the voice of our ancestors, the spirits of the planet" (McKenna in Bergmann, 2016: 2:17:59).

I'm not suggesting the solution to anything is that everyone go out and get high on mushrooms. McKenna has already done that. But I do think it's important to honour his life work and acquired knowledge by taking his thoughts into consideration. And maybe even more important, learn from his approach and the questions he has asked:

Who do you work for? What is going on here – do you understand what you're doing? And if you don't, who does? Why did they set you marching? Because I cant tell what's happening here - we are trying to tinker with something. It's a groping in

the dark for a button. We are trying to make something happen, by saying words, by setting examples – empowering people to do certain things (Ibid: 2:16:00).

He's hinting at that there is a huger power at work, what he calls the "mushrooms programming", and even how mindboggling that idea might sound, who can deny if the earth itself has a network with intelligence that we don't understand, that the earth could have a programming in a network, and why not distributed by mushrooms? Who's to say it isn't so?

McKenna within his pseudoscience or science fiction brand challenges the core of science; reason. But the interesting part he points out in the documentary, is that it seems science has spun around to bite its own tail:

"...But even they [particle physicists and quantum physicists] admit that matter has now become so wacky that the grand enterprise of the conquest of reality through reason has revealed that reason has no place in the domain of reality. That reality itself is not reasonable" (Ibid: 2:27:43).

And in reality, he says, we really are just monkeys trying to figure out the universe.

Biology

According to Bruce H. Lipton PhD, cell biologist and lecturer, a human is an integrated community of around 50 trillion amoeba like cells. In his article, *Why and how to let go of fear*, he informs that over 30 years ago he revealed that "genes are not the key to organismal evolution". His cell research shows that human evolution can be traced back to how the most primitive cells; bacteria have expanded. One single cell is protected by a surface of membrane whose work is to filter and be a barrier of sorts for what to enter the actual cell. Once the surface is fully covered, the cell's growth stops and it would be natural to think that was it: "But evolution didn't stop— it changed paradigms" he writes;

Once you've made the smartest bacterium, the next level of evolution is to create a community of bacteria, wherein the bacteria can share their awareness. On the physical plane, bacteria can communicate with one another through the use of secreted chemical signals (similar to hormones). Bacteria can also communicate by releasing viruses that contain nucleic acids (DNA or RNA programs)—information that can be picked up and utilized by other members of the bacterial community. In addition, bacteria can communicate by broadcasting vibrational energy fields" (Lipton, 2017).

Lipton argues that this is the process of our evolution. From one tiny bacteria communicating with another and joining forces to different cells living together in a shared community that surrounds themselves with a membrane to regulate diverse entities in shared environment. Simpler said, every human is a community. “Once the smartest human was created, the next level of our evolution led humans to form communities to share awareness. First there were clans, then tribes, then states, and then nations as humans assembled into larger communities”(Ibid).

In this perspective it can be argued that every nation is a protected area, with physical limitations on the membrane, so to say, within it there is evolution through community building, and not until the community reaches it’s limit of awareness, they will be ready to communicate with the outside environment. Not until progress halts, and fear of the unknown is replaced by the instinctual need for survival through expanding awareness, will the paradigms change and borders truly become not limitations and obstacles, but the place we connect and communicate: “Right now, human civilization is on the verge of creating a new multi-human organism” (Ibid).

McKenna’s earlier mentioned proposal for organisms (people) to question the motivation within the structure they are a part of, could be the core of Borderology. Out of the areas long standing nomadic traditions of trade sprung the “ people-to people – cooperation” political idea behind Barents secretariat, and what Borderology takes further as a ‘folk diplomacy’. An evolution through history and tradition, not fitting in just one category, and what Rossvær points out when explaining why the study differs from social anthropology and history: ”The first point is that Borderology as the study of cooperation in border regions is primarily interested in peace-processes, therefore also contains references to political theory” (Rossvær, 2006:19).

As I understand this, the study merges techniques from social anthropology, philosophy/ history and political theory, but invites not only the academic elite to participate. On the contrary, it prefers for ‘ordinary’ people to participate to help shift the perspective of borders to bridges on the road to peace: ”Seeing borders as bridges brings us on the trail of the cosmopolitan universality that only can be established by actively taking up the trail of this kind of regional effort” (Ibid: 24).

Borderology seems to think that crossing borders or that organisms (people) within border regions is/has the tool to shift the understanding of the world from opposing forces of ownership and power, to find the organic flow of the earth: “Only the open human community permitting other men crossing your borders, gives us the proper context for developing a society with a surplus of vitality and meaning” (Ibid: 21).

Questioning what Luk Van Langenhove addresses methodical nationalism in his book *Building Regions – the regionalization of the world order*, could be what both McKenna and Rossvør sees as the road to a more peaceful future:

“Methodical nationalism overemphasizes the role of the states in the myriad of existing forms of societal organizations, and brings with it an illusion of stability as the geopolitical order of states and their (internal) relations is presented as the only possible one” (Van Langenhove, 2011:9).

Van Langenhove touches here on what could be the reason for the expansions of the super-communities we have at current world state, USA and Russia. Calling it an ‘illusion’ would suggest a false security created on the basis of belonging within a restricted geographical area, establishing ownership through the word ‘belonging’. For if “I” belong here and no one can cross my borders unless they are a part of “us” - we live in peace? And anyone else crossing these borders is an intruder. Except isn’t this peace fake, if it denies the outside reality? If the borders are used as blinders to (excuses to not accept) what actually sustains the limited area? It could seem Langenhove merges the use of mapping into states (territories) and governing by methodical nationalism as the two main reasons for our planet not functioning as a whole:

“One thing in common is that they are all ways of dividing the surface of the earth in meaningful entities in order to make sense of the world and of the relations between people belonging to these different entities” (Langenhove, 2013: 9).

Langenhove focuses on that the existing systems are built on the structure of the Greek state, as the Roman Empire and even USSR – built on the same principles: sovereign states, drawing lines of territories irritating the existing tribes/cultural population¹⁵. But Langenhove doesn’t merely focus on the existing problems, he suggests a solution: the genesis of the state. This not meaning dismantling any existing system but using regions areas ‘mapped’ out according to language, people and activities.

¹⁵ Building Regions, 2013: 9

I would imagine this regional map to be a third dimension on our current maps, hovering over the existing two-dimensionality on a different level. Kind of flipping the horizon from horizontal to vertical, all according to breaking with what Rossvær points out as the “versus” attitude of the Greek, and that worldviews dividing qualities. The shift from seeing the world as limited - the mental shift of mentality, needed in every man (particle) belonging to the same organism, the earth. Not leaving behind what has been created tested out, success or failure, not discarding every existing –ism or structure, not discarding any reality, but embracing logic, and why not: Border-o-logy.

Confronting Europe

“I’m Sattar, Made in Bangla”, he introduced, and repeated it when I didn’t give a response: “I am Sattar, Made in Bangla”. The second time I got it, and responded:

“I am Lina, made in Norway”, I gestured, but got only a blank stare back. I looked around the room at the group of Rickshaw-drivers and my translator, but just blank stares: “Scandinavia?” I tried, but no recognition there either, and my translator offered no help, just raised shoulders and hands towards the sky; “The north of Europe?” I threw out in desperation, thinking this wasn’t going so well, and I had an urge to just run away from the whole project, but than I got an exclaim back, from Sattar;

“AH!!! Europe-country”, he said, and I nodded: ” Yes, ‘Europe-country’”.

It dawned on me then, sitting in Dhaka, the capitol of Bangladesh in 2008 as a photojournalist under education, trying to make a story about rickshaw workers - trying to argue with the rickshaw drivers that Europe wasn’t some utopia of happiness. That I had met more happy, caring, loving people there than back home, and trying to convince my translator to translate this to them above his discarding “they wont understand”. It dawned on me hard, that everywhere one goes you will meet preconceptions based on a definition, terms, and names. In this example, 'Europe-country' was where dreams came true - the Promised Land. And there I was, grown in and out of it, trying to say it wasn’t all good, it was actually pretty bad, but no one wanted to hear, no one wanted to know, no one wanted to understand, and who was I to talk anyway? I was one of the lucky ones that came from there; I was clearly blazed and not knowing of life’s true hardship, after all, I had what they didn’t have – money/freedom.

July 1980, Russell Means, a member of Oglala Lakota tribe, gave his most famous speech. It was at a gathering for the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He allowed his speech to be written down, going against his oral tradition and rejection of the western way because: “It seems that the only way to communicate with the white world is through the dead, dry leaves of a book” (Means, 1980).

His main goal with the speech was not to reach the whites, but his concerns were the American Indian people becoming converted into the white world through universities and institutions, and to reach those that wished to resist what he called “the process of cultural genocide waged by Europeans against American Indian Peoples’ today”:

“The process began much earlier. Newton, for example, "revolutionized" physics and the so-called natural sciences by reducing the physical universe to a linear mathematical equation. Descartes did the same thing with culture. John Locke did it with politics, and Adam Smith did it with economics. Each one of these "thinkers" took a piece of the spirituality of human existence and converted it into code, an abstraction. They picked up where Christianity ended: they "secularized" Christian religion, as the "scholars" like to say--and in doing so they made Europe more able and ready to act as an expansionist culture. Each of these intellectual revolutions served to abstract the European mentality even further, to remove the wonderful complexity and spirituality from the universe and replace it with a logical sequence: one, two, three. Answer!”(Means, 1980)

In this reasoning it can seem Means is directly blaming Europe, or the European way of ‘thinking’ for what has happened since “we” expanded to the states. That stabs my gut emotionally. Could I, as a cell in my community, be partly responsible for the evolution to Donald Trump? Even in just a minuscule way, that fraction of blame is mine to carry? An inherited emotional rejection of myself by way of where I come from - the environment that I came out of? And now seeing the consequences it has on others, thus the feeling of responsibility to make up for it?

This research project, that started out looking from an outside perspective, taking two similar conditions from each side of a national border, to see what could be so different between us that we need to wage war to protect us from the other, has turned into a scary thought: If what Lipton says is true, then you can view the USA and Russia, the largest communities we have on this earth now, as the highest level of awareness. But why then is our planet on the verge of destruction? How can you by those premises defend the election of Donald Trump as the selected representation of such awareness? In this kind of view of the world, it becomes

interesting to not only critique and question the current world leaders positions, how they came about and what they represent; as they are the ‘chiefs’ of their communities.

Holding in mind McKenna’s idea of an earthly global programming by the network of the mushroom, Galtung’s both-and, Watt’s vastness of universe, Lipton’s evolution theory, Means criticism of expansion culture - it all seems to be turning quite chaotic. Or is it?

Returning to Rossvøer’s ‘the border we are investigating lies within man himself’, and if we dissolve the notion of ”us” and “the other” by using Galtung’s Buddhist bookstore approach, it becomes possible to imagine a global interconnected world where national borders are not restrictive borders but protective membranes for societies to develop in the process described by Lipton. It becomes evident that the first course of action would be to turn the perspective and critical eye to ourselves, but how? Would we need a comparison to be able to see what we are? Would we need others perspective on us to enter through our membrane and connect with us in dialogue to be able to shift our attitude, as Rossvøer suggest?

If we recognize that the borders are in us, that we are enforcing the physical boundaries by pure mental activity, can we then stop focusing on what’s wrong with everyone else? Stop validating our right with whatever ‘wrong’ or what differs from our normal, and merely use the varieties as comparison grounds, not for competition but embracing the totality of a global “us”?

If recognizing that we are all a part of an expansion culture heading for destruction, by keeping our beliefs, not the personal, but the structured belief of opposing forces, the notion ‘nothing will change unless I do’ sounds about right to me. If we are a minuscule particle in an enormous viral system - then who knows what will change around us when we do. If that sounds revolutionary, it’s not meant to. It’s meant the opposite. I don’t think this shift comes about as a turnaround or a complete halt of switching sides or breaking with everything established. More through an expansion of the horizon, not looking for a constant one, but recognizing the growth each generation has done and at present time: a small pause at first to consider ‘the others’ perspective, would be a start:

I think there's a problem with language here: Christians, capitalists, Marxists. All of them have been revolutionary in their own minds, but none of them really means revolution. What they really mean is continuation. They do what they do in order that European culture can continue to exist and develop according to its needs (Means 1980).

So what do we need? What are the old ladies telling us? Peace they say. Continued 'cooperation' the Norwegian says, 'respect', the Russian says. Respect for differences, different lifestyles, for varieties within and outside your organism, always recognizing that we all are a part of a whole.

Recognition of that we are all connected seems to be the first step, language translation maybe the next, but I think there it stops with the steps that can be imagined and argued for, for after that and even before, nothing would matter how much is set up unless there is motivation. And for now the "claim and own, protect and fight, "us" vs. "them"- mentality seems to be a too big a part of human nature. Call it whatever you will; capitalist, any other -ism that we can blame the west for, or if we imagine western perspective we could possibly blame communism for it all? We could look at the Vikings, they were all about expanding - maybe they are to blame for the arctic ice melting. Or maybe its just time to stop the blame game, and view our current situation as what we are at now. What we have to work with. And were we are at is not necessarily just bad. So. I'd like to embrace it all. Forget the past, not the steps that has gotten us here, but forget the mentality of holding on to blame. We can remember what went wrong, what didn't work, and see what isn't working, but use that as knowledge towards what could be ways of making a difference.

We just have to change our reasons for living. Easy, right? Just become vegetarians and the animals wont suffer anymore. Buy an electric car and the environment is saved? I don't think so. For when it comes down to it, who wants to live in "reality" when reality is hard work, conscious decisions, reflections, analysis, not left for an elite to figure out, but a necessity for every particle in the organism to participate in. And than a peaceful existence. Can we even Imagine? Wouldn't that be boring? A life without drama? I think most would say that's what they want, but who makes the actions to achieve it? I am left questioning: Would it be possible to achieve planetary peace on earth with the not knowing of what the universe is, or would and outside threat to the planet have to arise/be created for us to unite? One, that has nothing to do with anything that could be our own fault - just a cause, an opposing force that we can fight against, together. I hope that's not the only way. I hope we can come together for the planet we already inhabit, the life that already exist. To make it here before we try to make it/fail anywhere (else):

“There is another way. There is the traditional Lakota way and the ways of the American Indian peoples. It is the way that knows that humans do not have the right to degrade Mother Earth, that there are forces beyond anything the European mind

has conceived, that humans must be in harmony with all relations or the relations will eventually eliminate the disharmony. A lopsided emphasis on humans by humans--the Europeans' arrogance of acting as though they were beyond the nature of all related things--can only result in a total disharmony and a readjustment which cuts arrogant humans down to size, gives them a taste of that reality beyond their grasp or control and restores the harmony. There is no need for a revolutionary theory to bring this about; it's beyond human control. The nature peoples of this planet know this and so they do not theorize about it. Theory is an abstract; our knowledge is real" (Means, 1980).

Means uses 'they', I want to use 'us'. In picking up on creating this written dialogue with a dead mans thoughts, I'm trying to honour his actions of leaving his stubbornness of holding on to 'his way' of oral traditions (continuation) by communicating as a member of the 'white world'.

That I can from 'ink on dead leaves' find his thoughts and put them into mine to reflect on his criticism of what is ultimately what I have grown out of, makes for a mental meeting of different positions. This is not a dissolve of either of us – me considering his perspective doesn't mean I merge into adopting his thinking and leaving all of me behind, it just perhaps could be the way to find acceptance for both and find a balance where both our ways could co-exist together.

I think it's important to not overemphasize that even the mentality of what now is described as 'European expansion culture' is to blame for our planet being out of balance, flipping it completely for another fundamental perspective might also work in the end as something going too far in it's attempt to validate it's righteousness. In a sense to head Means warning of continuation to a flaw it would be necessary to dare to look back in history and to start looking at Oneself, wherever you originate from. Asking the question 'what I am continuing?' – defining what borders run through 'me', keeping in mind to consider 'the others' perspective, would be a start of change.

Interlude

In the next two segments of this essay I will embark on topics that didn't have an intention of being in this essay before they suddenly were. They are included now for seeing that they will help round off the topics from the actual fieldwork, and will therefore be based mostly on

personal experiences, recollected from my memory which is surprisingly precise being trained as a photographer and journalist. Those who participated in the events that weren't recorded or intended as fieldwork have confirmed the correctness of the stories.

Closing borders

“You remember when you said I was living in the past?” I said, his eyes blinked up at me. I wasn't sure if really wanted to hear me. He had kind of shut down after we broke up. “Huh”, he replied. “Well, I argue it's opposite”, I continued;

“If your time is something that happens before ours, than we are what is to come. That makes us the future and you the past”.

His big eyes blinked again, before his mouth turned arrogantly to the side in a half smile, half grunt: “Is this what you waste your time thinking about” he said with a tint of disgust in his voice. I replied as I walked out the door:

“ I don't think it's a waste of time”.

The time-debate had come about in the course of dating cross-border, Finland-Norway since New Years Eve to 2014. The logistics of having a constant hour in time-difference weren't the real reason for the break up. What had started out seemingly like a perfect fit, once thrown into the crisis-situation the world entered into that year, turned it real complicated.

Wednesday, January 20th 2016 Reuters reported: “Norway sent a first bus carrying 13 migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan back across its Arctic border with Russia on Tuesday night in temperatures of around -30 degrees Celsius (-22 Fahrenheit)¹⁶.

And five days after that, The Finnish newspaper Yle reported that two days before the mentioned bus, “a suspected asylum seeker was found dead, apparently frozen to death in a car some 70 kilometres east of the Finnish border”¹⁷.

I was working as a teacher in the children's school in Neiden at the time that news found me, mostly by word of mouth. The school had gone from a student-population of five to almost 40, by harbouring the refugee-kids in transit, waiting for the government to assess their

¹⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-nordics-idUSKCN0UY2F3>

¹⁷ https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/russian_finnish_interior_ministers_meet_amid_rising_border_worries/8622461

situation. I had chosen a job in a border town, away from where I had done my research, a part-time employment to support me while I wrote out my thesis, and suddenly I found myself a 100% in a crisis, leaving my planned personal journey aside, doing what needed to be done.

The whole handling of the refugee-situation felt even more complicated as it seemed an underlying non-cooperative mode between Russia and its northern counterparts from the sanctions against Russian military deployment in Ukraine, years earlier.

August 11th 2014 the Norwegian government officially released their support of EU's restrictive measures against Russia as a response to Russia's actions. The statement published on *Regjeringen.no* quoted Norwegian foreign minister, Børge Brende: "Since the start of the crisis in Ukraine, Norway has stood united with the EU and other like-minded countries in responding to Russia's violations of international law"¹⁸.

I'll leave out the higher political details of this, as I admittedly don't have enough knowledge of the subject, and the topic would probably make for a second thesis or more. But I would like to note that Norway's action of aligning with the EU and ultimately also the UN, points to where Norway as a nation feels it belongs – at least from a central political view.

I mentioned the high political movements, the reports of death and deportation, the fluctuation of people in arctic temperatures, and the sudden changes in "normality", because when looking at it in the context of the fieldwork from the Russian/Norwegian border – I can't help but notice the similarities. I had, after hearing hours on hours of tales from WWII, the daily life of it, happened to be in a situation that had reminding factors: refugees with different appearance, different culture, different religion, the affect on the local community, seeing that community come together to help in any way they could, suspicion, news of deaths, of tragedy. The small town of Neiden had at that point almost 300 counted inhabitants on Wikipedia, but I really don't know if that number is true. Living there it felt less. It doesn't matter. The point is that it was a small town, and with the 30+ refugee kids that entered our school, you can imagine the number of parents and older siblings, and the changes it brought to the area. Nothing like the Norwegian lady tell tales of the Germans population: 'disappearing' in the crowd of Germans – but still a huge change, and her quote about her experience with the "Finnish War": 'we had some idea what war was', were suddenly becoming my own thoughts. I have questioned in analysing this fieldwork, if the constant changes around them, the instability, had them narrowing their identity to "Sør-Varanger".

I'm not sure there will ever be a way to validate this theory, but I can say that if Identity can be paralleled to a feeling of belonging, mine narrowed quite extensively. In accordance with the etymology of the northern European languages of the word, that it originates from something audible, the massive intrusion of voices and stories, everyone carrying chaos and disturbance – “noise” as my Norwegian participant has called it, I stopped listening. I remember clearly the finality of that, the day I met my Finnish friend across the border and my: ‘How are you?’ was met with:

“I have decided to give my Finnish citizenship to a Syrian and go down there to get bombed”.

I just walked out.

That's when I started shutting down. My brain had gone into hyper-mood, looking for solutions, highly active to be able to deal with the challenges at work, and it didn't tolerate negative noise. The meeting with my friend was too much for me. Where could I go if not to friends for ease, when my work was in actuality emotionally in the middle of war?

Not long after I found myself sitting in front of my fireplace, listening to my bright eyed friend from before explain to me that a relationship with me was too hard. The English language wasn't sufficient enough for him to offer me the support I needed, and he was feeling like he was losing his identity. I understood. I was experiencing anxiety and panic attacks for the same reason: the need to withdraw and hideaway – make the crisis go away and have back my normality. But I couldn't. I felt responsible for the kids, and if we all gave up and turned our backs on the reality of our close surroundings, wouldn't it mean to give up all hope? We broke away from each other, to not ruin ourselves. He went “ to Finnish sauna” as he called it and I to work.

I've taken this refugee-crisis down to a very personal level. One, because I think my own experiences is the only thing I have found I can validate in this kind of work of exploring identity. Two, because the intricacy of higher political forces and their games to disguise actions are too complex to address in this essay, other than to acknowledge they are there and the cause of all the “noise”.

I've shared this part of my own personal story that was never intended to be apart of master thesis. But as I dropped everything else in my life to focus on the crisis at hand, I also postponed my study. Later I discovered that this experience with the refugees in Neiden, as mentioned: gave me grounds for comparison to the prior fieldwork. I bring in the story of the

Finnish guy, for in our decision to leave each other alone, and our very different responses to overwhelming circumstances, lies of course the obvious of our different response but also something deeper that is the same in both of us, maybe all of us: the sometimes mental and physical need to escape the conditions of this planet.

I experienced a systematic breakdown of my nerves as I stayed in the situation. From week to week I could feel a tingling pain spreading from my neck and further and further down my back. I started losing control of my motoric skills. I became clumsier and as said, had trouble breathing in panic attacks. I didn't have any solutions, neither did he? I didn't see an option of running away; he did, and took it. I don't blame him.

Say you are the most empathetic soul in the world, born in the richest country in the world, healthy, strong and wanting nothing but to be a part of saving this planet and humanity. Can you take on everyone that has suffered more than you, has less than you, needs more, and deserves more? Can you, or will you yourself break? And if you start feeling yourself breaking, do you have any other choice but to shut down and take care of yourself? Otherwise your entire world will break? Is this what the government of Norway and also Finland reasoned around to stop the refugees from entering over the northern borders – the lack of capacity? Seeing it like this, I could state that borders and closing them are a necessity, but then I remember Russell Means again and his speech on European expansion: “They do what they do in order that European culture can continue to exist and develop according to its needs” (Means, 1980), and the statement turns to questioning if borders aren't so much a necessity, but an excuse?

If we try out Galtung's approach of shifting thinking in 'neither-nor, to 'both-and', I could state the answer is probably 'both', and I would define the 'and' then, as that the answer differs in every individual circumstance. And for the higher political actors of my nation, the question I'd like to ask is in the spirit of shifting perspective, is:

Would we have had the same course of action if the same amount of refugees had come from the west? If they arrived by boats, or planes from the US?

Building Regions

Culture is a kind of prison, and the only way that we know to get beyond it, is to dissolve its boundaries

The Barents region has as mentioned developed since 1993, but looking even further back, did the structures that of what regions now attempts, already exist, just overlooked? Perhaps it is found in indigenous' culture?

Sometimes forgotten it seems, in the high political movements of the Barents secretariats focus on keeping the border to Russia friendly as the central politics plays out their game of power, the little town called Neiden is situated on the border to Finland. The town is a historical 'joint' area, where the national border now splits what is a Sami-Siida.

I will present the town through an interview made with Rolf Arvola, a newspaperman specialized in politics of fisheries. The interview was done 1st of June 2016, and by the 22nd of July he had passed away I'll let him introduce himself as he did to me: "My name is Rolf Arvola, born in Neiden of Finnish parents – that would make me third or fourth generation of Finns? I speak Finnish and Norwegian. I have grown up with the rights to fish in the Neiden-river" (Winge 2016).

The interview with Rolf was a start of making a portrait of the Neiden River, I had told him I needed voices that could speak for the river, the natural resource that has survived and flourished through protective measures over the years. He willingly shared his knowledge:

"The area here, the so-called "stateless' area, is an old Skolt Sami settlement. They had their winter lair on what is now Finnish side and would come here around the month of May for living here in what was called "Skoltebyen" (The Skolt-city). During summer they would roam further out the fjord where they had places to fish for Salmon and by June July they would be back in the Skolt-city where the fishing continued up the "Skoltefossen" (Skolt-waterfall)" (Ibid.).

Around the settlement developed agriculture, mainly sheep and cows. When the borders were drawn in 1826, Sør-Varanger became the youngest part of Norway, and the first changes arrived for the Skolt Sami's. The parts that are now Finnish, was then Russian, and the people living in the area about to split into nations was given the option:

"Within 6 years they would have to decide whether they would be Norwegian or Russian. When they decided to become Norwegian they lost all their rights to the area then belonging to Russia, now Finland" (Ibid.)

¹⁹ Excerpt from the video *True Hallucinations*, by Peter Bergman, published on *Youtube*, 4th of March , 2016 . Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MG5gFtZ3U8&t=3552s> : 2:30:54)

‘The Neiden river’ is acknowledged as one of the great rivers of Norway and by 1830 when Sør-Varanger had become a part of the Nation, the right to govern the river was given those who had settled there in the valley, and there is where it gets ‘fishy’ in a sense.

Arvola adds that the choice made by the Eastern Sami’s in 1826 wasn’t merely to choose between Finland and Norway, but it was also to settle in what was perceived as Skolt-Sami area or in the valley around and become Norwegians: “They chose to become Norwegian citizens, in 1826. So the choice was really made then. And from that you can discuss, where any aware of the consequences of that choice” (Ibid.)?

I’ll leave that question hanging for another time or someone else with more knowledge of the historical details, to answer. But I can feel and read between the lines that it would be a complex answer, and parts of that complexity is still alive in the Siida today. I am tempted to parallel the definition of a Siida to a region, but looking at Van Langenhove’s definition it might fall between our outside of it:

“Regions differ from states but both have in common that they are human constructs: neither states, nor regions are a priori given categories. They are always the result of a double building process: they are imagined and they are created in an institutionalized way” (Van Langenhove 2011, preface).

I stated earlier that the national border splits a still existing Sami-Siida, and in a sense the establishing of appointed regions (The Barents region), seems to be a circular movement of history. From how I understand the indigenous tradition, they were nomadic, based on resources and trade, and their created bases; families devoted to areas in different seasons regulated the Siida’s. The families would expand and merge naturally with and around each other. Building regions beyond nations and states could be an attempt to try to bring back a mindset of movement and cooperation that has been tried closed off by territorial discussion within the mindset of entitled expansion culture. Seeing the connection in the ancient nomadic traditions and how they related to land, brings hope that in the establishing of these region we are in the process of mentality-shift, one aligning with Rossvøer ‘s suggestion to leave the ancient Greek’s versus approach, embracing Means and his advice that indigenous ‘knowledge is real’, McKenna’s vision of a global natural network and Galtung’s ‘Both-and’ in Lipton exemplifies in evolution of cells, when put into on a three-dimensional level of what Langenhove suggest is not a discard of established states or nations, but a changing in paradigms:

“The world of states has brought with it a lot of positive developments but also nationalism and what Sen (2006) labelled an illusion of destiny that resulted in incredible violence. The multiple worlds of regions could perhaps be a way to replace the illusion of (a single) national identity by a more realistic view that people hold plural regional identities. As such the world of regions might not only be a more complex and in instable world, but maybe also one with more chances to peace and freedom” (Van Langenhove, 2011:5).

Within all this talk of higher organization I return once again to my personal journey and positive progress I experienced:

In a way, the meeting of and the making of my friendships in Neiden, could be described as a full circle from the first meeting with the man from Poetry Slam, and the start of this essay. His rejection of the term " Søring “ was ultimately a rejection of me. But in this return to the north, I met a total different approach and maybe what Russell Means describes when he says: " things come full circle, back to where they started. That's revolution” (Means, 1980).

The complexity of Neiden (Njauddâm in Skolt Sami, Näätamö in Finnish and Njávđán in North Sami) with the origins from Norway, Russia, Finland mixed with the Sami’s, and evolution through generations of merging cultures through relationship, without loosing there sense of origin, is a good reminder that even in my initial fieldwork I was still carrying the perspective of opposing forces, setting up a comparison study between only two nations.

By the randomness of being in Neiden at the time of the refugee-crises, I was offered another level, a tiny experience of a broader representation of the region, and the regions within the region, without the linear focus on just Russia as the other side:

First I discovered in the meetings with my Russian/Norwegian participants their way of integrating their limitations by ‘not feeling’ or ‘thinking’ about the border. The very same border I had preconceived as strict, hard, and even scary. I realized all the established ‘truths’ I was carrying around without being aware. It also became more and more clear that that Identities and feeling of belonging doesn’t necessarily accord with national borders. And by my personal experiences with living in the north and seeing how the central politics shakes different hands left and right, not really having the knowledge of the history or culture in the northern municipalities/Barents region, or how the consequences of the local communities are affected by their actions, I am starting to grasp the complexity of it all.

But within this complexity lies something encouraging. For if meeting with just one ‘other’ can result in a more complex view and approach to the world, imagine what opportunities can be found within cultural hubs as Neiden, and it’s broader surroundings, The Barents region.

If one is willing to grab the opportunity to use the surroundings, cross some borders to not look for what is different as what must be wrong if I am right, but use the differences to discover what has established in oneself, and choose it to continue to fester in your actions or not, there is possibilities of major change, but it demands conscious change. If both parties in such a meeting carry this attitude, there is a massive opportunity of exchange of knowledge

“ She told me she didn’t understand how I was still standing”, she referred what her co-worker had told to her on the phone the day before, to me. I listened as I watched her roam around the bon-fire outside my caravan and she continued:

“I told her I had wine”, she joked, and paused and sat down on the reindeer skin she had brought from home and then got serious:

“But if I hadn’t had you to talk to during this time, I don’t think I would have been able to stand it all”, she ended.

I knew what she was talking about. We had met in a situation where we both had to be strong, in private life and dealing with our overwhelming circumstances. From being one who had stood alone in similar situations she was in now, something in me had decided to stand beside her, being the place she could tell her story:

“I think that’s what my tutor calls the Sami-method” I said, and paused for a second when I remembered she was of Skolt Sami origin. A fact I usually didn’t think about, for in my mind she the one person I had found in Neiden that truly seemed to understand and accept me just for me. She didn’t seemed to care if I was a “Søring”, and I hadn’t ever thought of her in terms of origin. We had met, female to female, and whatever boundaries had existed between us had slowly dissolved in meetings and dialogue and we had become friends. But for a second I was worried I might be touching on what should be left alone. I shook the worry off and continued:

“He tells about a man who as an adult is haunted by guilt from a childhood event that lead to his brother drowning. He suddenly starts speaking to his dead brother, out loud. The community around him thinks he’s crazy and he is institutionalized and medicated. But he

continues to talk there, for two weeks before he announces he's finished talking, and he is released".

I paused to see if she has a response but her silence made me continue. I thought out loud to her, the hybrid of how I now understand the 'Sami-Method': to think out loud what haunts you and by putting thoughts into words, and in hearing yourself you organize your brain. The response from others isn't really needed but could offer perspective and direction, and if done with a person of mutual attitude - the sharing of experiences could be helpful.

After sharing these thoughts, looked for her response:

"That's what you do", she said, and I meet her smiling eyes with mine, adjusting her statement for the lack of recognizing her equal part in it:

"That's what we do".

I argue that this story is an example of a different individual experience than the one exemplified in the chapter of 'closing borders': This time the meeting of two individuals in complex and overwhelming surroundings where both manages to keep an open attitude towards each other without the fear of losing ourselves by letting others in. And as it did with happen, this approach can result in friendship through exchange of knowledge and healing as a consequence. I'd like to state that:

Within the concept of people-to-people cooperation lies the opportunity of people's diplomacy: The kind that looks beyond appearance, the kind that wants to really know 'the other', and find ways to get along. Establish friendships by respecting differences and sharing perspectives and knowledge. And it might just be the way to peace

Fieldwork and method reflections

All interviews conducted in the process of working with this project from February 2014 to October 2016 was filmed, and all subjects participating in the project was informed and approved of the purpose – which was described to them as “A research project during my study of Borderology at (Un) Nord University and Murmansk Arctic State University on Identity in the border zone, looking at living history and life-experience of residents in said zone. The product intended to be text and film”.

Since I've chosen a qualitative approach with lengthy interview sessions added with a personal interview of Johan Galtung to concretise my method, there is only two main subjects: one old lady from the Norwegian side and one old lady from the Russian. I conducted 6 sessions with the Norwegian participant, and 5 with the Russian. My co-student was involved in one of the Norwegian interview sessions, while all 5 of the Russian, as all interviews were conducted in their respective languages.

The questions we used during the sessions were developed during the first two meetings with the Norwegian participant, and ended up concretising into a list which was then later used in interviews with the Russian:

Questions:

What is the border?

What is to live near the border?

What is a "Russian"?

What is a "Norwegian"? Difference, likeness?

Changes over the past years?

What is the north/the northerner?

What is BEAR?

What is border-visa?

How is the relationship between Norway and Russia? Has it changed over the years?

What is war?

What is peace?

Who won [WWII]?

What was it for?

Can there be peace?

Do you carry bitterness towards the "other"?

How does the future look to you?

What is Nazism? Socialism? Communism?

Working in the field, first with the woman from Norway, and then extending/including/contrasting their experience to a Russian counterpart, the first main challenge I encountered was just this; How can you ask someone to define a term of Identity?

Working on this project I realized I was asking a lot, maybe too much? In a sense, this master took on the daunting task of defining myself while using myself as a tool for research in scientific investigation of the world. The personal tragedy that had shot me mentally into space became in every way a new beginning. There was only the present and I was a wandering question mark, aching for someone to give me a reason to stay alive, to give some answers that made sense of a world I at the time experienced as only pain – something to organize my existence, which had turned into non-concrete fragments. Asking of my subjects to research their inner definitions by just bombarding them with terms to analyze, was asking a lot.

After now having had the time to process it all, I looking back through the fieldwork that shows that much of what defines who we are and how we act might not be a conscious choice. So in bringing all these terms to them from, the inner work they had to do to follow up on the topics must have been immense. I am forever grateful for everyone that has participated and shared within their abilities, whether that is in stories that they connected to my topic, plain facts, spelling corrections or poems, like the Russian. This in particular left an impression on me. Maybe from it's the suggestion of integration of environment into your personality/identity I recognize, in meeting a place that was unknown and just randomly chosen, to it leaving a lasting impression in/on you. From my personal experience with this physical pull towards the north, maybe?

When it took a hold of and in me I cannot define, and where it originated from is still a riddle I might never answer, but that it exists, I feel, and for every time I come back up north, it becomes a bigger part of me. But I don't feel like it takes over, that I have to choose either or, like the man that suddenly rejected his origin as "Søring" to belong to a "Finnmarking". I feel the opposite – that I expand. That my Identity is slowly growing from my first 'spot on the map', to several spots spread around, and maybe eventually I will find a way to connect all

the dots and create a universal image of Identity. Much like you stare at stars until the dots are no longer random but connected in figures.

If not anything else has come out of this essay than my personal journey from grief to a brighter state of mind; I would still be inclined to say that's enough. For all the love that has helped me along this way, given freely, I have nothing but love in return but I do hope that I honour these gifts of loving in how I have handled them.

Handling of the material

“All research conducted at University of Nordland should be based upon respect for the rights and welfare the participants. Consideration of participants' welfare and integrity is the basis for ethical research and takes precedence over the interests of science and society”. (Kymre, 2017).

The oral agreement before conducting interviews was that should anything go public, the participants would have the right to proofread their quotes and statements. This agreement was made for the filmed material as well as anything written. Choosing to film came about as a random thought of ‘why not?’ Coming from a journalistic background, I found it natural to choose this media, and if I were to conduct these interviews, to have documentation for what I had worked on, why only use sound? The idea to assemble material that could possibly be an end product, a film that would much more show the ‘truth’ of what was done, than text ever can, arose. But that was when I still thought I was going towards belonging in science.

When I applied my tutors for using film as my media, I was told that within our field, and that our institution, The University of Nordland would not approve filmed material as a part of the masters but that it could suffice as an appendix to the written product. So I paused the work on editing the film, as this is endlessly time-consuming and I was never really trained much in working with film, as photography was my field - and instead treated it as a source for textualization. Separating them as two different projects, still holding on to my now integrated life approach from Galtung: ‘Both-and’”(Galtung, 2001).

Before even starting the interviews, I raised the questions with my tutor of what ethical standards should be used, and what method, since I was new to what I then thought would be scientific research. This because we were moving away from writing subjectivity and including fieldwork. In embracing my background as a photojournalist I have merged in those ethical standards of how to handle the collected data-material and collaboration with the

participants to clear agreements of participation. The fieldwork and the analytical part still made me feel like I could belong in the science-category, but as stated in the introduction, the choice of qualitative and individual interviews and shaping methodically as an essay made me embrace 'pseudoscience'. Looking back, with the aim of not wanting to explain the universe, just to be a voice and a channel for others' choices, I found this to be the right choice. The freedom when working out of so controlled and fixed criteria as science brings, and into the pseudo version of it, has given this work character. I think I've managed to personalize the essay by keeping all participants' personality instead of what would have happened would I have chosen a more quantitative approach: participants would disappear as numbers within a statistic.

As I started writing this essay, I treated the fieldwork as a journalist, but was then told by my tutor to anonymize the participants, even as far as to the name of my co-student, and I have done this to act in accordance with my tutoring, but will have it noted that this was not my wish, not necessary as my participants were freely sharing their stories, and that it makes me question scientific research (even more). For what field requires disguising their sources when not necessary? This is a whole other discussion I will not go into at this point, I just want it duly noted that I don't agree with this type of work and I don't understand how it aligns with Ingjerd's own statement: "The field of research ethics contains many elements. The fundamental ethos of research is the search for truth" (Ibid.).

I am currently working on a written agreement that concurs with the oral one, that will follow any editing or publication of any of the filmed material in the future, and the participants are still informed and we are still in communication about the whole change in the process (anonymizing in the text and postponing of the editing of film).

The material is stored on a separate hard-drive and is not for public use outside what is and will be agreed upon with the participants.

I therefore state that I am in accordance with the university of Nordlands ethical standards for research, here defined at a lecture for Borderology, Svanvik 19th of September 2017:

- When research involves humans as research subjects, researchers must, as a general rule, obtain freely given, informed consent.
- General requirements regarding freely given informed consent entail researchers ensuring that the person or persons taking part in the research;
- ...understand the purpose of the project and the part concerning their participation in the project

-can evaluate their own situation
-can make an independent decision as to whether they wish to participate, without external pressure, on the basis of information and their own preferences and values
-can freely communicate their decision

Challenges

This collaboration proved to have many obstacles and challenges:

1) Language:

Our biggest challenge was language. The interviews of the Russian subject were conducted in Russian, as the Norwegian in our mother tongue. What I didn't reckon with was the flow of refugees that didn't want to risk their lives on the open ocean, who found the northern travel-route from various parts of the Middle East; they found their path northwest, over the border from Russia to Norway. This all happened during the winter 2015/2016, and it created a crisis situation, and the little school I was currently working at got it's tiny part of the consequences when our student population rose from 5 to 40 and the staff didn't inflate with.

The interviews always done in Russian by my co-student, where filmed to be translated. The translation was amateur- work, done by my co-worker. Sometimes I would use Google translate or how to outsource her translations to my friends because there were words in Russian she didn't know how to find in English.

2) Geographic placement and life situation

Both our living situations proved complicated. At the start of the collaboration, I was situated in the south moving some 1500 (+, -) km up and down to meet my collaborator and participants. My co-student living in Murmansk where a mother of two during her second divorce, trying to make ends meet by very little, pushing herself beyond any limit possible to do this project with me. She ended up finding love and moving close to St. Petersburg by the time we were finished with the actual fieldwork and approached the faze of analysis and processing of what we had done.

3) Time

Most of 2015 was spent still conducting interviews, trying to find means and ways to meet and go through them together, and then on respective sides finding a solution for how to share all the raw material to be able and to write translations for each other. The files were so big, and I didn't have the necessary programs to work with them. And in the end the distance proved too hard.

In reality we only had one month looking at our material together, when I decided desperate needs called for desperate measures and moved to Murmansk for a month with my dog without knowing the language. At least we could be physically present. We prioritized the Russian interviews then, and then I went back to my country and started translating the Norwegian parts.

4) Finances

Moving back and forth between Oslo and Finnmark, spending chunks of my life-savings and trying to get jobs that would free me up to actually spend the time needed on the project, and having the necessary equipment to execute it, proved costly. Keeping in mind my co-workers tragic financial situation, we tried to keep expenses as low as possible. WE thought we could get support from the Barents secretariat, but as we were working within two of the fields they do not support; film and research, that was a waste of time and resources. So we did what we could with what we had, but quickly I realized it wouldn't suffice, and I had to prioritize surviving, and take a job. In my attempt to embrace Galtungs' "both-and"- mentality I had decided to move to the historical "joint district" of Neiden, where I was offered a job as an assistant teacher.

5) The refugee crisis

A quick search for jobs to keep me situated up north and close to my topic and participants and I started my part-time job at the children's school in Neiden. This turned into a tragedy as two of the parents to my pupils died within a few months of working there, and at the turn of the New Year entered the refugee crisis. I had to postpone working with the past and deal with the present.

That whole ordeal wore me so down that I struggled the following year to focus. I had developed anxiety and was struggling locating the source of it to deal with it.

Come 2017 and I did heal myself enough to start up again with the work on this master.

Closing remarks

“You are just the Norwegian map,” she laughed at me after I broke my tailbone and was heavily bruised and having a hard time moving on the ice. The woman laughing at 11 year old me was one of my figure skating teachers.

“Come and talk to me when your body looks like the world map”, she discarded me and turned her focus onto another skater”.

This story has stayed with me as an attitude on how to approach life: the bruises as marks of experience, and without experiences you do not know. So knowledge comes about in action, in trying, in working, in not being afraid of getting hurt – and though that demands pauses and times of healing, unless you have been bruised by the whole universe, there will always be more knowledge out there within the unknown, and that keeps me humble.

As stated the premise for starting this work, was described in my previous essay, as there is “still living history”. In the women from both sides of the border I found a past war very much alive, in their stories, in their ways of now thinking and the focus on the wish for peace. If the past experiences were to have been forgotten, if they indeed never thought about or felt the border, as they do state they do, would they even be able to talk about it? Would there be thought of peace if we didn't know war?

I'm inclined to say this shows that we integrate our pasts, our experiences, and also our limitations. I've suggested this is a way of accepting our limitations, and also touched on that it could be a conforming to boundaries – but also, I think it could just be that we are carriers of an ongoing evolution. We've been through the organic cell structure from Lipton; a micro to macro view of how one particle reaches it's highest awareness level to merge with another particle. Cells on cells do this, to form human bodies, communities of humans etc. McKenna and his focus on the global network of a consciousness in mushrooms support this, and together they would paint a picture of an interconnected planet in change towards something still unknown. All in the name of evolution. But in the criticism from Means, of the entitled expansion culture, lies the warning that all this evolution might not be all good. It makes me think in terms of sickness, the viral kind, and if you look at a body and how a virus can easily distort the balance and actually kill it, it becomes important to consider if this culture of entitled expansion isn't in fact doing that on a planetary level.

“We stand on the edge of being able to leave history” (McKenna in Bergmann, 2016: 1:33:33) and I put that in as a quote at the very beginning of this essay. I picked the quote for it resonated in me, without really grasping the entirety in it, having left it there while finishing up the rest of this text, I now find it more fitting than I did preliminary:

With all the knowledge we do have, through history, through documentation, through analysis, it is my opinion that we do have all we need to make the changes to avoid everything wrong done in the past. We have all the knowledge of past experiments, maybe not any concrete solution on how to make it better, but for sure everything we know will just keep on making it bad. And with all this information we have the premises for creating a better world, for making conscious decisions. And with that stated, the same as I said about myself and re-constructing consciously: our actions can no longer be excused as ignorance.

Standing on the brink means we could still turn it around. And even if it proves in the end that it's too late, why not go down trying?

When science looks at the shape of our galaxy the Milky Way, it finds our planet a tiny microscopic organism far from the centre, way out in the outskirts. I'm going to let my mind free on this for a little, just to have some fun here at the end of this written journey, and state: I'm sure everything surrounding us in the galaxy would, if they thought like humans do, discard our planet as “the ghetto” of the galaxy, the troubled neighbourhood on the complete wrong side of what could be called the ‘Plutonian Starway nr, 1087’ or PS1087. If looking at how we as humans have divided and conquered our planet, it's easy to imagine a whole universe filled with the same mentality, but I'd rather hope it's quite different – something better than anything we ever could imagine. And even if it isn't, a hope for a better unknown is much better than predicting a disastrous known from what I cannot know, or creating false security by preconceiving and imagining something after death. I hope something will shape our thoughts were religion has tried but failed, to embrace diversity and unity on the planet without demanding total conformity.

And as for my future, my continuing personal journey, it is best described in a poem I wrote 3rd of July, 2014:

The years may weather

My dreams undone

The clouds might cover

And pressure on

*But I Will stand, and dance and burn
Strap my Wings to catch each turn
As Pines are rooted
And fish can fly
I'll do my best before I die.*

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<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/science>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barents_Region

https://snl.no/Norge_under_andre_verdenskrig#-Motstand

<https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murmanskfronten>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-nordics-idUSKCN0UY2F3>

https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/russian_finnish_interior_ministers_meet_amid_rising_border_worries/8622461

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Borders – excuse or necessity?

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Preface:

This article is an addition to my main master thesis, *Borderline-life*, for the Joint Master Degree in Borderology at Nord University (Nu) and Murmansk Arctic State University (MASU), 2017. I have viewed the purpose of this article to be a kind of summary of the topics in the main work, but also a representation of the method and style used in the thesis, and you will therefore encounter here longer segments directly copied with slight adjustments. The choice of doing this came about in working with the last chapters of the thesis at the same time as this article. In that process I found the two bodies of work started communicating and the transfer of work ended up going back and forth between them. I realize that might break with the standards of how it usually is done, but in the spirit of how the world ‘Borderology’ was created to be the hybrid word where ‘Border’ and ‘ology’ is merged for the purpose of function and practicality (Rossvær, 2006: 19). I’ve found it unnecessary to re-write everything. On the contrary, I found it necessary to keep some of the longer segments, to keep the spirit and feel of the thesis and have both bodies of work represent the topics in what I’ve considered to be the best of possible ways: to be able to work alone, and together. The many different topic I bring into this, and the mix of personal experiences with theory, might not offer an easy read – but be sure everything put into these works are put there for me seeing a connection. So, these choices are made after careful consideration, which I hope you can follow me on. I haven’t formatted the use of text with references to the thesis, to keep the article’s layout clean, and I therefore clarify the approach here: both written products go hand in hand and are parts of the same product but can also stand alone: the article is the shorter representation of the main body of work, the master thesis, *Borderline Life*.

The method for the master-thesis was built around Johan Galtung's approach to conflict: switching out the perspective of neither-nor with both-and. By this, the thesis and also this article merges fieldwork with theory, and aligns it with my own personal experiences to try to connect the dots and make sense of all the gathered fragments of information I have encountered in the process of dismantling identity. The essay form is a chosen writing method in the study of Borderology’s first assignment on writing subjectivity, and has followed me through the previous work, and into my master thesis. Breaking up the heavier theoretical segments with telling stories from real encounters, and keeping the interviewed subject’s words in line with how they were spoken (as much as possible in a translation to English). I’ve found this to be the best method to add the necessary layers of making the ‘ink on dead leaves’ feel alive. Note that I have never intended, neither in my thesis or this article, to be the

carrier of truth or solutions. I merely wish to be a voice in the global discourse, and a channel for others voices.

Before reading this article I think it is important to know where the author comes from. I therefore introduce myself as a “Søring” (Someone from the south of Norway), born and raised in Oslo from 1981, a place where the closest to state borders in my immediate surroundings where the mental one of dividing east and west of the capitol. My suburb of Furuset was considered on the ‘wrong’ side of the European highway nr.6, as presented by the richer kids on the other side growing up. This ‘right’ and ‘wrong’- side discussions followed me in most of my youth, until we, or I at least, grew up and out of it, and tired of the ‘war’.

Border Identity

Culture is a kind of prison, and the only way that we know to get beyond it, is to dissolve its boundaries

(Terence McKenna¹).

“You said there might be something called “border-identity?” I asked, trying to get us back to the topic. I was there as a student of Borderology at Nu/MASU with the topic of ‘Identity’ in the border zone, and after hours and hours of interviews focusing on a life in relations to borders, she had suddenly concretized it for me.

What up until now had been me asking for her to share her experiences going back to before the Second World War – filling my mind with images of dead Russians, wounded German soldiers hanging off cars, rats coming and going along with settlements of military troops. Weather conditions and status of the current year’s berries, had suddenly turned more concrete. We were sitting in the family house of the small town where it all had happened years ago, a town situated close to the Russian border in northern Norway. The elderly woman had opened up her home for me coming around to talk as research for my masters. The initial idea had been to start off this quest for Identity by comparing two older women and their life experiences from each side of the national border, to see what occurred. I had started on the Norwegian side:

¹ Excerpt from the video *True Hallucinations*, by Peter Bergman, published on *Youtube*, 4th of March, 2016 . Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MG5gFtZ3U8&t=3552s> : 2:30:54)

“We aren’t like the rest of Norway,” she offered and I followed up with: “How is the rest of Norway?” but suddenly a voice from outside the living room, broke our focus: The lady’s son had arrived without us noticing, and was suddenly engaged in our talk from a distance: “How can you say that – do you feel like a foreigner?”

The reply was a steady one:

“No, I feel like a “Sør-Varanger”.

The municipality of Sør-Varanger is best described in current Mayor, Rune Rafaelsen’s words: ”The oldest part of ‘Sæp’mi’ in the youngest part of Norway”². Sæp’mi’ refers to that the land was used by indigenous people, Sami, long before the national borders were agreed and established in 1826. Since then the municipality has been governed by Norway. Whereas over The border, ownership continued to change until after the Second World War when the borders were established, and Petsamo handed over to the Soviet Union from Finland. But alongside this confirmation of national territory, after the fall of the Soviet Union, a new regional cooperation plan was established.

The Barents Region – a peaceful place

The Barents Region was the name given this trans-international region that covers 1.75mn km² in total and with a population at about 5 million inhabitants. The cooperation was formally opened on January 11, 1993, initiated by Norway under foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, and in 2012 an official border-zone was drawn up, defining citizens in a radius of 30 km on each side of the Russian - Norwegian border as “border residents”³.

Within this zone the Russian participant lives. She differentiates between the ‘border-zone’ and ‘borderland’ – the latter where she feels she belongs. Trying to accomplish a comparison-study, both ladies were asked the same questions. To the one sounding: ‘what is a border?’ the Russian responded with “I do not feel it”, where the Norwegian “didn’t think about it”. Being asked to define what ‘a Russian’ and what ‘a Norwegian’ is, both agreed on that we are mostly alike. The Norwegian specified that appearances could differ, but other than that “they are much the same”, and the Russian offered a more specific story of seeing Norwegian

² <http://www.svk.no/ordfoerers-tale-paa-samefolkets-dag.5842553-17830.htm> :

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barents_Region

women in bikini at the time where Russian beach clothing were more like a whole-covering corset. But mainly they both focus on similarities and the mutual wish for peace:

“It is certainly the wish for peace and stability. They don’t want to fight, neither do we”, and the Norwegian describes the cross-border-cooperation and the area as: “ a peaceful place. If it had been this peaceful everywhere in the world, there would be no danger”.

In conversations with the Norwegian woman who has lived through so many of the territorial and political changes, exemplified specifically during the German occupation where their town had a more than 10 times enlargement of population by foreign invasion. I started questioning what effect this could have had on their way of thinking. I thought experiences where the status of being a local changed from majority to minority within days, must have made an impact on how one relates to the world?

And when the world becomes so intrusive and overwhelming as during the years of occupation, I wondered if that was the cause for this narrowing of Identity described in feeling like a ‘Sør-Varanger’? The word ‘belong’ kept coming up in my writing so I started looking at the languages in the region and the words origin. I found that in all, except for Russian who carried meaning of ‘appropriate’ and ‘being a part of’⁴, the word for ‘belong’ carries traces of something audible, as I explained in my thesis:

The Swedish ‘tillhöra’ is the same as Norwegian ‘tilhøre’, where ‘høre’ means ‘hear’. In Finnish ‘Kuulla’ is the verb for belong. It also has the meaning ‘to be audible’ and has the same word body as ‘kuulla’, which means, ‘to hear’⁵. In both Skolt Sami: ‘Kuullâd’, and North Sami, ‘Gullelašvuhta’ the word resembles that of hearing⁶.

I mention this for what could be just a coincidence, but I found it interesting to notice that my Norwegian participant describes the German withdrawal from the Russians, as ‘noise’. And she tells that her family’s course of action when this noise appeared, where not to withdraw with the troops as told, but to try to withdraw from it all by leaving for a self-made ‘Gamme’ in the wilderness. Now years later, looking back, I find in her a complexity; a mental withdrawal to ‘Sør-Varanger’ as where she belongs, the embracing of others as “the same” and no bitterness carried for the past. The narrowing of Identity doesn’t seem to exclude their general feeling of belonging to the entirety of the world, but the specific of the municipality

⁴ Personal correspondence with Russian translator, Nina Mikhaylenko, 20.06.2017

⁵ Personal correspondence with translator of Finnish origin, Katja Jylhä, June 22.06.17

⁶ Personal correspondence with Skolt Sami from Neiden, Christina Mathisen, 2017

could suggest that this is where the environment holds the memories and her experiences resonate in others?

The only indignation I could trace, I found in the Norwegian telling how the English came up north after the war, expecting to be welcomed as liberators: “but we were already liberated”, she points out, referring the Germans loosing against Russia. The cutting of the hair of women who was suspected of having had relations to German soldiers, she described as “foolishness”, followed by questioning what Norwegian soldiers were doing when stationed in other countries. With this change of perspective, my Norwegian participant embodies the shift of attitude professor Viggo Rossvær suggest for the study of Borderology, in his article *What is Borderology?* (Rossvær, 2006).

Folk diplomacy

Highly influenced by Kant, Rossvær argues for the study’s potential through ‘empirical studies of man and the ideal world tribunal, there is a place for a new knowledge where the borders run trough people. He explains Borderology as a type of regional knowledge where “the border we are investigating lies within man himself”:

“This type of knowledge is not consistent with the traditional Greek view of the human condition, that outside our known border are only the barbarians, a view that has been influencing European thinking deeply since antiquity” (Rossvær, 2006: 26).

Rossvær suggests the shift from thinking of the world as divisions of opposing forces of “us” vs. “others” to investigating our own in meeting with others, as a furthering of the idea behind the Barents secretariats purpose of supporting people-to-people cooperation⁷. The study of Borderology has embraced the mentioned people-to-people cooperation: In establishing a joint degree between the Nord University and Murmansk Arctic State University –a cross-border academic cooperation, it has laid the grounds for common people to unity their mental experiences through physical meetings. A practicing theory, you might call it – a people’s diplomacy on the road to peace.

”Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states” is a general definition offered on Wikipedia⁸. It aligns with what I see as the political

⁷ <https://barents.no/nb/om-oss/bakgrunn>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomacy>

idea of the Barents secretariat – as the Norwegian foreign ministries’ prolonged left arm up north trying keep the physical border to Russia warm, however much the central high-political actors are throwing right-handed balls of ice at each other.

Hopping on the concept of a collaborative ‘peace-train’, I started fieldwork on identity with a Russian co-student. The thought initially was if we could dismantle the definitions of Identity, trace through life experiences how our perspectives of the world had been built, we might understand a little bit more about how the world has come to it’s current state.

Choosing this historically instable border zone that now nationally divides Norway and Russia, seemed like could be the place to start when looking for explanations, for why our planet is so divided and war-ridden. But by the fieldwork in tracing history through life-experiences, what I found was the consequences of a world of the states governed by war-mentality: No matter which side of the border the participants belonged to, they carried the grounded wish for peace.

Confronting Europe

Russell Means, a member of Oglala Lakota tribe, confronted European Expansion culture in his most famous speech given at the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He allowed his speech to be written down, going against his oral tradition and rejection of the western way, because: “It seems that the only way to communicate with the white world is through the dead, dry leaves of a book” (Means, 1980):

“The process began much earlier. Newton, for example, "revolutionized" physics and the so-called natural sciences by reducing the physical universe to a linear mathematical equation. Descartes did the same thing with culture. John Locke did it with politics, and Adam Smith did it with economics. Each one of these "thinkers" took a piece of the spirituality of human existence and converted it into code, an abstraction. They picked up where Christianity ended: they "secularized" Christian religion, as the "scholars" like to say--and in doing so they made Europe more able and ready to act as an expansionist culture. Each of these intellectual revolutions served to abstract the European mentality even further, to remove the wonderful complexity and spirituality from the universe and replace it with a logical sequence: one, two, three. Answer!”(Ibid).

I’m inclined to say that what Russell Means is telling us, the white world, is that our

fundamental belief in science has made our world two-dimensional, one of opposing forces: 'Me' versus 'you', 'us' versus 'them' and sometimes even 'I' versus 'the rest of the world'. I think he is accusing us of having blinders, of being brainwashed into thinking our way is the only way, and by confronting us, by somewhat unwillingly joining our two-dimensional world of ink on white sheets, he wants the blinders off so we can recognize our own flaws and mistakes:

“I think there's a problem with language here: Christians, capitalists, Marxists. All of them have been revolutionary in their own minds, but none of them really means revolution. What they really mean is continuation. They do what they do in order that European culture can continue to exist and develop according to its needs”
(Ibid).

Means uses 'they', I want to use 'us'. In picking up on creating this written dialogue with a dead Russell Means thoughts, I'm trying to honour his actions of leaving his stubbornness of holding on to 'his way' of oral traditions (continuation), by communicating as a member of the 'white world'.

That I can from 'ink on dead leaves' find his thoughts and put them into mine to reflect on his criticism of what is ultimately what I have grown out of, makes for a mental meeting of different positions. This is not a dissolve of either of us. Me considering his perspective doesn't mean I merge into adopting his thinking to delete mine – but it just perhaps could be the way to find acceptance for both, and find a balance where both our ways could co-exist together.

I think it's important to not overemphasize how the mentality of what by Means has described, as 'European expansion culture' could be to blame for everything. Trading perspectives completely for another fundamental view, would always carry a risk of something growing out of proportions for wanting to validate it's own righteousness. To consider Means warning of 'continuation to a fault', it would be necessary to dare to look back in history and to start looking at oneself – wherever you originate from. Asking the question 'what I am continuing?' – defining what borders run through 'me', keeping in mind to consider 'the others' perspective, would be a start of change.

Closing borders

“You remember when you said I was living in the past?” I said, his eyes blinked up at me. I wasn’t sure if he really wanted to hear me. He had kind of shut down. “Huh”, he replied. “Well, I argue it’s opposite”, I continued;

“If your time is something that happens before ours, than we are what is to come. That makes us the future and you the past”.

His big, bright eyes blinked again, before his mouth turned arrogantly to the side in a half smile, half grunt: “Is this what you waste your time thinking about” he said with a tint of disgust in his voice. I replied as I walked out the door:

“ I don’t think it’s a waste of time”.

The time-debate had come about in the course of dating cross-border, Finland-Norway since New Years Eve to 2014. The logistics of having a constant hour in time-difference weren’t the real reason for the break up. What had started out seemingly like a perfect fit, once thrown into the crisis-situation the world entered into that year, turned the relationship complicated:

Wednesday, January 20th 2016 Reuters reported: “Norway sent a first bus carrying 13 migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan back across its Arctic border with Russia on Tuesday night in temperatures of around -30 degrees Celsius (-22 Fahrenheit)⁹.

And five days after that, The Finnish newspaper Yle reported that two days before the mentioned bus, “a suspected asylum seeker was found dead, apparently frozen to death in a car some 70 kilometres east of the Finnish border”¹⁰.

I was working as a teacher in the children’s school in Neiden at the time that news found me. The school had gone from a student-population of five to almost 40, by harbouring the refugee-kids in transit, waiting for the government to assess their situation. I had chosen a job in a border town, away from where I had done my research, a part-time employment to support me while I wrote out my thesis, and suddenly I found myself a 100% in a crisis, leaving my planned personal journey aside, doing what needed to be done.

The whole handling of the refugee-situation felt even more complicated as it seemed an underlying non-cooperative mode between Russia and it’s northern counterparts, resulting in now the shuffling back and forth of people running from war, over this national border. The

⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-nordics-idUSKCN0UY2F3>

¹⁰ https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/russian_finnish_interior_ministers_meet_amid_rising_border_worries/8622461

non-cooperative mood could stem from the sanctions against Russian military deployment in Ukraine, years earlier:

August 11th 2014 the Norwegian government officially released their support of EU's restrictive measures against Russia as a response to Russia's actions. The statement published on *Regjeringen.no* quoted Norwegian foreign minister, Børge Brende: "Since the start of the crisis in Ukraine, Norway has stood united with the EU and other like-minded countries in responding to Russia's violations of international law"¹¹.

I'll leave out the higher political details of this, as I admittedly don't have enough knowledge of the subject, and the topic would probably make for a second thesis or more. But I would like to note that Norway's action of aligning with the EU and ultimately also the UN, points to where Norway as a nation feels it belongs – at least from a central political view.

I mentioned the high political movements, the reports of death and deportation, the fluctuation of people in arctic temperatures, and the sudden changes in "normality", because when looking at it in the context of the fieldwork from the Russian/Norwegian border – I can't help but notice the similarities. I happened to be in a situation that had corresponding factors: refugees with different appearance, different culture, different religion, the affect on the local community, seeing that community come together to help in any way they could, suspicion, news of deaths, of tragedy.

The small town of Neiden, had at that point almost 300 counted inhabitants according to Wikipedia, and with the 30+ refugee kids that entered our school, you can maybe imagine and the changes it brought to the area. In retrospect this was giving me personal experience to use as comparison when looking at my earlier fieldwork, and I recognized my own thoughts in my Norwegian participants quote: "we had some idea what war was" [before the Second World War]. She was referring to the 'Winter War' between Russia and Finland, where the Finns came to Norway for refuge.

I have questioned in analysing the fieldwork, if the constant changes around them, the instability of the war, had them narrowing their identity to "Sør-Varanger". I'm not sure there will ever be a way to validate this theory, but I can say that if Identity can be paralleled to a feeling of belonging, mine narrowed quite extensively. In accordance with the etymology of the northern European languages of the word, that it originates from something audible, the

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massive intrusion of voices and stories, everyone carrying chaos and disturbance – “noise” as my Norwegian participant has called it, I stopped listening. I remember clearly the finality of that, the day I met another Finnish friend across the border and my: ‘How are you?’ was met with: “I have decided to give my Finnish citizenship to a Syrian and go down there to get bombed”.

I just walked out. That’s when I started shutting down. My brain had gone into hyper-mode, looking for solutions, highly active to be able to deal with the challenges at work, and it didn’t tolerate negative noise. The meeting with my friend was too much for me. Where could I go if not to friends for ease, when my work was in actuality emotionally in the middle of war?

Not long after I found myself sitting in front of my fireplace, listening to my bright eyed friend from before explain to me that a relationship with me was too hard. The English language wasn’t sufficient enough for him to offer me the support I needed, and he was feeling like he was losing his identity. I understood. I was experiencing anxiety and panic attacks for the same reason: the need to withdraw and hideaway – make the crisis go away and have back my normality. But I couldn’t. I felt responsible for the kids, and if we all gave up and turned our backs on the reality of our close surroundings, wouldn’t it mean to give up all hope? We broke away from each other, to not ruin ourselves. He went “ to Finnish sauna” as he called it and I to work.

I’ve taken this refugee-crisis down to a very personal level. One, because I think my own experiences is the only thing I have found I can validate in this kind of work of exploring identity. Two, because the intricacy of higher political forces and their games to disguise actions are too complex to address in this essay, other than to acknowledge they are there and the cause of all the “noise”.

I’ve shared this part of my own personal story that was never intended to be apart of master thesis. But as I dropped everything else in my life to focus on the crisis at hand, I also postponed my study. Later I discovered that this experience with the refugees in Neiden, as mentioned: gave me grounds for comparison to the prior fieldwork. I bring in the story of the Finnish guy, for in our decision to leave each other alone, and our very different responses to overwhelming circumstances, lies of course the obvious of our different response but also something deeper that is the same in both of us, maybe all of us: the sometimes mental and physical need to escape the conditions of this planet.

I experienced a systematic breakdown of my nerves as I stayed in the situation. From week to week I could feel a tingling pain spreading from my neck and further and further down my back. I started losing control of my motoric skills. I became clumsier and as said, had trouble breathing in panic attacks. I didn't have any solutions, neither did he? I didn't see an option of running away; he did, and took it. I don't blame him.

Suppose that you are the most empathetic soul in the world, born in the richest country in the world, healthy, strong and wanting nothing but to be a part of saving this planet and humanity. Can you take on everyone that has suffered more than you, has less than you, needs more, and deserves more? Can you, or will you let yourself break? And if you start feeling yourself breaking, do you have any other choice but to shut down and take care of yourself? Otherwise your entire world will break? Is this what the government of Norway and also Finland reasoned around to stop the refugees from entering over the northern borders – the lack of capacity? Seeing it like this, I could state that borders and closing them are a necessity, but then I remember Russell Means again and his speech on European expansion: “They do what they do in order that European culture can continue to exist and develop according to its needs” (Means, 1980), and the statement turns to questioning if borders aren't so much a necessity, but an excuse?

If we try out Galtung's approach of shifting thinking in ‘neither-nor, to ‘both-and’ (Galtung, 2001), I could state the answer is probably ‘both’, and I would define the ‘and’ then, as that the answer differs in every individual circumstance. And for the higher political actors of my nation, the question I'd like to ask is in the spirit of shifting perspective, is:

Would we have had the same course of action if the same amount of refugees had come from the west? If they arrived by boats, or planes from America?

Building regions

In the book *Building Regions – the regionalization of the world order*, Luk Van Langenhove assesses the whole history of how we have gotten to the current ‘state of the world’. From the ancient Greeks establishing the first states with powers clearly defined in laws, through the Roman Empire and kingdoms, chieftains and what not in wars over territory and succession. He describes religion as the one concept that provided a ‘loose sense of unity in Europe’ before Napoleon took on the idea of the ‘divide and rule’-principle of the nations-state:

“The assumption that there is or ought to be a one-to one relation between cultural identities (nations) and political sovereign entities (states)”. (Van Langenhove, 2011, preface)

From how Russell Means has criticized the ‘European expansion’ looking further back in history with Langenhove, it can seem ‘evolution’ has brought us the brink of our own extinction as specie for the lack of creating balance. It might sound a bit far out and exaggerated to suggest our extinction, for the critics of the environmental crisis at stage. And for those putting their faith into galactic expansion, you might shrug it off and even laugh, because someone with means and brains will find a way to survive. Technology has always stepped up as a solution with evolution for survival (of the richest), so if this planet really is thrashed to the point of no return, we find another?

I’d like to think we can find a way to make it work here on Tellus, and maybe Van Langenhove can offer parts of the solution:

“The world of states has brought with it a lot of positive developments but also nationalism and what Sen (2006) labelled an illusion of destiny that resulted in incredible violence. The multiple worlds of regions could perhaps be a way to replace the illusion of (a single) national identity by a more realist view that people hold plural regional identities. As such the world of regions might not only be a more complex and instable world, but maybe also one with more chances to peace and freedom”.

(Van Langenhove, 2011: 5)

The Barents region has as mentioned developed since 1993, but looking even further back, did the structures that of what regions now are already exist, perhaps found in indigenous’ culture?

Sometimes forgotten it seems, in the high political movements of the Barents secretariats focus on keeping the border to Russia friendly as the central politics plays out their game of power, the little town of Neiden is situated on the border to Finland. It’s a historical ‘joint’ area, where the national border now splits what is a Sami-Siida. The historical structure of the Siida is explained by Rolf Arvola, a long-time fishery journalist, born in Neiden of Finnish parents, “third or fourth generation Finns” he says in an interview we did 1st of June 2016:

“The area here, the so-called “stateless’ area, is an old Skolt Sami settlement. They had their winter lair on what is now Finnish side and would come here around the month of May for living here in what was called “Skoltebyen” (The Skolt-city). During summer they would roam further out the fjord where they had places to fish for

Salmon and by June July they would be back in the Skolt-city where the fishing continued up the “Skoltefossen” (Winge, 2016).

When Sør-Varanger in 1826 became the youngest part of Norway, the first changes arrived for the Skolt Sami’s. The parts that are now Finnish, was then Russian, and the people living in the area about to split into nations was given the option of choosing nationality

“Within 6 years they would have to decide whether they would be Norwegian or Russian. When they decided to become Norwegian they lost all their rights to the area then belonging to Russia, now Finland” (Ibid.).

The complexity of Neiden (Njauddâm in Skolt Sami, Näätamö in Finnish and Njávđán in North Sami) with the origins from Norway, Russia, Finland mixed with the Sami’s, and evolution through generations of merging cultures through relationship, without losing their sense of origin, is a good reminder that even in my initial fieldwork I was still carrying the perspective of opposing forces, setting up a comparison study between only two nations.

By the randomness of being in Neiden at the time of the refugee-crises, I was offered another level, a tiny experience of a broader representation of the region, and the regions within the region, without the linear focus on just Russia as the other side:

First I discovered in the meetings with my Russian/Norwegian participants their way of integrating their limitations by ‘not feeling’ or ‘thinking’ about the border. The very same border I had preconceived as strict, hard, and even scary. I realized all the established ‘truths’ I was carrying around without being aware. It also became more and more clear that that Identities and feeling of belonging doesn’t necessarily accord with national borders. And by my personal experiences with living in the north and seeing how the central politics shakes different hands left and right, not really having the knowledge of the history or culture in the northern municipalities/Barents region, or how the consequences of the local communities are affected by their actions, I am starting to grasp the complexity of it all.

But within this complexity lies something encouraging. For if meeting with just one ‘other’ can result in a more complex view and approach to the world, imagine what opportunities can be found within cultural hubs as Neiden, and it’s broader surroundings, The Barents region. And the thought that this is happening, and has been happening outside ‘the blinders’ of only seeing what a two-dimensional perspective offers, makes me excited about the future.

If one is willing to grab the opportunity to use the surroundings, cross some borders to not look for what is different as what must be wrong if I am right, but use the differences to discover what has established in oneself, and choose it to continue to fester in your actions or not, there is possibilities of major change, but it demands conscious change. If both parties in such a meeting carry this attitude, there is a massive opportunity of exchange of knowledge, something I found to be true in meeting and establishing a friendship with a Skolt Sami in Neiden:

“ She told me she didn’t understand how I was still standing”, she referred what her co-worker had told to her on the phone the day before, to me. I listened as I watched her roam around the bon-fire outside my caravan and she continued:

“I told her I had wine”, she joked, and paused and sat down on the reindeer skin she had brought from home and then got serious:

“But if I hadn’t had you to talk to during this time, I don’t think I would have been able to stand it all”, she ended.

I knew what she was talking about. We had met in a situation where we both had to be strong, in private life and dealing with our overwhelming circumstances. From being one who had stood alone in similar situations she was in now, something in me had decided to stand beside her, being the place she could tell her story:

“That’s what my tutor calls the ‘Sami-method’” I said, and paused for a second when I remembered she was of Skolt Sami origin. A fact I usually didn’t think about, for in my mind she the one person I had found in Neiden that truly seemed to understand and accept me just for me. She didn’t seemed to care if I was a “Søring”, and I hadn’t ever thought of her in terms of origin. We had met, female to female, and whatever boundaries had existed between us had slowly dissolved in meetings and dialogue and we had become friends. But for a second I was worried I might be touching on what should be left alone. I shook the worry off and continued:

“He tells about a man who as an adult is haunted by guilt from a childhood event that lead to his brother drowning. He suddenly starts speaking to his dead brother, out loud. The community around him thinks he’s crazy and he is institutionalized and medicated. But he continues to talk there, for two weeks before he announces he’s finished talking, and he is released”.

I paused to see if she has a response but her silence made me continue. I thought out loud to her, the hybrid of how I now understand the “Sami-Method”: to think out loud what haunts you and by putting thoughts into words, and in hearing yourself you organize your brain. The response from others isn’t really needed but could offer perspective and direction, and if done with a person of mutual attitude - the sharing of experiences could be helpful.

After sharing these thoughts, looked for her response:

“That’s what you do”, she said, and I meet her smiling eyes with mine, adjusting her statement for the lack of recognizing her equal part in it:

“That’s what we do”.

I’d like to end this article within the still premises of that I offer no conclusion and that life is in continuing evolution and then suggest that:

Within the concept of people-to-people cooperation lies the opportunity of people’s diplomacy: The kind that looks beyond appearance, the kind that wants to really know 'the other' and find ways to get along. Establish friendships by respecting differences and sharing perspectives and knowledge. And it might just be the way to peace.

Disclaimer:

All interviews conducted from February 2014 to October 2016 was filmed. The material is stored on a separate hard-drive and is not for public use outside what is and will be agreed upon with the participants. The fieldwork and experiences used in it has come about in the course of over 4 years working part-time on the thesis. All participants are informed of the purpose of their involvement before entering into it, and where random personal experiences proved useful for the thesis, parties involved to an extent where risk at recognition existed, has been informed of the process and have approved their participation. All interviews were conducted in their respective languages; my collaborator and co-student Olga Kovalenko translated the Russian parts, and the author handled the Norwegians.

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