“God is a GPS for Life”

Negotiating National Belonging and Christianity in Norway

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Abstract

The backdrop for this thesis is the everyday lived religion of young people in Norway who are by some considered conservative Christians. All my informants were connected to a Christian Multicultural Youth Organisation (CMYO), an organisation that sought to open up the definition of Christianity by working towards including migrant youths in to a greater Christian community in Norway. The organisation did also provide activities and services intended for anyone to attend, regardless of religious background. Based on ethnographic fieldwork gathered during a six months period in 2016 this thesis seeks to investigate how the relationship between national belonging and Christianity in Norway is negotiated. Although Norway is considered one of the most secular countries in the world, Christianity is still considered an important part of the country’s cultural heritage. My informants simultaneously rejected and accepted this notion on the basis that Christianity was not considered culture. For them, Christianity meant to have a close and personal relationship with God and to try to live like Jesus.

The main themes of the thesis are lived religion, community building and maintenance, belonging, and nationalism. These themes will throughout the thesis be conceptualised apart and together as tools to understand how integrated their believes were in their daily lives, how that affected how they built and maintained Christian communities and how they portrayed and were portrayed in the wider Norwegian society.

The thesis will both be focusing on the Norwegian volunteers and workers in the organisation who often considered themselves a minority in their own country, and on the people they wished to reach out to. It will further explore what is meant by belonging, who was seen as entitled to belong and in what contexts belonging became important.
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1 Introduction

The Language Cafe

“Would you mind putting the coffee on? And please don’t make it so weak this time.” It is a normal Thursday evening and I am in a language café, the person asking me the question is Ola, who is 22 years old and the coordinator of the café. In half an hour, the foyer of the Mission Church will be filled with people, thirsty for coffee and hungry for a space to practice their newly acquired Norwegian skills. Ola is slicing up bread and baked goods which is offered for free to the guests attending the café, Håkon, Ola’s friend and fellow volunteer, is in the kitchen getting cups and spoons, and as per usual I have ended up with the responsibility of making the coffee. After being jokingly scolded a few times over coffee which appears to have been way too weak I am aware that if I do not do a good job on the coffee I might never live it down. I laugh as I am measuring up the right amount of coffee, adding a bit more than I probably should just to make sure Ola will have no reason to complain.

The language café is one of the initiatives of the Christian Multicultural Youth Organisation (CMYO), a nationwide organisation with an aim to include Christian youths in to a bigger interdenominational Christian community. A way of doing this is by reaching out to youths in migrant churches, both by offering leadership training through courses and summits, and by arranging festivals where they offer young people of different backgrounds a space to get to know each other and together reflect over pressing issues concerning young Christians in Norway. The different regional branches of the organisation have a lot of freedom to work in ways in which works best in that particular area. In the Oslo branch where I spent time, part of this work is to offer language cafés and affordable Norwegian language courses for everyone with a migrant background regardless of religious affiliations or lack thereof. The organisation consists mainly of local volunteers, who are overseen by the main office in Oslo which is led by Karsten, who I have known since high school.

After half an hour of banter, laughter and general conversations, the foyer has been transformed into a cosy café with two large tables and three smaller ones, live candles and the

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1 All names of people and organisations have been anonymised and given pseudonyms.

2 As described in chapter 7.
smell of freshly baked goods. People start coming in, both from the outside and from the
language courses that are being held in the adjacent rooms. The guests sit down, more often
than not with people they already know from before, and from all corners of the room one can
hear conversations being had in broken Norwegian, sometimes intertwined with English and
other times only in English. Usually the volunteer team, including Ola, Håkon and I take a
seat in a leathery brick which is supposed to resemble a sofa, having first served ourselves
with the free baked goods and coffee. As per usual the conversation is off to a haltering start
as everyone has to introduce themselves by answering the following three questions; “What is
your name? Where are you from? How long have you lived in Norway for?” , if the questions
are directed at one of the volunteers, who mostly consist of Norwegians, the third question is
usually replaced with “What do you do for a living?”

The guests who come to the café are people of all nationalities and with backgrounds
spanning from refugees to migrant workers, and as much as their backgrounds varies, so do
t heir religious affiliations. When the subject of religion is brought up, it is often in an
inquisitorial manner, to get the answer to a question on a certain topic or simply because
someone wants to get to know the other person better. Despite the unspoken words, the
presence of religion is always latent and from time to time I am asked what church I belong
to, as it is taken for granted that I as a Norwegian in this setting, adheres to the Christian faith.
When this happens, Ola is quick to jump in with a joke saying that “Sonja, she doesn’t believe
in anything, she is a heathen.” To which he usually receives a roaring laughter from both me
and the other people taking part in the conversation.

Ola and I have had long talks about religion during the time we spend preparing for the café.
After telling him about experiences of people telling me I am going to hell for not believing in
God, my lack of belief has become a running joke. He wants to show me that “Christians are
not all about judging people for believing differently than what we do”. Although he wants
me to “see the light”, as he jokingly says, referring to stereotypes concerning how Christians
speak, all he can do is try to show me, and people like me, that following the bible as a
rulebook for life is the only way to truly be free.

The café became a weekly event throughout my fieldwork and it was here I met my main
informants, who would in turn invite me to their churches and open up about their lived
experiences of being young Christians in Norway. My fieldwork lasted for six months, and
during those six months I met many amazing people who in one way or another influenced
the final result. However, some people I saw more than others and consequently the names of Ola, Karsten, Håkon and Maria will be mentioned throughout the thesis.

I have been told that although the café is run by a Christian organisation and is situated within a church, what is being done here is not proselytising. Everyone is welcome regardless of background and thus there is no preaching and the goal is not conversion of people with different faiths. “It’s a bit sad, really, that we don’t talk more about God in the café. But then again it should be open for everyone and maybe people wouldn’t come if we started every week with a prayer or something.” Maria, a volunteer who I got to know fairly well through my fieldwork, has told me. She sees it as her duty as a Christian to spread the good word, but she has explained that this can also mean to just be a good person and help someone in need.

Most of the conversation is mundane and filled with jokes and laughter, but as people become more familiar with each other, serious topics can come up and it becomes obvious that this is a space open for talks about everything from the weather (according to those coming from warmer parts of the world, it is too cold and wet) to the traumatic experiences of being a refugee and leaving your family behind. It is when the chatter dies down and the serious topics arise, the subject of religion resurfaces, both as a way of making sense of the world and, as it has been explained to me, by letting other people share their lives and by listening to the stories. In some cases, one of the volunteers will have a private conversation with the person in question and although I cannot hear what is being said I can sometimes see their heads bowing down in prayer. Ola has explained to me that “It is important for me to tell them that God loves them. And even if they believe in God or Allah or nothing, I always ask them if they want me to pray for them and usually they say yes.”

No matter the conversation topics, one thing that never changes is the inevitable game of Ligretto³ towards the end of the café. It is not unusual for someone who has a high proficiency in Norwegian to translate to someone who struggles to understand the language so that they might get a grasp of the rules. As there are a limited number of cards, and what seems like an unlimited amount of people wanting to play, the game is divided into teams of two, and the only thing that matters is to win. The foyer is transformed from being filled with quiet conversations and the occasional outburst of laughter to a loud cacophony of shouting noises uttered in whatever language one feels like, and the competitiveness replaces the sense

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³ A card game.
of comradery and togetherness from before. “Stop, stop, STOP!” someone yells, as people have gone slightly of their hinges to put down their cards before anyone else’s and the table is a mess of cards flying around everywhere. “Faen4!” is uttered from someone who was just about to win before the game was put to a halt, and as this is not a word usually uttered in these premises, it is met with a shocked gasp from some of the participants, and laughter from others. “Haha, sorry I forgot where I was…” is said before the game is resumed, before long someone else screams “LIGRETTO!” and the game is over.

As soon as the winners are announced and the game put back in to the right boxes, most people are starting to leave, leaving only the volunteers, Ola and some devoted guests to clean up after the café. We remove the tea candles and the serviettes, put all the cups in the dishwasher and wipe all surfaces including the floor. After a few times this has become routine and everyone knows what they need to do to make the cleaning process speed up. Despite it being a rather tedious activity, it is fun to take part in the social aspect, as the conversation continues and we are discussing whether someone cheated while playing Ligretto, talking about the weather, or simply complaining about how tired one of us feels and how good it will be to get back home and jump straight to bed. It is also during clean up I often end up talking with one of the other members of the team on my own while putting stuff away in the kitchen cupboards.

After a while, when most of the cleaning and tidying is done, one by one check the travel app on their phones to see when their respective trams are due to leave from the stop outside the church, which often leads to a huge commotion to either finish off, to be able to catch the next tram, or by Ola taking on the leader role by reassuring us that we can leave if we have to while thanking us for helping out. I get on the tram which will take me home and as I sit there I look out the window and I notice that a surprisingly large number of the buildings around me are adorned with crosses and seems to be hosting different churches.

**Surrounded By Crosses**

Having lived in Oslo for six months when I started my fieldwork, I had of course noticed the more remarkable churches, the cathedral in the middle of the city centre and other more traditional looking churches similar to those found in any European city. Those churches

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4 Norwegian swear word, lit. translation: the devil.
however, I associated with the Norwegian Church. They were tall and rather lavish and brought forth associations of special occasions or holidays, of mourning or celebration. What I saw from my window in the tram however, were buildings that could have been housing anything from restaurants to offices, they had no particularly outstanding features except for the fact that someone had placed a cross on them. They did not stick out from the buildings around them and were easy to overlook. That did not mean they were not there, though.

My observations this day can easily be transferred to how Christianity is understood in Norway, when I was preparing for fieldwork many of my fellow students seemed to be surprised that I was going to do research on Christianity in Oslo. The impression was that churches and Christianity was associated with special occasions, old people, or the South-Western part of the country. The lively and thriving generation of young adults who were eager to spend not just their Sundays, but their entire lives dedicated to worship, were far from the vicinity of the students at the social anthropology department. But just as the innocuous buildings adorned with crosses; they were there.

**Christianity in Norway**

Christianity has been the leading religion in Norway since the end of the Viking age (Mikaelsson, 2009, p. 121) and following the reformation, Norway, which was at the time ruled by Denmark, became Lutheran in 1536 (T. H. Eriksen & Neumann, 2011; Mikaelsson, 2009). Although many social theorists prophesised religion to be a declining entity in modern societies, there seems to have been an upsurge in the public discussions concerning the matter (Asad, 2003; Furseth, 2015; Hefner, 1998). Although Christian institutions have lost a lot of political power in Norway during the 20th and 21st century (Repstad, 2000) culminating in the state and the church officially separating in 2012 (Furseth, 2015), there is still a strong feeling that Lutheran Christianity is part of what are considered as Norwegian values (Gullestad, 2002a; Iversen, 2012; Moxnes, 2011). As in most European countries, Christianity has played a big role in how Norway has been shaped. The formal education system in the country was initially created as a means to teach young Norwegians what they needed to know to pass their confirmation (Sandvig, 1996) and although the content of the school’s curriculum has
obviously changed today, the content of the school’s religious teaching curriculum is still highly debated (Lingås & London, 1996; Thomas, 2015). Despite the loss of political power and that Norway, alongside the other Nordic countries, is considered a relatively secular society (Davie, 2007), the majority of the population is still members of the Norwegian Church and use its services in relation to big moments in their lives such as weddings, funerals and christenings (Repstad, 2008) and thus, I would argue, feel ownership and comfort through the religious rituals it provides. The connections between Christianity and ‘Norwegianness’ is also expressed in the constitution’s article 2 where it states “Our values will remain our Christian and humanist heritage…”

**Lay Movements**

However important the Norwegian church has been in Norway, the religious history concerning the Lay Movement becomes even more relevant in the context of my informants. Before *dissenterloven* (the law of dissent) was official in 1845, the church and clergy held not only all the religious power in the country, but were also representatives of the state and the king (Haanes, 2007, p. 5). The Lay movement, which is most often described as starting with Hans Nielsen Hauge in the early 1800s (Haanes, 2007; Mikaelsson, 2009; Seland, 2015) can be seen as a rebellion against the state’s hegemonic religious power. Hauge and other laymen travelled around the country preaching a pietistic form of Christianity where the focus of faith was shifted from revering clergymen to “putting decisive weight on personal faith, moral behavior and individual Bible reading” (Mikaelsson, 2009, p. 121). Through the Lay Movement several *bedehus* (prayer houses) were built all over the country (Aagedal, 1986), although they often were under the Norwegian Church, they remained faithful to the strict and personal interpretation of Christianity taught by the laymen.

The lay movement, in other words, became the beginning of a growing understanding of religion being a personal choice and not a duty (Haanes, 2007, p. 4). Influences from America and the United Kingdom led to separation between the Norwegian Church and smaller churches appeared and based on this several free churches, seen as dissenters, started appearing in the religious landscape (Seland, 2015, p. 447). This was also coupled with a

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5 During the 2017 election the question of whether to place a *k* (For kristendom – Christianity) in front of the name of the subject was highly debated, as illustrated in this article from the Norwegian broadcasting channel (NRK): https://www.nrk.no/norge/nrkbokstav-k-skaper-storst-engasjement-i-valgmaten-1.13658127
heightened focus on missionary work both abroad and at home (Haanes, 2007; Mikaelsson, 2009; Seland, 2015). This is also the part of the history wherein my informants come in, although most of them were members of the Norwegian Church, they all belonged to various free churches. The focus on a personal understanding of the Bible, moral behaviour and missionary work which can be traced back to the laymen of the 1800s is still highly present in their respective churches.

**The Past in the Present**

The history of Christianity in Norway can, from the 1800s onwards be read as a simultaneously parallel and intertwined history, with the once hegemonic Norwegian church on one side and the lay movement and free churches on the other side. The Norwegian church focused on dogma and rituals, held a great deal of power in the daily lives of people as the clergy represented the power of the king, while the lay movement and free churches wished to offer people a personal relationship with Jesus and focused heavily on rebirth through Christ. These distinctions are still to be found. The Norwegian church still maintains a position of being the upholder of tradition, it is seen as the place to go for big celebrations and rites of passages like weddings, funerals, confirmations and christenings. When I got engaged a number of people were surprised when I told them I was not getting married in a church, despite me being rather outspoken about my lack of belief. They would tell me that faith does not really matter, it is tradition to get married in a church.

The smaller churches wherein my informants tend to congregate are on the other hand still very concerned with a personal relationship with God and being reborn in Christ. They focus less on rituals, traditions and dogma and often upholds services that focuses on the direct and personal relationships with God through songs of worship accompanied by rock bands and services that focuses more on what is being said and disregard the ritualistic aspects of church services. When I was in the café and we were talking about weddings, I was asked the same question, was I going to get married in a church? When I said no, the people there seemed to be pleased. I clearly did not believe in God, and they all agreed that it made no sense for me to include Him in my wedding vows.

As we can see, ideas of the position of the Norwegian Church differs according to people’s perspectives and their own faith. Needless to say, the historic Church is still very much present in the perceptions of where big events are supposed to be acknowledged, and what
matters is to uphold traditions, not so much whether you believe in the basis of said traditions. As Marianne Gullestad (2002a, p. 105) noted, it is not uncommon that both politicians and other public figures talk about Christianity as an important part of the Norwegian cultural heritage, and then often in the context of debates on immigration where the Christian is presented as “the Norwegian” and other religions (mainly Islam) are seen as “the foreign” (cf. Døving, 2009; Furseth, 2015; Iversen, 2012).

Since the 1960s with the arrival of the first labour migrants from non-western countries (Kjeldstadli, 2003) Norway in general and Oslo in particular has experienced an increase in religious plurality (Furseth, 2015). For immigrants facing a new and sometimes uncertain life in Norway, religion may be given a bigger meaning in their life than it previously has, as it is a way of contextualising a new reality and presenting oneself (Døving, 2009, p. 118) which might have led to religion being more visible in society than previously, and if it is accepted to be Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim, then it is also acceptable to be Christian and thus the increase in religious plurality may have had a revitalising effect on Christianity in Norway (Iversen, 2012).

**Aim**

Trying to make sense of the conflicting views of what Christianity meant to Norwegians I thus decided to do the research culminating in this thesis. As seen above, Christianity is highly linked in with perceptions of what Norwegian values and beliefs are, and this is often seen in contrast to the ‘foreign’ which is increasingly seen as Islam. My reason for choosing an organisation to do my fieldwork in came from a hope that I would meet people from different denominations and with different ideas of what it meant to be Christian in Norway.

The reason for doing the fieldwork within a diverse Christian organisation, was to look at the lived experiences of young Christians in Norway. The aim of this thesis is to examine why my informants spend their time working or volunteering to include immigrants in to both the Norwegian society and to a Norwegian Christian community, and within that, how are belonging and differences negotiated?
How the Thesis is Laid Out

In this chapter I have given an overview of what I am going to be researching, why I chose that topic and the societal context surrounding Christianity and understandings of Christianity in Norway. I will now provide an overview of how the rest of the thesis is laid out. The thesis starts with three introductory chapters, providing the reader with the necessary context before delving into four analytical chapters which culminates in a chapter on conclusive remarks which will further tie the context and the analysis together.

In the chapter “So, what is it really that you are doing here?” I will provide the reader with my reflections surrounding anthropological methodology, how I positioned myself in the field and how I was positioned by my informants. It will also include a discussion of ethical considerations relevant to doing fieldwork so close to “home”. Following the methods chapter I am presenting the theoretical approaches I will be using to conceptualise the ethnographic data I gathered through my fieldwork.

For the analytical chapters I have chosen to divide the focus into different layers, starting with the individual and expanding the perspective to increasingly larger communities. Human beings, however, are complex, and a simplification of someone’s lives into different layers cannot possibly capture all aspects of social or individual life. Nonetheless I found it useful to separate my data in this manner. In chapter 4 I will give an introduction to the reader of how religion is perceived by the individual. Chapter 5 will look at how religious beliefs are taught, experienced and negotiated within Christian communities, by focusing on boundary making, sameness and belonging. In Chapter 6, I will continue to look at boundaries, but within the context of the Norwegian society. I will focus on how reflections surrounding belonging influences how my informants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by the general society. Chapter 7 will show how these religious beliefs are incorporated in an understanding of the greater Norwegian community, both by my Norwegian informants and by immigrants. I will use this as a basis to look at how the organisation’s work focuses on the multicultural aspect of Norwegian culture, and on Christian culture within Norway.

Following the analytical chapters I will summarise and give a conclusion which will open up for further debates surrounding Christianity and Norwegianness.
2 “So, What is it Really That You’re Doing Here?”

Ola jokingly asked me this during the preparations for a language café about a month into my fieldwork. I wittily replied that “I am only here for the free coffee and the laughs.” A reply that, seeing I was supposed to be there as a researcher, probably could be understood as more than a little inappropriate. I did eventually give Ola a proper answer, because although he knew what anthropology was and I had explained that I was undertaking anthropological fieldwork, the lines between being a participant and an observer could, understandably, become blurred.

In this chapter I not only wish to answer Ola’s question, I will also give an account as to why the lines between being a participant and an observer could seem blurred, what methodological considerations I found relevant during fieldwork and what ethical implications my presence in the field posed.

The Field

In the introduction, I provided an ethnographic vignette of an average Thursday in the language café, which is where I both started and ended my fieldwork. Although the language café was definitely where I established most of my contacts and the most consistent arena throughout my fieldwork, my intention was never to study the café per se. Rather the café worked as a place wherein I was able to meet people involved with the organisation and who belonged to different church societies.

The field proved to be a mixture between narrow, in the sense that it was always limited by my interest in studying young Norwegian Christians, and rather substantial, in the sense that I also aimed to look at notions of Norwegianness and the role Christianity played within these perceived notions. Doing research on one specific group of Norwegians does in a way also mean to do research on all of Norway (Rugkåsa & Thorsen, 2003, p. 17), however specific the group might be, and it was therefore important throughout my fieldwork to pay attention to popular culture, politics, social media and just media in general. The information gained from paying attention to what was occurring in Norway at the time of my fieldwork was important
in the sense that what was at the time going on at the news would be relevant to bring up during conversations with informants.

Through Karsten, I was not only introduced to the language café, I was also made aware of an annual weekend long seminar being held in a small city outside of Oslo. The aim of the seminar was to help build a unified Christian identity regardless of backgrounds, denominations and other things that might divide. The goal was to be unified through Jesus, or as one of the preachers put it more eloquently: “Be one in Christ.” I was allowed to take part in the seminar both as an observer and as a participant. Much like Marianne Gullestad (1984) describes in ‘Kitchen Table Society’, I was able to use the contacts I already had to gain a greater network and was subsequently I was invited to take part in several arrangements and activities.

I also chose to start reading two Christian newspapers (Dagen and Vårt Land) to get a greater scope of what was happening in this part of the Norwegian society which I had previously not been too familiar with. Through this I learnt of a bible marathon being held in the centre of Oslo. I aimed to follow the topic, something that also lead me to a sing-a-long arranged by the Norwegian Church and directed at refugees, as a friendly and fun way to learn the Norwegian language. Although the sing-along did not end up being featured in the final thesis, experiences gained helped inform me about a greater variety within the Christian landscape of Norway.

In addition to participant observation I also conducted eight semi-structured interviews, usually involving a cup of coffee. During these interviews, my role was that of a researcher. I decided to do two sets of interviews, the first in the beginning of the fieldwork and the second one at the end. I used a digital recorder and transcribed the interviews afterwards. Although the interviews were conducted on mostly the same people who I would spend time with in the café, they provided me with a chance to have more in-depth conversations and further expand upon information I had gathered in other arenas. In that way the interviews did not become my main source of information but rather a space where we could sit down and pick up conversations from previous encounters. Being roughly within the same age and in the same stage in life as the people that I interviewed it became natural that the interviews became very informal and turned more in to conversations on relevant topics.
However, when the recorder was turned off at the end of the interview I noticed that my informants would relax more, and more than once we started conversing about relevant topics in a much more informal way than I could ever expect during the interviews. In one instance, during the second interview with Ola, I actually asked for permission to turn the recorder back on because I did not wish to miss any of the information he was sharing.

**Slowly Entering the Field**

Although I officially started my fieldwork on a cold and windy January day waiting outside Karsten’s office, my curiosity concerning Christianity in Norway can be traced back to my childhood. I grew up in Jæren, an area in the South West of Norway that is highly influenced by Christianity. In the town where I grew up we did not have a youth centre, rather when we became teenagers we would ‘hang out’ in Misjonshuset (the missionary house) where we would play cards, billiard and ping pong in the weekends. I personally never felt very at ease in this environment, and my unease reached a climax when I went to a meeting once and a pastor uttered the sentence “*Without Jesus you are a zero. Only with Jesus can you become number one.*” I left the missionary house never to come back. Being a teenager and needing a reason to rebel, I took this as a reason to leave behind any trace of belief I might have had previously. Thanks to my adolescent logic, I concluded that Christians were bigoted, and that Christianity was inherently bad.

When I got a bit older and it was time for me to write my bachelor’s dissertation I wanted to re-examine the environment which I had stayed away from for so many years. I contacted a friend who worked as a youth minister in a bedehus (Prayer House) in a neighbouring town from where I grew up. Here I met a number of lovely people who opened up about being Christian and having very different experiences from me. Many of them had had a hard time growing up Christian, and although the dissertation centred more around the life within the church, my informants would occasionally talk about themselves as if they were on the outskirts of society looking in. Having rather conservative views on sex and alcohol they had found it hard to be part of the ‘mainstream’ and all but one mentioned that they would have

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6 Prayer houses and missionary houses have sprung out of the lay movement in the 19th century, as discussed in the introduction.
liked to have more friends outside the church, and that that had been the case before they became teenagers and expectations of what to do when socialising changed.

At the time I did not dwell on these notions, thinking that it was only natural that friendship groups change as you get older, but I started noticing the way people around me talked about Christianity. As I mentioned above, I was not brought up in a particularly religious household, but I had always been told that Norway was a Christian country, especially when discussing the subject of teaching religion in schools or immigration. However, I also started noticing the negative comments directed at those who were perceived as gladkristne (happy clappy Christians), a definition that broadly speaking included evangelical Christians with a more charismatic expression than what you would normally find in the Norwegian Church. I started to gain a greater understanding of how my informants felt when facing the world outside their own community; as is common with prejudices, the negative comments were founded on varying rumours and misunderstandings and did not reflect the people I had gotten to know through my fieldwork. I also found it to be a conundrum that the same person could tell me that it was imperative for Norway to hold on to Christianity as a basis for the country’s cultural heritage, but at the same time would be so judgmental towards people who dedicated their lives to the faith.

**Studying “at home”**

I have now talked about how I came to be interested in studying Christianity in Norway. My role and my level of being able to grasp what was happening during fieldwork was highly influenced by the fact that I had chosen to do fieldwork in a place I considered my home.

While my fellow anthropology students flew off to different corners of the world, I made myself a cup of coffee and sat down in my Oslo apartment to start planning the next six months of my life. To live with my informants was not feasible, both because most of my informants lived in house shares just like I did, but also because this was Oslo and there was no way I could have afforded to pay rent in two different places at the same time. I did not see this as a negative aspect of my research, though.

While I was pouring myself that cup of coffee, I am sure that Mia, Karsten, Ola or Håkon probably did the same thing in their respective homes. Just by living in Oslo and being within the same age bracket meant we had something in common. They, as well as I, lived in either
house shares or student accommodation. Their daily and mundane routines echoed mine in more ways than they did not. This innate familiarity with the field has been criticized by some anthropologists for being ‘too close to home’ and thus preventing the researcher from being able to recognize traits and customs that are also part of the anthropologist’s daily life (Howell, 2010). I recognize these criticisms, however, I always maintained that my field was my informants and their perception of the world around them. By living in the same city, going through the same mundane everyday life activities such as making coffee or going to the shop, I not only embodied parts of their realities, but also realised that life, no matter what you believe in, consists mainly of banal and mundane everyday things. I would argue that, as Judith Okely (1996, p. 24) points out, by studying at home you do encompass a substantial amount of knowledge on the field already before you start doing fieldwork. By being reflexive (Davies, 2008) in researching and writing I have worked to use my pre-conceived knowledge of Norway as an advantage both while doing research and when writing, while at the same time constantly being aware of the fact that this preconceived knowledge might not actually be a testament to how things actually are.

**Role and Role Implications**

To be reflexive I had to reflect over my own role and pre-conceived knowledge constantly. My background highly influenced both how I was perceived in the field and how I perceived the field. As I spent time in different arenas, my role shifted, I found myself varying between playing the part of participant, friend, student, teacher, observer and at times just as a researcher. The biggest difference in the roles that I played, was in other words not me or my lack of faith, nor my informants and their belief, but rather the settings and surroundings of where we were. Using laughter and humour as a bridge to gap the differences that might occur between me and my informants helped me gain a sense of comradery with my informants. According to Marianne Lien (2001, p. 289):

Laughter brings people together. To burst out in laughter together, to be able to tell a joke that people will laugh at, or to understand the humorous undertone in other’s irony is about mastering common cultural codes [own translation].
One time I came back from the kitchen with my hands occupied with a large tray of cups when I saw Ola *twerking*\(^7\) and Lars laughing. I was standing there, with the tray still in my hands, wondering what in the world I had missed while away in the kitchen. Seeing my perplexed look, Lars immediately made room for the tray on a countertop, still laughing. Ola saw the look on my face and exploded in laughter before he tried to straighten up and explained that he had been telling Lars how he had been shocked coming back to Norway after six months away and had seen everyone “Twerking around”, when it turned out that Lars did not actually know what Twerking was, Ola had to show him. The reason for Ola’s surprise was that he found twerking highly sexualised and he said:

“I don’t agree that dancing necessarily leads to sex, as some people think, but I would definitely draw the line with twerking. I mean, it just goes to show how sexualised our society is when that is an acceptable form of dance.”

As illustrated through this example, it was through mundane conversations and everyday interactions that I was able to get a glimpse in to my informants’ world view, more often than not through jokes and banter. Laughter (ref.Lien, 2001) became the key to enter in to more substantial topics, and thus this way of interacting with my informants did in many ways become my main method while spending time in groups, both in the café and in other social gatherings. The laughter allowed for my informants to ask me questions they might not otherwise have felt comfortable asking, often by starting a sentence with a tiny ridicule referring to my role as a researcher or my lack of religious beliefs. Laughter did in turn also make it easier for me to do the same.

However, some events would turn up where I realised that I was an outsider and were my role as an observer was cemented. During a visit to Ola’s church, we were told we could go to receive communion, and although it was a big church and I do not think anyone would notice whether I had joined or not, I felt as if everyone noticed that I did not go. I had recently had a conversation with Ola and he had explained to me that although Christian rituals was not that important for him, he still considered receiving communion a sacred act. I also told me that although he would not be offended if I did it, he did not think it would have been right for me to do it. Hence, when the church service broke up and church members moved to the side

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\(^7\) A dance which is easily recognised by the dancer’s characteristic shake of his or her buttocks.
room to receive their communions I moved out to the hallway, just to discover I was not the only one who had chosen to opt out on the communion.

**Language**

The fieldwork was predominately conducted in Norwegian, with a bit of English whenever needed. The choice of writing in English was a conscious one, as a lot of the words and concepts I came across throughout fieldwork are hard to translate from Norwegian. Writing in English provides forces me to truly consider what is behind the words I take for granted, especially in instances where a single word or expression is impossible to directly translate.

My speaking language is Norwegian, but more importantly it is in the dialect from Jæren. As mentioned above, Jæren is an area which is highly influenced by Christianity and speaking *Jaersk* turned out to be a substantial advantage whenever I met new people. It was the only time while living in Oslo people have asked me where I was from and proceeded to ask which town, instead of asking where Jæren is. As Christians, most of my informants had some connection to Jæren. Some of the people I met where from Jæren themselves, most of them had friends from there and I dare say everyone knew someone who had gone to the Lutheran high school *Tryggheim* which is situated in the neighbouring town from where I grew up. In addition, on a personal note, it was a relief not having to adjust my dialect to be understood. Having friends or acquaintances in common was a common occurrence, and often worked as a conversation starter.

Language however is not just strictly how you speak or what you say, it is often the implicit meanings of words that are important. As Unni Wikan (2012, p. 466) says: “…the need to attend to what people say and the intent they are trying to convey, rather than groping for some “larger” answers within the particulars of their spoken words.” In a setting which seems very familiar, yet strange, these meanings can easily be lost without it even being realised. One of the moments this became very clear to me was during a conversation with Karsten, when I asked him to explain *evangelisation* to me;

“It is hard to explain evangelisation in a country where evangelisation has such a negative connotation, because it really is just about me wanting to share what has meant a lot
to me. Just because I care about people. If I didn’t care about people, I wouldn’t have shared what I care about.”

When Karsten said this, I realised that not only did I myself have negative connotations with evangelisation, I also did not fully understand what my informants meant when using the word. If I was to understand what it actually is, or means to my informants, I would have to confront my own prejudices and question all my preconceived notions about words being used and my interpretation of what the words might or might not mean. To do this I started asking ignorant questions on matters where I thought I already had all the answers. It was not as though they were trying to hide the bigger meaning of the words they were using to me, it was simply a result of having different points of reference when conversing about different matters. When I think about evangelisation I often picture men standing on the streets shouting about hell and damnation, but for Karsten in particular, and my informants in general, evangelisation is just seen as a way to convey their belief.

**Ethics and Such**

Norway is a small country with only five million inhabitants, and this is something I was aware of when writing this thesis in order to maintain the privacy of the people who did become my informants. While in the field, however, it seemed as if I was the only one concerned with this. When presenting Karsten with the ethical clearance form which he had to sign, he stopped and looked at it, before he asked me why I wished to anonymise the organisation and their names. Before being confronted with this question I had just assumed that people who were interviewed or became my informants would like to have their names removed from the final thesis. That Karsten, the leader of the organisation, saw this as unnecessary was something I had not thought likely.

In the end, I did choose to anonymise both names of persons and organisations, not necessarily to protect the organisation or my informants, most of them asked me the same question as Karsten, but to keep the privacy of the people using their services. Some of these people were in vulnerable positions, being refugees, or in some cases underage. I did not use information obtained from persons in vulnerable positions, but had I used the organisation’s full name, these persons could have been easily recognised nonetheless. I chose to follow the
ethical guidelines as laid out by the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA\textsuperscript{8}) as a guiding tool throughout the research and my writing.

**The Problems With Making a Group**

As mentioned above, my incentive throughout both my fieldwork and in writing this thesis has been to look at young Norwegian Christians. Considering the people I met during fieldwork came from varying backgrounds, none of the two descriptive words I have used to define and limit my research defines or limits the research substantially. Semantics matter when describing people, however, to be able to present my data I have seen it necessary to use very specific definitions of the two aforementioned words\textsuperscript{9}.

I have chosen to use the term Norwegian to describe people whose ancestral lineage can be traced back in Norway for several generations. People who consider themselves Norwegian, but who do not share the ancestral lineage will be referred to as Norwegian with an immigrant background. As discussed in many an academic text on nationalism, for example T. H. Eriksen and Neumann (2011), Gullestad (2002a) and Lynnebakke and Fangen (2011), it is no simple feat to easily define who is called Norwegian. I fully admit that by not only calling people with different backgrounds by different terms, but also by grouping people into different categories based on their heritage, I engage in a semantic quarrel that is highly problematic and to an extent wildly political. Nevertheless, as I am interested in studying the lived realities of people who would identify themselves as placed in the juxtaposition between being both a majority and a minority, such groupings are necessary for the sake of conciseness while writing.

**The Answer to Ola’s Question**

As discussed in this chapter, I got the opportunity to be involved in several aspects of my informants’ lives. Although I never managed to take part in all aspects of their everyday lives, they let me in and opened up to me in private conversations and interviews. The short answer to Ola’s question would be that I tried to do anything they did: I would show up early to the café, I would brew coffee and boil kettles of water for tea. I would engage in conversations

\textsuperscript{8} https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml  
\textsuperscript{9} The use of the word ‘Christian’ will be further discussed in chapter 5.
about every topic imaginable to man, ranging from what *twerking* is, to in-depth discussions about faith. I would also partake in church services and get up and sing whenever music was playing. I spent a weekend sleeping on a classroom floor, and the following week trying to avoid thinking about my neck pain. I spent hours at home in my own flat, waiting for the phone to ring while watching the youth show *skam*\(^{10}\), and consequently spent a substantial amount of time discussing said show, from a Christian point of view, with my informants. I sat outside the cathedral in Oslo for hours listening to someone read out loud from the Bible, and got a free coffee and a wonderful conversation from someone who recognised me from the café. I helped teach refugees how to sing *Ro-Ro-Ro Din Båt* (row, row, row your boat) and I became obsessed with trying to look for any signs of Christianity in newspaper articles.

If I was to summarise what I was doing, it would be that I learnt about the lived realities of young Christians in Norway by participating in parts of their lives. To be able to analyse and convey the knowledge, I will provide the reader with the theoretical framework I will be using in the analysis in the subsequent chapter.

\(^{10}\) A TV-show about a group of teenagers which was wildly popular during the time of my fieldwork due to its realistic portrayal of the tribulations of being a teenager.
3 Theoretical Approaches

This thesis is placed in the intersections of the anthropology of nationalism and the anthropology of religion. My focus however is on neither of these fields particularly, but rather on the lived experiences of young people who lead their lives as Christian young adults in a multicultural Norway where their religion is simultaneously taken for granted and exotified. I wish to show how their feelings of identity are shaped and reshaped as a result of belonging to this particular demographic and how current debates on immigration and people of other faiths affect, or does not affect, their outward portrayal of their lived religion and how that again changes their lived experiences of everyday life. Beneath I will provide an overview of the theoretical approaches I will be using to show this throughout the thesis.

I will start by showing how I conceptualise lived experiences of religious lives before moving on to giving an overview of theories surrounding communities and belonging and then I will show what theories I use to understand nationalism, before I sum up the chapter by showing how boundaries dictate how my informants move within and outside different communities.

Lived Religion

Although religion is a well-known subject within the field of anthropology, it is not until relatively recently that there has been an increased attention towards Christianity and a move towards establishing an anthropology of Christianity (Robbins, 2007b), but while there are numerous texts written on the religious lives of Christians within their own social milieu (cf. Bielo, 2011; Cannell, 2006; Luhrmann, 2012) less has been said about religious lives in the context of the greater societies.. This thesis is focusing on the continuity of Christianity within the Norwegian society, through my informants’ lived experiences. So while looking at the overarching religiousness of the country and what is proposed and understood as part of Norway’s cultural heritage, this mainly becomes a backdrop in a more relevant discussion; namely how my informants experience living their lives through the words of the Bible in a country which, as I mentioned in the introduction, is at the same time seen as secular and Christian.

This thesis seeks to understand how faith shapes my informants’ lives. For my informants; God is real, and although there is always room for doubt, the pure existence of God is the
fundament in how they lead their lives and all the choices that they make. Not only is God real, he is also a personal friend, father figure and confidant, he executes tough love at times, but only ever to give you a chance to learn.

To be able to convey how the abovementioned beliefs influences my informants I have chosen to start with looking at lived religion, as described in the book ‘Lived Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives’. Nancy T. Ammerman (2007) has collected several essays regarding lived experiences of everyday religion throughout America and Europe in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The book aims to look at how people navigate and negotiate their religious beliefs in religiously plural societies, similar to Norway. With the premise that despite the belief of some social scientists in the twentieth century that religion all together would disappear in a world influenced by plurality of religion, people are still being religious, Ammerman and her team of social scientists aim to give descriptions of “…social realities of everyday religious lives.” (p. 6). In this thesis I use the same approach, or I “start from the everyday…” (p.5), to give an apt description of how my informants negotiate their everyday lives in accordance to their beliefs, and how the belief is incorporated into every decision they make.

To further understand what religiosity means to my informants I have found it useful to look at Luhrmann (2012) who writes about American evangelicals’ personal relationship with God through prayers. Her findings reflects the way my informants would talk about their relationship with God. Although my informants come from different churches and denominations, most of them have been influenced by the same search for authenticity as the emerging evangelicals James Bielo (2011) in the United States writes about. They want to, as expressed by Mia; “live like Jesus”, which means putting faith in scripture and using their personal relationships with God as a guidance, as opposed to putting all their faith in the person preaching. The growth of Pentecostalism around the globe (Robbins, 2009) was also reflected in the way my informants expressed their belief, by seemingly not focusing on rituals, but rather “Placing a high value on spontaneity and authenticity…” (ibid., p. 58), and this was not unique for people who looked at themselves as belonging to Pentecostal churches. The focus on a personal relationship with God is also a typical trait of the Pentecostal movement, and it is further explored by Pål Repstad (2000); (2008). Instead of going in to detail about the personal belief of individuals, he provides an overview of how the way of thinking and talking about God has changed in the Norwegian context; from being
someone one should fear to being a personal friend, or as my informants would describe it; *God is a just and fair father*. Christianity as a religion is not only understood as a faith, it is understood as a way of life and it shapes and influences every decision being made.

**Communities**

Religion is not merely about individual experiences and personal relationship with God, rather it also relies heavily on the more organised aspects of religious lives through worship in groups or in churches. Durkheim (2009) says something about the social aspect of worshipping and claims that by worshipping God together people are more or less just worshipping each other. Although my informants would vehemently disagree with that statement, I have found it enlightening to look at Durkheim when talking about Christian communities and the togetherness created by common rituals and activities.

I find it useful to apply Holland et.al’s (1998) definition of ‘figured worlds’: “… a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized. Significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular are valued over others.” (p.53) as a definition of how I will be looking at and analysing communities in this thesis. This will be interesting not only to give a definition of community, but also to give a description of how the way my informants perceive themselves and are perceived in different situations and within different communities, a notion I will get back to when discussing boundary making.

An important factor of any community is the feeling of belonging. To be able to conceptualise and analyse belonging I will be looking at the work of Marco Antonsich (2010) and Nira Yuval-Davies (2006). Belonging is used both as a description of ‘feeling at home’ in smaller communities and as a wider term determining belonging within a greater socio-political framework. When applying belonging when looking at the greater socio-political framework, the term ‘politics of belonging’ is applied, a term that will be relevant when discussing how my informants negotiate their belonging within the greater community of Norway. ‘Feeling at home’ is applied when looking at smaller communities, such as churches or the language café, and will consequently be applied when discussing these. However, as both smaller and bigger communities are linked together by the fact that whatever small communities there are in
Norway are undeniably still in Norway, ‘politics of belonging’ cannot necessarily be conceptualised without also considering ‘feeling at home’ as an analytical tool.

**Nationalism; Banal or Otherwise**

This thesis is a study of a relatively small community where the state is “…an external agent influencing local conditions.” (T. H. Eriksen, 2002, p. 96). However more than just influencing the ‘local conditions’ where I study, the nation is always present. It cannot be ignored, forgotten or treated as a solely outside force because it is intrinsic in size and influence, and as Hylland Eriksen (ibid., p. 97) continues: “Like ourselves, our informants are citizens.” As everyone else, my informants navigate their lives within the context of a nation state, more precisely within the Norwegian nation state. To understand concepts of nationalism it is not only imperative to understand how people within certain nations navigate their lives and negotiate their sense of belonging within said communities, but also how the nation is proposed to its citizens.

In Benedict Anderson’s famous work ‘Imagined Communities’ (2006) he defines the nation as “…an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (ibid., p.6) The nation is proposed to be imagined in the sense that most members within that community is likely to never meet, yet everyone living within the nation share something in common. The nation is created and re-created by tellings of joint history and a connectedness which sets its members apart from other imagined communities. You can choose to reject parts of what it entails to be part of a certain nation state, however, you will do it within the context of said nation. In this thesis, the imagined community is Norway. Being able to say ‘I am Norwegian’ creates a feeling of belonging and is a confirmation of ones membership within the imagined community of Norway.

In Michael Billig’s book ‘Banal Nationalism’ (1995) he argues that the word nationalism should not exclusively used to describe movements and people on the far-right periphery who cry out for a very confined definition of what and who belongs within the nation. Rather than limiting the scope of nationalism to the far-right, he opens up for a discussion surrounding the ‘banal nationalism’ we all live our lives within without necessarily noticing. As he says “The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with a fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.” (ibid., p.8). Further
he argues that we live in a world where nation-states are more or less considered the natural order of things and the idea of belonging to a nation is taken for granted through everyday activities and symbols.

Michael Skey (2011) argues that the taken-for-grantedness of national identity and belonging among the majority populations have been greatly understudied and that

“…by attending to the lives of people whose sense of belonging and entitlement remains largely ‘beyond question’, we may be in a better position to explain why national forms of identification and organisation matter and, just as importantly, why such issues are being debated so ferociously at the current time.” (p. 2)

Meaning that in order to make sense of the current debates on national belonging and seemingly upsurge in nationalist rhetoric, it is important to actually do research on people who without question feel a sense of belonging and entitlement to say they belong to a certain nation state. He also suggests that although the nation and who belongs within it might not be as concrete and absolute as some people perceive it, this does not necessarily make it less important for people’s ‘lived experiences’ of their own national identities. He also uses the term ‘ecstatic nationalism’ (ibid., chp. 4) to describe events designed to generate forms of social solidarity linked to a national community or movement. The term ecstatic nationalism is derived from the idea of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and as Skey argues, and as I will discuss in the chapter aptly named ‘Yes, We Love This Country!’; ecstatic nationalism and everyday (or banal) nationhood should be conceptualised in relation to each other (Skey, 2011, p. 95).

Goode and Stroup (2015) agrees with Skey in that the ethnic majority is understudies in terms of nationalism (p.718) and further discusses how academic theorising does not necessarily reflect the actual lived experiences. In other words, it is relatively easy for an academic to say that the nation state is a social construct, but for the inhabitants of said nation state that is probably a hard pill to swallow. The inhabitants have most likely built up a feeling of identity based on the belonging to said nation state, and regardless of how socially constructed the nation state is, it does not change how inhabitants feel about their sense of belonging. They also argue that national identity usually is more important in countries with a newfound independence, a definition that Norway falls under.
The aforementioned theoretical approaches are chosen as an overarching way of looking at nationalism as a banal and everyday consequence of this taken-for-grantedness of the nation states as being the ‘natural’ way of looking at how the world is made out to be. By using qualitative data I aim to show how notions of nationalism is still relevant in an environment where the far-right and anti-immigration stance often equated with nationalism is not present.

**Boundary Making**

To be able to fully analyse and understand the everyday lives of my informants, it is imperative to understand how they perceive themselves in regard to other people and how other people perceive them. Any group or community is as much defined by the members as it is by the boundaries between the members and the non-members. In other words, the groups are defined by boundaries. To further investigate how boundaries are created, maintained and negotiated within this specific community, I have found it useful to look at Fredrik Barth’s famous introduction in his book “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” from 1969. Although I do not suggest my informants should be defined as an ethnic group, Barth’s understanding of how groups maintain their boundaries towards ‘outsiders’ by recognising members of their own group and being able to “play[ing] the same game” (ibid., p. 15) as opposed to when interacting with ‘outsiders’ which “implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest.” (ibid.) interesting and worth taking in to account when looking at how they themselves perceive their belonging in different areas of the society.

Groups and belonging to said groups are not static, though, and I will be looking at when, in which situations, different emphasis on belonging is evident. It is useful to look at Christine M. Jacobsen’s (2002) ethnography where she looked at issues surrounding Muslim identity in the Norwegian context. Not only do I find that many of the issues she is bringing up in her book can be directly transferable to my informants, she also uses the concept of ‘relational identity’. As the term might suggest, she does not consider identity as a constant. People construct different identities in different social settings, and others prescribe people with an identity that might vary tremendously from how one perceives oneself (p.35). These different constructions of identity, either done by oneself or by someone else, creates the basis for what boundaries are drawn up and where the lines between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ might lie.
A way to understand how the constructions of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ in the Norwegian context might happen, is to look at the concept of likhet. Likhet is perceived as meaning both sameness and equality and it has been portrayed as a substantially important factor when in a Norwegian context (cf. Gullestad, 1997, 2002b; Gullestad, 2010). Things and people who are considered the same are often considered equal, and likhet is often used to either unify people by accentuating what they have in common, or by differentiating people by focusing on their differences. During my time in the field I was considered both lik (the same) and ulik (different) in different settings, depending on the setting. Whilst in the language café I was mostly seen as lik, because I looked, sounded and mostly acted the same as everyone else, but in a church setting I was considered ulik because I was not a Christian.

Although my informants considered themselves to be the same as every other Norwegian in some aspects, they also knew that they were different and would sometimes even accentuate this difference by using words like ‘worldly’ or secular when describing the general Norwegian society. The instances when they did this was also often when they either felt that Norway was losing out on not following the words of the Bible, or if they felt insecure about their position within the Norwegian society.

Conclusions

When looking at how my informants navigate their lives in context to the wider community, these theories will be relevant to look at both in the sense of shaping a sense of belonging within the imagined community of Norway and within their own communities. Through looking at their lived experiences and the banalities of everyday life and how these experiences are influenced by an all-encompassing belief I will apply these theories to the empirical data I gathered through six months of fieldwork.

Although human interactions are complex and no one thing influences the average person in regard to how they see themselves; you cannot belong unless you are part of a community, and you cannot have a community without some outwards boundaries to other communities, and all of these communities are created, maintained and negotiated within the nation state. While understanding the complexities of everyday life, both this chapter and the following empirical chapters are laid out systematically, starting with the individual and ending up looking at the global aspects of everyday life, the lived realities of the people whose lives I
am describing are obviously not so easy to categorise. Nevertheless, I have found this approach useful in order to fully understand and convey the complexities of my informants’ believes and their daily navigation and negotiations of everyday life.
4 Lived Religion

There is a God. How insane is that? It is absurd. Here we are, walking around, trudging the asphalt, and what if God exists then? That there is eternal life? That we have someone who cares up there? (Karsten)

The quote from Karsten comes from an interview, he was explaining to me the awesomeness of the existence of God in a manner so intent and eager that it is hard to put into words. The reason I have chosen the quote as a starting point to this chapter is because it perfectly sums up the excitement aroused from my informants when talking about God and His presence in their lives. God’s existence is not only ‘insane’ and ‘absurd’, it is also mundane and banal. God is always there, even when we are just ‘walking around, trudging the asphalt.’

God does not merely exist as a deity in my informants’ lives, rather he exists as a very real entity. For my informants, a personal relationship with God was a rudimentary force which led them through life and guided their every step. It was explained to me once that God is a very hands-on father and all human beings are his children. Whether we choose to acknowledge God as our father is a different matter, but if we do, he will be there to take us in and care for us.

In this chapter I wish to explore what it means for my informants when they say they believe in God and Jesus, and how it affects their everyday life. I will start by looking at who God is understood to be before giving a description of how God is always present in their life. The personal relationships gained from believing in a present God are seen as a protection against outside forces and used both to understand the world and to withstand the world. How this works will be discussed towards the end of the chapter.

Living with God

I visited Maria in the flat she shared with three girlfriends she had met in church for her interview. When she gave me a quick tour of the flat, I was struck by how homely it seemed
considering it was occupied by three students. In the kitchen, I could see a family planner, listing activities the girls where to do, both apart and together, and on the fridge hung magnets with Bible-verses, blessings and prayers. I was told that they were aiming to make it feel like it was a family home, because they looked at each other as a family; every morning they would pray together and as often as they could they would have dinners together.

According to Nancy T. Ammerman (2014, p. 2) “Looking for lived religion does mean that we look for the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life, in addition to listening for how people explain themselves.” Signs of lived religion was found everywhere in the flat, from the fridge magnets to the bookshelves filled with Bibles and Christian literature to the more inconspicuous wedding dress hanging on one of the bedroom doors. One of the girls was getting married later that year, and as they considered it sinful to co-habituate before marriage, the dress could hang out in the open. Whenever the future husband came to visit, they could hide the dress in one of the other bedrooms.

The girls sharing the flat had certain goals for how they wanted their lives to be and things they would like to do. One of the aims was to be a blessing for the community around them. Due to the Syrian ‘refugee-crisis’ in the autumn of 2015 they all got involved in a volunteer programme where they could help the refugees who came to Oslo, but as the months passed there were less and less refugees coming to Oslo and they decided they would start something new. Through a friend of Maria’s, they ended up in the café, and unlike in the volunteer programme, they could get to know people and create lasting relationships by volunteering in the café.

During the interview, we ended up talking about belief, what it meant to her in her daily life and who God was to her. She told me that she found it incredibly comforting to know that He listened when she talked with Him and that to be able to have a personal relationship with God you had to get to know Him. In other words, a relationship with God was to be looked at, and looked after, like any other relationship. In order to get to know someone you have to spend time with them, and the same goes for God.

**Who is God?**

Much like Maria, most of my informants talked about God in a very casual manner. As briefly mentioned above, God was not only thought about during huge events and celebrations. God
was seen as an omnipresent entity that wanted the best for everyone. His presence was felt by the people who believed in him, and God was conferred with on a daily basis. For my informants he was not an abstract figure, but someone they needed to work to get to know. This personal and intimate relationship with God was something that all my informants talked about. Both Repstad (2008) and Luhrmann (2012) talk about how the perception of God has changed. From being someone far away, to being a constant present in Christian people’s lives. God has become a friend and a strict and fair father who is always there and always wants what is best for each individual, even if they might not know it themselves. As any other father, God’s love was seen as unconditional, but that did not mean there were no consequences should one step over the line.

Belief was completely integrated in to their daily lives, and although being active in church and member of a Bible study group, Maria’s, like all of my informants’, main connection to God came from the everyday (cf. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, 2007). Her life choices were as much affected by her beliefs as her portrayal of said beliefs were affected by her life choices. Having come from a Christian family in the south of Norway, she had gone to church for as long as she could remember, but it was not until she got older and decided to join Youth With a Mission\(^{11}\), or YWAM as she usually called it, she could fully understand how close and personal she could be with God. As the name suggests, YWAM focuses on missionary work, but in order to talk about God with other people, it is necessary to know God.

### Praying and/or Talking with God

When I was a young child, I used to go to a Christian arts and crafts class with other children from my neighbourhood in a neighbour’s basement. I was too young to really understand what Christianity meant, but we got to listen to interesting stories and what we made in the class was eagerly distributed to parents and grandparents come Christmas. As I was very young I do not remember much of these classes, but one vivid memory I do have is that at the end of every class we had to fold our hands, bow our heads and silently pray. For the preschooler that I was, this was the most boring and infuriating experience I could imagine, and often what was supposed to be a prayer ended up being a test of how long I could sit still without laughing. Every prayer had to start with ‘Dear God’ and it did not end until the

\(^{11}\) An evangelical bible school. For more information see Høgblad (2015).
teacher said ‘Amen’. For most of my life that is what I have imagined prayers to be like. Praying meant to sit still and to be serious, and above all; every prayer had to start with ‘Dear God’ and end with ‘Amen’.

I told this story to Ola one time when we were sitting in the café before the other guests arrived. He laughed a bit before he agreed that prayers could indeed be a serious matter, however, for him a prayer could also just be communication with God. He would sometimes sit down and bow his head and fold his hands, other times he would raise his hands to songs of worship in church, but most of the time he would just communicate with God on his own accord. If something good happened he would say a little ‘thank you’, and if he needed strength he would ask for it. God was never far away and for him it was as natural a thing to do as to send a text message to a friend.

The idea of God as present in a person’s everyday life is not limited to Norway. In the United States of America evangelical Christians are greatly focusing on having a personal relationship with God and are understanding God as “…an intensely personal God, a God who not only cares about your welfare but worries about whether to paint the kitchen table.” (Luhrmann, 2012, p. xv). This belief that God is always there and is always helping does not however, mean that his followers just rest in peace, knowing that he has a plan. Rather they look at themselves as part of his plan and seek to understand what their role is. Nonetheless, as we shall see below, a belief in an all-caring and forever present God can be helpful when life seems increasingly stressful and challenging.

**Listening to God**

Communication with God is not a one-way street. For my informants, God always answers prayers, but maybe not in the way he is expected to. Part of getting to know God is to realise when a person is being spoken to by God. Maria explained to me that God created everyone and gave everyone their own strengths and weaknesses. The aim is to understand what each individual’s strengths are, and to use them as a way to both communicate with God and to communicate God with other people. For Maria it was drama, she always enjoyed performing and she wanted to do something with her life that gave her meaning but that also could be used for something good. She realised that choosing drama as a degree was risky, but she believed that God had spoken to her and given her theatrical skills for a reason, so she trusted God to guide her through what most people would consider an uncertain career path.
A similar story was told by Michael, a volunteer at the café, he also grew up in a Christian home, but he never really felt like a Christian until his late teens. He had been sitting in a youth service listening to the pastor, all the while knowing that there was something missing. After the service he walked over to the pastor to talk about his doubts, and he told me that when he did this everything changed. It was as if he had torn down a wall between him and God and things just started getting easier, because he had at that moment decided to listen to and to trust God.

Although these two stories both represent events that can be seen as both incredible and life altering, they are good representations of different ways people experience God in their daily lives. He intervenes when he has a reason to do so, but to understand that, it is imperative that you listen, as Michael learnt from his experience of finally accepting God. For people who have a relationship with God, He can also be present in more mundane ways, during an exam which is not going very well or when you do not know what to have for dinner. It was explained to me that God was always present and always caring. Whatever way God lets himself be known to his followers, what they all have in common is that this communication is seen as proof that God does not only listen to people, he also actively engages in their lives.

Praying is not something new, neither is a want to feel God’s presence. What is new is how it is presented. As mentioned above there has been a shift in the ways God is described and understood in Norway. Although focusing on the south of Norway in particular, Repstad (2008) captures this shift in how God is understood in his article “From Sin to a Gift from God: Constructions of Change in Conservative Christian Organizations.” Repstad claims that the way to look at God and to talk about Christianity is no longer to focus on human’s sinfulness, but rather to appeal to their positive attributes.

**Sharing Lives**

Being able to communicate with God and communicate God with people is an important aspect of being a Christian. Another way of looking at communication in this sense is through the concept of sharing lives. To share lives does not only mean that you are open and tell your peers about everything that goes on in your life, it also means that you share your life with
God, with people you don’t know that well and to a slightly perplexed anthropologist who is not particularly known to open up without a few glasses of wine.

Karsten once told me that “People in Norway don’t talk about the important questions. Because the important questions, is there a God? Is there a purpose with my life? What is really the point of living? Those kinds of questions are barely talked about.” And it was then I realised the importance of what was considered sharing lives. Sharing one’s life is a way for a person to be able to express his or her innermost thoughts, feelings and doubts, as expressed by Håkon when telling me about his Bible group by saying “…we just come in and spend the first half hour just to talk about everything that has happened during the week. We share everything from events to our innermost thoughts and feelings.” And in this way it is also a way to get to know each other on a deeper level. As seen in the quote from Karsten, this way of relating to one another is something that is understood as missing in the general society; they believe that people are too shallow and too afraid to talk about important matters.

Sharing one’s own life can also be a way of getting other people to open up about their own lives, and in that it becomes a form of reciprocity. Spending time in the language café, helping people practice their Norwegian or listening to them talk about their future dreams and in some cases past nightmares was seen as a form of reciprocity, by letting other people share their lives and being a good listener.

This reciprocity need not necessarily be between two people, it can also be between a person and God, because to open up and to be able to be honest about oneself also means that one has to open up about sins one might have committed. When Michael told me his story about starting to trust God and starting to listen to Him, he also told me that the only way for him to become a Christian was to leave his old ways behind and start with a new slate. As will be further explained in the next chapter, breaking with one’s old life to experience a new life with Jesus is characteristic for the Christian faith (Harding, 1987 [2008]; Robbins, 2007b). He explained that he had for many years been addicted to pornography, a habit he described as damaging his soul, and to fully accept Jesus he had to not only stop his habit, he also had to fully admit to God what he had been doing.

To share lives then became a way of being honest with oneself, others and God and to be able to tell other people how one’s life really was. The idea was an integral part of their everyday life, and as we see in Karsten’s quote, it was seen in contrast to how the general society
communicated with each other. Further down we will see how some of the same distinctions between the society in general and the Christian people could be understood and conceptualised by reading the Bible.

“**You Need to Give Yourself Some Grace!”**

“Grace, you need to give yourself a little grace!” The words that travel through a very fancy sound system and out to the audience come from a young preacher wearing a shirt and a pair of jeans. The occasion was a Sunday evening service in a big Pentecostal church towards the end of my fieldwork. At the time I was feeling increasingly stressed about going back to university and start writing my thesis based on the data I had collected for the last few months. Throughout these months I had met some really nice people, but I felt lost and I felt like everyone around me was always so happy. Based on this general feeling of unease I therefore sharpened my ears and listened intently when the preacher was talking about giving myself a little grace, or how I interpreted it at the time; he gave me permission to ‘cut myself some slack.’

The theme for the service was pressure, the preacher wanted to address the issue of *generasjon prestasjon* (Generation performance), a term which had been frequently discussed in the media in the last few months concerning young people working too hard and putting too much pressure on themselves. He wanted to get us to stop listening to the worldly voices telling us that we could and should do everything, and rather use scripture to understand how to deal with the pressure. When looking around I could see that I was not the only one who could relate to what was being said. A couple of rows in front of me a girl had started crying and her friend had put her arm around her. I was there with Maria and her boyfriend who both listened carefully to what was being said, while once in a while turning their heads to see how I reacted.

“**Us and our lives are not perfect”** the preacher said before saying we should look in the Bible for answers. He continued to say that It is dangerous to forget that we are limited as human beings. What young people should do is to really read the Bible to realise that we as human beings are weak and we have our limits. In short, we need to calm down and listen to God.
The preacher was very good at keeping the speech relevant and he perfectly captured a feeling that a lot of people could recognise. After reading from Romans 7:14-18 he gave us three tasks, or rather three things to think about:

1. Give yourself some grace. It is natural to make mistakes.

2. Receive God’s grace. You and I are loved and valuable.

3. See God’s grace within yourself.

Following from the last subchapter, this Sunday evening service was very much a display of how to use faith as a guiding tool in life. Although speaking at a public service the preacher managed to engage the listeners and give them tools to understand how to best lead their lives in accordance to the Bible and by listening to God. Throughout the service he would give several examples from the Bible, making them all relevant to modern life. Although he was speaking to the already converted, he used the same tactic as Engelke (2011) observed in Manchester where he did fieldwork among people working for the British Bible Society. They worked from an idea that people did no longer find the Bible relevant for modern life, so therefore they strived to make it relevant by placing bible-verses alongside photos from famous soap operas and the like. For the preacher at this service, making the Bible relevant for today’s world was not necessarily to get people interested in learning more about the Bible, but rather a way to show them that not only is the Bible always relevant, but through that, God is also always relevant, and by listening to Him it is possible to relax a bit in a stressful world.

**Conclusions**

By looking at religion through the lens of Ammerman’s “Lived Religion” (2007; 2014), the daily lives of Maria, Ola, Karsten and all the other informants become just that; daily lives. Their belief in God is so imperative to how they view the world that it shapes everything they

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12 We know that the Law is spiritual. But I am merely a human, and I have been sold as a slave to sin. 15 In fact, I don’t understand why I act the way I do. I don’t do what I know is right. I do the things I hate. 16 Although I don’t do what I know is right, I agree that the Law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing these evil things. The sin that lives in me is what does them.

18 I know that my selfish desires won’t let me do anything that is good. Even when I want to do right, I cannot. (The Bible, contemporary English version)
say and do, whether it is by distinguishing by overlooking a wedding dress hanging out in the open or by sharing lives.

A religious belief is not a tangible entity, it is not something that is easily conveyed to someone who does not share the faith. “Belief is a private and inner state.” (A. Eriksen, 2014, p. S265). In other words, it is personal, and it is based on a personal relationship with God, but at the same time it is universal and shared with millions of people around the globe. When Maria or Ola silently confers with God, they confirm their relationship, they get to know God better. By looking at how my informants understand God, it makes it easier to get an idea of how they understand the world around them.

That however, does not mean that the world around them understand them. As mentioned above, the worldly is often seen as an outside force which might seem threatening, and God is seen as refuge. By differentiating themselves from what is considered worldly, they create boundaries (Barth, 1969) between them and people who do not believe, which encapsulates their ‘figured worlds’ (Holland, 1998). That does not mean that they live separate from the world and all the pressures the worldly might bring with it, but rather that they use their relationship with God to understand how to withstand the pressure. And as we will see in the following chapter, neither does it mean that the boundaries created are permanent structures meant to keep people out. Rather the belief is that God is father to all humankind, and therefore everyone has the possibility to receive God’s grace and become insiders.

In the following chapters I will continue to look at how ‘lived religion’ influences my informants within and without their own communities. Further, I will look closer into how boundaries are imagined, maintained and negotiated when faced with the ‘worldly’.
5 “You Are The Light of The World.”

In this chapter I wish to further look at how lived religion, as discussed in the previous chapter, is used as the basis for inclusion. I will do this by mainly using examples from a multicultural Christian festival held in February of 2016, but I will also incorporate examples from the language café to show that the same set of issues are being discussed in different arenas. The festival was arranged by CMYO and two other Christian organisations who shared the goal of working towards a more open Norwegian Christian identity where also migrant youths\footnote{An emic term used to describe youths of immigrant backgrounds. This term does not specify whether the persons are born in Norway or not, but incorporates all those whose families are descended from different (mostly African or Asian) countries.} felt welcome to participate, contribute and take on leadership roles.

The focus of the festival was to be able to live together in a multicultural society where it was okay to be ‘different’. Most of the participants were Norwegian in the sense that they had been brought up in Norway and had Norwegian citizenships, but the majority of them were either born in, or had parents who were born in Asian or African countries. When I was there I was in a minority position in several ways; I was one of few white participants and I was definitely the only person at the festival who did not call herself a Christian.

The feeling of being in a minority in Norway is something I rarely experience as a white woman with blue eyes and more or less blonde hair. However it is a feeling the participants at the festival experience every day. In this chapter I will discuss how belonging within the Norwegian community is negotiated by the participants and the leaders of the festival by using the Bible as a guidebook for life. The Bible is used as a tool of inclusion for these youths into a greater Norwegian community, but then often in an opposition to what this group would define as ‘worldly’, which is briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. I further wish to examine how belonging is negotiated within the group and how differences are being ignored by focusing on what they have in common – the belief in the words of God, as presented in the Bible – to create a sense of ownership and unity.

First, I want to say something about the community that is created, and the boundaries that are being made through a joint faith. Next, I will clarify how this community can be used as a guiding tool when these youths are navigating their lives in a society which is partially seen as
foreign and where they experience being seen as strangers. In the end I will discuss how these two elements are being used as tools for inclusion in a Norwegian Christian community.

**Definitions of Inclusion and Exclusion**

Similar to all of my informants, the participants and the leaders at the festival came from a range of different church communities and denominations. Most of them, however, belonged Baptist or Pentecostal churches with a *charismatic* expression. What they had in common, outside of their faith, was that they did not feel any affiliation with the Norwegian Church, or “cultural Christianity” as Marcus, one of the pastors called it. This had also been discussed in the language café, where I had picked up the expression *norskkristne* (Norwegian Christians), and when I asked him if that was what he meant, he laughed and told me he might start using that word himself. He had had problems getting parents to send their children to the festival due to a scepticism surrounding what they were going to learn there. A lot of the people in his congregation had come to Norway with the impression that it was a Christian country and was shocked when they discovered a country where drinking alcohol with the sole purpose of getting intoxicated and acceptance of premarital sex was seen as common. This again was seen as a reflection of a liberal church and a society where ‘everything goes’. The Norwegian Church was in other words seen as too worldly and it was important for these parents to protect their children from attitudes and lifestyles which were seen as damaging and against the teachings of the Bible.

It was during this conversation with Marcus and another pastor, Jonah, I asked them about being Christians in Norway. Marcus, explained to me that he would describe himself as a ‘follower of Christ’ and Jonah, another speaker, who was standing with us said that he often said he was a ‘believer’. Semantics aside, these clarifications were very indicative of how my informants looked at themselves and their faith, for them the word ‘Christian’ did not entail what faith really meant for them, it was a description of people who belonged to the Norwegian church. It is interesting to note that, according to Malcolm Ruel (1982 [2008], p. 100) the word ‘Christians’ is only mentioned three times in the Bible, and when it is mentioned, it is by people who did not themselves believe. Instead the word ‘believer’ is used.

By choosing to draw a distinction between themselves, ‘the believers’, and everyone else, they laid foundations for how to define their group and how to define the outsiders. They
drew up boundaries based solely on their beliefs, what mattered was what they had in common, their belief, not the ‘cultural stuff’ (Barth, 1969, p. 15) that might differentiate them from one another. As I was told by Michael, a man from the language café, when discussing what I had learnt at the festival; “It is not how you worship, it’s that you do that’s important.” They “[handled] difference by emphasizing sameness.” (Gullestad, 1984, p. 70) and by doing so distinguished themselves from people they considered not the same as them. These people who claimed to be Christians but who did not really lead a life in accordance with the Bible, the ‘cultural Christians’, are defined by Loek Halman & Ole Riis (2003, p. 8) as “…marginal members: people belong to a church but they hardly go to church.” Distinctions like this were important to create a group identity and when facing people outside the group; they did not want to be confused with someone who just went to church for Christmas and special events like most norsk-kristne, they strived to live like Jesus every day.

As we will see further down, the separation between the worldly and the holy was seen as a battle the youths who acknowledged the Christian faith had to fight to live a free life through Jesus. The arguments Marcus had used to convince parents to send their children to the festival was that, in a greater degree than their parents, the youths were exposed to parts of a society that did not share their values through participating in public schooling and socialising with their peers. The festival was meant to help provide them with tools and a network which would help them, should they ever be tempted by the worldly.

**Liberal and Conservative**

While Marcus and Jonah did this by calling themselves ‘believer’ and ‘follower of Christ’, the Christians with Norwegian descent seemed more concerned with distinguishing themselves the Norwegian Church by using terms such as ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’. During a language café Rakel, one of the regular volunteers, mentioned that she studied at the Theological Faculty (TF) at the university of Oslo. Before anyone could react, she interjected by saying “Oh, but I am not studying to be a priest there. No, it’s way too liberal for that.” Having been to the café for a while by this point I knew that when they used words such as liberal and conservative, they were referring to faith, not expression, as Ola put it: “I can easily be in a church that’s really, like, party.” The ultimate church was one that was conservative in its interpretation of the Bible, but liberal in its expression of worship.
Nevertheless, this wish to be clear on what they believed in, by using terms such as liberal and conservative to distinguish themselves was the same as the reasoning behind calling themselves ‘believers’ or ‘followers of Christ’. The volunteers at the café, however, did not really look at Norway as a Christian country and therefore did not have problems with calling themselves Christians in fear of being misunderstood. As Lars Laird Iversen (2012) observed Norwegian teenagers do not tend to say they are Christians unless they have a clear, honest and open faith (p.262). Although the volunteers were too old to be classified as teenagers, the same mentality was true for this age group. The boundaries between people who had a liberal interpretation of the Bible and themselves became more important than distinguishing themselves from the word Christians. Having said that, it is worth noting that although the words they used were different, the actual content and the boundaries were more or less the same.

Using terms to describe themselves became markers, not only of how they looked at themselves and where they belonged, it also became a way of how they do not want to be looked at or who they do not want to be equated with. This in turn created groups based on exclusion of who were considered the same and who were not. Daniel L. Pals (2009, p. 99) sums up Durkheim’s view of communities better than I can by saying “humans do not just exist; they belong”, Belonging based on sameness creates communities, which also implies that those who are not the same, do not fit in to said community.

In other words, an important part of defining group belonging was to define who was not included within the group, by creating boundaries (Barth, 1969). According to Nira Yuval-Davies (2006) “Belonging… is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are valued and judged.” (p.203) This can be seen in the above examples; the speakers of the festival did not want to equate themselves with the word Christian and the volunteers at the language café strongly disassociated themselves from liberal Christians. The reasons for this was not necessarily to single out the groups they did not wish to belong within, but rather to showcase to me, the outsider, who they were by exemplifying who they were not. What mattered was to solidify their joint identity as people who were not only Christians, but followers of Christ with a conservative view of the Bible.
“We’re all one in Christ”

On the Friday, the first day of the festival, I was situated in the auditorium of an elementary school in a small town in the east of Norway. Outside the snow was coming down heavily and inside I was surrounded by an overwhelming number of different languages and dialects. Some of the participants greeted each other as old friends, and others again greet for the first time, presenting themselves with their names, where they are from and what congregation they are from. Behind me I could hear a young man say, trying to answer the question of where he was from “It is so hard to say, because I am from Southern Norway, but I am also from Africa.” A response which was met with acknowledging nods and a bit of laughter.

A band entered the stage and the chit chat died down. To my surprise, and to some people’s dismay, the band left the stage after tuning and was replaced by Tore, one of the two main organisers for this event. Shortly thereafter, Karsten joined Tore on the stage. Both were given a microphone. “Velkommen til Krysskulturell Ungdom 2016!” Tore excitedly exclaimed in Norwegian, “Welcome to Cross-Cultural Youths 2016!” Karsten repeated in English. “We are a lot of different people here, but we all have one thing in common: we are all one in Christ!” Again, it was first said in Norwegian before being translated in to English by Karsten. People around me were applauding and from around the room I could hear numerous “Amen” being uttered.

After a short welcoming speech, the band, which consisted of two singers, a guitarist, a bass guitarist and a drummer, re-entered the stage and they created an electric feeling immediately after stroking the first chord. All the people in the auditorium got up, some raised their arms, while others moved in sync with the catchy music. Everyone was singing:

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\text{Father I adore you,} \\
\text{lay my life before you,} \\
\text{How I love you!} \]

While the song was playing I observed that some people turned their faces up, as if they were singing directly to God. The lyrics were emphasising their understanding of who God was, a father, a listener and a leader, the song was in honour of Him. Songs of worship accompanied by what one could describe as rock bands have become increasingly common in youth churches and they are characterised by being upbeat and having a rock or pop feel to them and
by having lyrics that are emphasising personal relationships with God (Trysnes, 2013). The embodied experiences of getting up and praising God together through lyrics and movement is further solidifying feelings of community by the worshippers (Trysnes, 2013, p.130-131). There was something about the completely honest lyrics, alluding to how one has to show one’s vulnerability to God and the fervent expression of joy by the other participants which made it impossible to not be moved by the music. As everyone else, I stood up to move to the beat of the music and sing along with the lyrics but soon realised I did not really know what I was expected to do. As I was awkwardly swaying a bit back and forth Karsten came over to me and said “It’s okay. It’s a bit weird for everyone who is not used to it.” I had no time to retort before the music stopped, the band was replaced by Marcus and Karsten was called up to the stage to translate.

**You Are The Light of The World**

Marcus was, as already mentioned, a pastor in a local African Baptist church. His task was to preach before we were divided in to groups. He looked like he could have been in his late thirties, was dressed in bright yellow trousers and could easily have been confused with a hipster walking around in Grünerløkka\(^\text{14}\). It was obvious that both the people arranging the festival and the participants wanted to front a friendly and youthful atmosphere where age differences and backgrounds were quieted down to promote sameness (Gullestad, 1984, 2002b, 2010). Here the focus was not on vestments and clerical collars, but rather presence and availability. The oneness in God was not only presented through a common faith, but also through a non-hierarchical power structure.

Marcus started by initiating a prayer and instead of folding their hands and bowing their heads, people stood up again. This time I stayed put in my seat to observe the youths and the young adults. Around me I could hear people muttering “*dear God*”, “*Dear Father*” and “*amen*”, the content in between was hard to hear. Some people were praying audibly, while others seemed to be conferring silently with God. Once again I was struck by the fervent expressions on their faces. The faith was in this moment made a reality for those present. They did not pray out in thin air into nothing, because for them God was at this moment experienced as a spiritual reality who listened to their prayers. I understood a bit more of what Durkheim (1991, p. 425) meant when he said “a faith is warmth, life, enthusiasm, the exaltion

\(^{14}\) A gentrified neighbourhood in Oslo.
of the whole mental life, the raising of the individual ‘above himself’.” In this moment the youths were not only giving themselves to God, but also to the community which the faith created. In true Durkheimian style every single prayer became a joint worship, and the community the prayers were created in was constructed, reconstructed and confirmed through worship. I was reminded of the song from earlier, “Give my life before you”, and through the seemingly simple act of praying that was just what they did.

The prayers disappeared one by one, and after the last “amen” was uttered Marcus started preaching. “You are the light of the world.” He said, and continued to read from Matthew 5, 14-16. Once again Karsten was translating, but this time from English to Norwegian. For the Bible verses he used a Bible app on his smartphone. Throughout the whole speech I heard confirming ‘mhms’ and ‘amens’ from around the auditorium. Marcus continued the theme of the gathering, namely to live together as different people with different backgrounds. He told the young Christians that they should live as ‘the light of the world’ and spread the words of God in ‘the darkness’. The main theme was love; love for one another and for those who have yet to find God.

Above we have seen how the personal relationship with God is maintained and strengthened by worshipping together. The maintenance of faith is a result of both a personal and intimate relationship with God, and the re-enforcement of this relationship through worshipping with others. This joint worship creates a feeling of belonging which is necessary to form communities.

Before I knew it, Marcus had left the stage and been replaced by Tore who was informing us about fire safety rules. This was apparently not as exciting as the speech and I could see that people were getting restless and wanted to move on to the groups they had been assigned to where they could get to know each other better and discuss what Marcus had said. God is, in other words, more interesting than knowing where the nearest fire extinguisher is located.

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15 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 16 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 17 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (the Bible, English Standard Version.)
The Church, Not Just a Building.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the basis of belief is a personal relationship with God and a belief that He is forever present in my informants’ lives. This belief then become the basis of how, as discussed above, my informants’ look at themselves. All those who believe are members of God’s church on earth. Although the membership mass of all of those who believe in the Christian religion is too vast to even count, a common belief is the basis for several smaller communities around the globe. These smaller communities constitute the ‘figured worlds’ (Holland, 1998) wherein they live their lives and shape their identities. Together these ‘worlds’ form, reshape and influence not just the way they looked at themselves, but also how other people looked at them.

During the weekend, faith was used to create togetherness among the participants, regardless of their backgrounds, God was never far away neither in conversations nor in actions. Before every meal I could see several heads bowing down thanking God for the food, and almost every activity was started by thanking God for joining all of these people together to learn from each other and to learn to know one another. The aim for the festival was to get to know each other, incorporate the youths who were there in to a greater Norwegian Christian community and to learn how to be able to be strong in their faith so as to be able to share it with other people.

One of the main distinguishing characteristics of Christianity is the belief that it is important to share the faith with other people. Christians believe that the only way to go to Heaven is by accepting Jesus, but to accept Jesus it is important to know Jesus. This was also what Marcus meant when he urged the youths to be ‘the light of the world’, they are urged to lead by example so that other people can be saved too.

This idea is fundamental in the Christian faith and the praxis has been thoroughly documented by anthropologists by, amongst other things, looking missionary work abroad (cf. Coleman, 2000; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2008; Gullestad, 2007) or evangelical work in their own neighbourhoods (cf. Bielo, 2011; Engelke, 2011; Luhrmann, 2012). As mentioned in the previous chapter, by being saved and accepting Jesus they believe people experience the rebirth of the self as a follower of Christ and a forsaking of what was before (Harding, 1987 [2008]; Robbins, 2007a). This idea is also the reason why most big churches are very open and want to appeal to as many people as possible. For my informants it made sense to provide
church services that opened the doors for everyone to step inside and learn more about the teachings of Jesus. It was also seen as a moral duty, as the only way to be saved was through Jesus and although they could not convince people to believe they could at least give people the opportunity to learn more about God by opening their arms and, quite literally, their doors as seen in this example from the first time I went to a Pentecostal youth church.

When I approached the big office looking building which housed the Pentecostal Youth Church I was heading towards I was greeted by two men with big smiles on their faces and t-shirts saying “velkommen hjem” (Welcome home). The typing on the t-shirts were indicative of what the goal of the church was; to make everyone welcome and to make them feel as if they belonged. The feeling of belonging is just as, if not more, important, to look at when discussing the matter as is boundaries (Antonsich, 2010). As they did not recognise me they asked if it was my first time and gladly told me where I could go to get myself some coffee before the service. Inside I met Maria and her boyfriend who were already situated by the coffee stand and by seeing me promptly asked the man behind the counter, who was also wearing a velkommen hjem t-shirt, to make me a coffee as well.

Happy to have a coffee in my hand I looked around to see that the foyer was filled with people who all seemed to be roughly my age congregating in small groups, most of them holding a cup of coffee. There were also several other people adorning the aforementioned t-shirts who seemed to be scouring the room in search for anyone who might seem to be on their own. Before long, our little group was joined by an American whose name escaped me because I became so fascinated with his appearance. He was sporting dreadlocks and was clothed in a manner I can only describe as backpackerish. I would not be surprised to have met him while traipsing around in South-East Asia, but among the well-dressed people in the church he stuck out. He told me he had been on sort of a spiritual journey when he found this church, and although the translation service provided through headphones was not great, he felt as if he had found a home here. “The energy is so great, you know?” he told me when I asked why he kept coming to this church despite not being able to understand what they were saying. At the time I could not stop wondering whether their welcoming attitude was the clue to understanding Pentecostalism’s success in spreading across the globe and thriving in unlikely places (Robbins, 2011, p. 49).

Apparently, the foyer where we were situated was actually a café that was open to the public during the week day, Maria told me that she liked the idea of making the church more of a
social place for everyone to be, not just the congregation. Whether opening the doors and welcoming people in actually lead to people accepting Jesus is unclear, and Maria did admit that she thought most of the people going to the café was probably already members of the church, but by providing an open space for everyone at least people had the opportunity to do further research and learn more about Jesus.

“You Can Come As You Are, But Not Leave As You Were.”

The boundaries and the way of defining belonging through inclusion and exclusion discussed previously in this chapter might seem counterproductive then, if everyone is welcomed in to this community. However, as the title of this subchapter suggests; the boundaries encompassing the figured worlds wherein my informants shape their relationships with God, created by my informants, are simultaneously open and closed. It is possible for everyone to go to church and to become Christians, but they have to want to live the way God wants them to, as exemplified by this excerpt from my second interview with Ola:

If I tell a lie I take part in ruining myself. If I steal something I take part in ruining myself. If I watch porn, I take part in ruining myself. I need to have a will to stop doing it. And not just that I am ruining myself, but also that I kind of bring forth God’s wrath upon myself...

But the will, it is the will. You then understand that all the wrong stuff you do, you have to get rid of it. You have to… wish for what the Bible says is good. It is hard, because sometimes I notice that I don’t want what the Bible says. I want something else. I want to tell a lie that is so much more comfortable than the truth. It’s a sort of processes of emotions. Even if I don’t want to at all I follow it. Although sometimes I don’t. But I try to.

The belief is that part of accepting Jesus is to leave your old life behind, and it is this discontinuity that defines and separates the Christian religion from other religions (Robbins, 2007a, p. 11). As it says in Matthew 7:2116 “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.” This entails that while the church door is big and wide, becoming part of the Christian community and by extension being able to call yourself a believer or follower of Christ means to forsake your former self and “…conversion itself, however long it takes to

16 The Bible - English Revised Version
get there, is always an event, a rupture in the time line of a person’s life that cleaves it into a before and after between which there is a moment of disconnection.” (Robbins, 2007a, p. 11).

So, while everyone is welcome to wander into church, it takes time and effort to truly become a follower of Christ, you have to change, or to quote Ola again, you cannot “… leave as you were.” More importantly than going to church is the continuous conscious will to follow the Bible in an everyday aspect. What is taught in Church provides the congregation with inspiration and a “spiritual refill” as Karsten would call it, but it is how the faith is lived which becomes important and which constitutes the boundaries being made.

One of the first things being said under the opening of the festival was a mentioning of the differences between the youths that were there, as a reminder that everyone was different, but it did not matter because they were all the same under God and the faith they had in him was the most important thing they had in common. By saying this, Tore put down some rather concrete boundaries between believers and non-believers, in an effort to reassure the youths that although it was hard to withstand the pressures from the general society, they had each other. Belief was seen as the most elementary when it came to the individuals’ own lives, and also when interacting with other people. People are either followers of Christ, they have not gotten to know God yet, or they have actively chosen not follow Christ. As we can see from Ola’s statement above, this does not mean that following Jesus is easy as a teenager in Norway.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter we have seen how my informants negotiate belonging by making boundaries based on who do not belong. The words they use to describe themselves become important markers for themselves as a way to distinguish themselves from others whom they do not consider the same. This chapter focuses mainly on the boundaries between those considered Conservative Christians and those considered Liberal Christians and the distinction between those who consider themselves believers or followers of Christ as opposed to norskekristne. I have shown how the boundaries between these perceived categories are simultaneously open and closed by using tactics meant to attract new members by making them feel welcome in to the individual church communities. Within these communities however, there are clear ideas
of what is considered appropriate behaviour, despite the idea that to be saved in the Christian religion one must only accept Jesus.

The boundaries are created when it is perceived that people do not understand what is meant by accepting Jesus, and does not follow the rules. This however does not mean that the rules set forth by the Bible are easy to follow, and it is expressed that it is hard to abide by the Bible in today’s society, but that is the point. It is not meant to be easy to be a Christian. Churches function as communities that empower the believers and help them lead the life that God wants for them, and at the same time keep an open door to those who wish to learn more or get to know Jesus.

In the following chapter I will look further in to how boundary making influences how my informants look at themselves in relation to the greater society of Norway. As mentioned a few times above, it is considered hard to abide by the Bible in today’s society which in some cases make it hard for my informants to place themselves in the same categories as their peers who do not share their religion.
6 The Insider Outsider

Previously I have looked at how faith is expressed in everyday life, how lived religion shapes feelings of belonging and consequently lead to community building, in this chapter I wish to look at how these communities are understood within the context of the ‘imagined community’ of Norway.

In this chapter I will ‘pick up the pieces’, so to speak, by looking at how the everyday nation and belonging within it is negotiated by following the words of the Bible. I will look further into what social realms my informants navigate their lives within and between, how belief comes into play within these realms and how religion is portrayed and understood outwardly.

Controversial (?) Topics

Once I arrive late to the café, I managed to get there before most of the guests, however the volunteers had already finished their preparations. They were sitting in the sofa were we always sat while waiting for people to arrive. Ola gave me a friendly nod when he saw me coming, but returned to the conversation around the table. Not thinking too much about it, it was not the first time people were wrapped up in their own conversations in the café, I went to the back of the kitchen to put my bag away.

When I got back to the foyer I could hear that they were discussing the recent news, the Norwegian Church had just days earlier decided to allow homosexual couples to get married in church. As I had thought, they were not as pleased with the decision as I had been. Rakel expressed “Well, I’ve been thinking about it for a long time, but this is the nail in the coffin. I am leaving the Norwegian church.” And others nodded in agreement. Michael had apparently already left the church, while Ola, who recently got married said he was supposed to have done it ages ago. His wife, however, would not let him because she wanted to get married in the church she had been christened and confirmed in.

While this conversation was going on I had been pouring coffee into the pots, thinking they knew I was there, but that I did not want to disturb the conversation. Although Ola had acknowledged me when I got there, it did not seem as if he fully realised I was present in the room until at this point. He seemed equally aware of my point of view on the matter as I was of his, and after he asked me to bring some coffee and come sit down, he slightly changed the
topic. He asked me, as a woman, if I would want to get married in a church, to which I, as stated in the first chapter, said no. Olivier, who seemed to either not care why the conversation had changed or not realise why, brought the conversation back to gay marriages but was soon hushed down by Ola who went on to talk about weddings.

I was surprised by the sudden change in topic, it was not as if I was unaware of their attitudes towards gay marriage, or towards the Norwegian church for that matter, in fact both topics had been brought up on several occasions. I figured that, although it definitely had something to do with my presence in the room, it had more to do with the place we were at. Although they had recently started putting on music in the form of songs of worship on the speakers, the language café was supposed to be a place for everyone and controversial topics were generally avoided.

**Ignoring Difference**

The language café could hardly be classified as a community, or as a figured world (Holland, 1998). It was not a place to belong or feel at home (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006), it was a place to be. Through the café however, people could establish belonging through meeting other people who introduced them to other communities, or through gaining a greater command of the Norwegian language and thus feel more included in Norway in general.

The volunteers there, did belong to the same figured world of a Christian community in Norway. They shared the same values and often opinions on topics such as gay marriage which could be considered a controversial topic. Most of the time I felt like one of the group whenever I was at the café, but the way Ola changed the conversation when I joined the group reminded both me and them that I was an outsider and not part of that figured world. This was actually enhanced when we started talking about weddings and I was told that it was a good thing I did not want to get married in a church, at least I was being honest and true to my beliefs.

Although conversations in groups within the café could sometimes entail sensitive topics, it was clear that the language café was not the place to start a conversation they knew would end up being a debate. This was not a result of wanting to avoid topics, but rather a normal way of interacting with people with differing opinions. Instead they sought for sameness (Gullestad, 1984, 1997, 2010) and a conversation topic everyone could engage with on a more equal
footing. This I interpreted in the same way as how people often avoid talking politics during family gatherings; it is just not worth it. The language café was not a place for conversion or persuasion, it was a place where anyone was welcome, regardless of their opinions and world views.

**Challenging oneself and others**

During a conversation I had with Ola he once told me that “I kinda feel as if Norway has left me behind in a way.” This was a sentiment that was repeated by several of my informants. It was often uttered during conversations about topics that were either controversial, as the conversation above surrounding the topic of gay marriage in church, or when discussing everyday life. Michael, who told me about his previous struggle with staying away from pornography had told me he was worried about how the general society seemed to sexualise everything and Håkon thought it was a shame that his colleagues always wanted to meet for beers. For many of my informants the Norwegian society was seen as representing not only pressure to do things my informants deemed as wrong, like premarital sex and exaggerated drinking; the Norwegian society was also seen as normalising things that were considered sinful, such as gay marriage.

In the previous chapter we saw that internal distinctions were important when establishing a sense of self towards what was considered the secular society. By emphasising a belonging to a conservative Norwegian Christian community, they could express a joint idea of an identity. This was created within the smaller communities, or the ‘figured worlds’ (Holland, 1998) which “…take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances and artifacts.” (ibid., p.51). In other words, it was within these figured worlds my informants made sense of the world they lived in. However, as everyone else, they navigated their lives not within just one figured world. They worked, studied and took part in various activities outside of church communities, hence their lives were constituted by navigation and negotiation between several figured worlds and being part of the overall ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006) of Norway, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.
Nonetheless, as Ola once said “the most important thing about me is not that I am Norwegian, it is that I am a Christian.” Which meant that regardless of whether they were within what they considered a secular part of society, the values, meanings and understandings learnt within their Christian community was always seen as the most important. It was also seen as a safe place to be, a place they felt belonging and felt at home (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006). Because of this it was a space where they could not only learn from each other but also challenge each other.

**Secularism**

The word secular is hard to define, both for academics and for my informants. This is confirmed by Bangstad (2009, p. 27), who says that there is barely an agreement on what the word actually entails. In other words, secularism can be seen in different ways. For my informants when they talked about secularism as a bad thing, they were not referring to the separation of church and state, often referred to as common ground strategy (Bangstad, 2009, p. 33), but to an understanding of secularism as a way to undermine religiosity in general. Just as most texts about secularism describe the challenges of defining what the word actually entails (Asad, 2003; Bangstad, 2009; Riis & Halman, 2003), so was the way my informants would talk about secularism.

There are several more theorists and academics who have written extensively on the topic of secularism, but I deem it more relevant for the purpose of this study to look deeper at how my informants understood secularism. The word itself was often used as a marker of boundaries where secularism would equal the worldly which was seen as the opposite of them. Secularism was often explained to me in two ways: In one sense they welcomed the separation of church and state, as they believed the Norwegian Church to be too liberal in values and was thankful that they had more alternatives, but on the other hand they looked at secularisation as a possible threat to the society in general, and not just their beliefs.

**Being In the World, But Not Of the World**

During one of the conversations I had with the preachers at the cross-cultural festival one of them told me that “you can’t expect a society that does not believe in Jesus wants the best for you.” I was reminded of that remark when I went to church with Maria and the preacher, as
mentioned in chapter 4, reminded the congregation to look to the Bible and not to society when they needed guidance. The worldly, or the secular, was presented as focusing too much on individualism, and as the preacher continued “when the individual is not good enough, it’s just our own fault in this secular Norway.” These things were said to make the listeners realise that God had given human beings rules to live by for a reason. My informants believed that by following these rules they would be freer, live a happier life and in the end they would hopefully live forever in the Kingdom of God. But, as mentioned in the previous chapter, abiding by these rules was not always easy in a secular society.

Although my informants spent great deals of their lives within a secular society, they were never themselves secular. Just as Tanya Luhrmann (2012) observed among her informants in the vineyard churches in the United States my informants “…live in the same world, yet very different worlds.” (p.300). Every day was seen as a new chance to enhance their relationship with God, but it was also seen as a challenge. They did not necessarily feel as if there were any room in the Norwegian society for them and their world-view. At least not as fully-fledged majority members, as I became increasingly aware of. When I asked Ola directly, he did not skip a beat before he replied “No, I do not consider myself as part of the majority in Norway, at all.”

Not everyone I spoke to was as vocal about being in a minority, but Christianity was always presented as being in a minority position in the general society. As Håkon expressed during an interview:

*I think most people accept that you are a Christian, but as soon as you express conservative views, and you say you are against gay marriage or abortion or stuff like that, and you have what a lot of people would equate with ‘weird’ opinions I think people think that, yeah, it’s okay, you can be a Christian, but you have to think like us.*

Ola and Håkon see themselves in similar but different relations to what is considered the secular society. Looking at the quote from Håkon it becomes clear that he has an idea of how other people might think of him, if he expresses what his beliefs actually are. And Ola went even further by saying his conservative interpretation of the Bible meant that he was a minority in his own home country.
This also brings us back to the example from the beginning of this chapter. Gay marriage was one example of topics where my informants felt they differed from the general society. It was also an issue that was brought up quite a lot during my fieldwork in general, mainly because of the church’s decision to allow for it to happen in churches. It was seen as a divisive issue which further differentiated ‘the conservatives’ from ‘the liberals’. They, as young people, had experienced getting a lot of heat for uttering their opinion on the topic. Maria told me about a friend of hers who was on the church board who had voted no, resulting in an array of negative comments where her age was brought up as a factor, people had argued that she as a young person who had been born and raised in Norway you have been a bit more ‘enlightened’.

“Sometimes They Do Things I Wouldn’t Advise Them To.”

It was not just in relation to gay marriage my informants experienced being different from what was perceived as the majority population. As Lynnebakke and Fangen (2011) noted when looking at young Muslims in Norway, alcohol is an important factor in socialising within the Norwegian society, and by abstaining from alcohol consumption my informants often felt uneasy by the prospect of taking part in certain areas of what they saw as expected from young adults. As Ola, who studied at MF (Norwegian School of Theology), told me when he reflected over his position in the Norwegian society, it was much easier for him to retort to spending time with people who had the same opinions as him. However, he welcomed good conversations where he could be challenged and really had to think about his stance on certain issues.

As opposed to immigrants, they were not a visible minority, nor did they lack an understanding of the Norwegian society. However, they actively chose to not take part in certain parts of what was considered ‘normal life’ and sometimes held views that were, as Maria put it “not really politically correct”, or accepted by their demographic peers, by doing so they experienced their belief to be considered a stigma (Goffman, 1968). Nonetheless, as becomes evident when we will look at the importance of providing people who were new to Norway with a 17th of May celebration in the next chapter, it is imperative to note that my informants did not wish to exclude themselves from the Norwegian society. The boundaries being drawn up by labelling the general Norwegian society as being secular (and not ‘like them’) were perceived to be inflicted upon them. A Norway that was considered too secular
was also considered as putting them in a position of being outsiders, and left them feeling as if they were in a minority position.

As mentioned above, most of my informants did not study at MF, and they did in fact spend a lot of their time navigating life within secular realms. Turid, a girl I met at the language café and who studied to be a teacher told me that studying at the University of Oslo and being around people who mostly did not share her beliefs was both a struggle and an opportunity. She experienced that people were curious when she said she was a Christian and that they often asked good questions which meant she had to think about her stance on different matters. Maria, told me something similar, but added that she was happy she was not the only Christian in her class. It meant that if topics should arise where she disagreed she had some support. And in the more practical aspect of her life, it also meant that she was not the only one who did not partake in parts of the student culture, as she said about her fellow students “Sometimes they do things I wouldn’t advise them to.” This however did not mean she did not want to take part in their lives, but rather that she, as a Christian had to be conscious of how she presented herself and be a good role model, that did not entail telling people off, but rather work with herself to be a good role model, “I want to be more like Jesus.”

“I Think That When People Meet, Magic Happens.”

Although my informants often expressed a feeling of being a part of a minority, the question was not whether my informants consider themselves Norwegian or not, because they do, and they are. The question rather becomes what does it actually mean to be Norwegian, and how come people who have every discernible right to claim a status as part of the majority population feel as if they are in a minority. To understand this, we have to further look at connections between national belonging, Norwegianness and Christianity. My informants’ reasons for choosing to work in a multicultural organisation can also be explained and examined by the same parameters.

The quote that is the title of this subchapter came out of an interview with Karsten. We were discussing his reasons for getting involved in this line of work, and this was his main reason. He had been telling me about his prejudices, about his parents’, friends’ and the society’s prejudices, and had come to the conclusion that the only way to really understand people is to
meet them. And on the other side of that, the only way for people to truly understand him and his beliefs was for people to meet him.

Goode and Stroup (2015, p. 719) says that theorists often divide nations in to two categories; either civic nations which are understood as being inclusive, tolerant and pluralistic, or ethnic nations which focuses on common descent and heritage. They go on to say that more interestingly though, are the more everyday questions and lived experiences of the people within the nation. As stated above, it was never a question of whether my informants were Norwegian or not, but rather what being Norwegian meant or was perceived to mean; what is expected to be the things people have in common and which grants them membership in the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006). I will further explore what everyday (Skey, 2011) and banal (Billig, 1995) expressions of the nation often occurred in the following chapter, but for now I wish to say that more important than anything was the topic of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006) and how belonging was negotiated by creating boundaries (Barth, 1969).

**Bringing the Bible to the People**

During the first half of 2016, not only did the Norwegian church allow for homosexual couples to be married in the church, the Norwegian Bible Society also celebrated its 200th anniversary and used it as an opportunity to bring the Bible to the people. Amongst other things by adorning buses with verses from the Bible, a way to make the Bible more accessible which can be compared with how the British Bible society campaigned in Manchester to make people aware of the Bible’s relevance in the 21st century (Engelke, 2011). They also arranged a number of events, one of which was the Bible Marathon. The goal was for the entire Bible to be read out loud non-stop, and it was held on Domkirkeplassen which is positioned right next to Karl Johans gate, probably the busiest street in Oslo.

When I got there they were reading out loud from Genesis and had gotten to the part where genealogies are described. Ahmed, one of Karsten’s friends, who I had gotten to know at the festival, was volunteering and when he saw me coming he came over to give me a hug. He looked at the woman who was standing in the front and laughed a bit while saying “I hope you have read more of the Bible, so you know it’s not all this boring. Anyway, it’s great that they do this, so everyone can come and hear.” I looked around to see four elderly people
sitting on the chairs that were put up in front of the stage, a couple of tourists stood outside the lawn taking photos, but most of the people present were volunteers.

There was also coffee there which you could buy for 10 kroner, I had not brought cash with me, and they did not accept cards. Ahmed got me a coffee and told me that in the spirit of Christianity he did not want to burden the student with the extra cost. While drinking coffee Ahmed introduced me to some of the other volunteers, Turid who I had met before and Abid, her friend. The conversation started by noting how boring the part of the Bible which was being read was, and that that probably explained the lack of people, during the opening the day before, Mette Marit, the crown princess of Norway, had been there to start the reading and it had been fully packed with people. This got us talking about the connections between Norwegianness and Christianity, I asked them whether they considered Norway a Christian country. Abid hesitated for a bit and said to me that it was impossible to distinguish Norwegian culture from its Christian heritage. It was engrained in the history and the mentality of the people. “To know what Norway’s culture is outside of Christianity you have to go back to the Viking era.”

**Representation**

I asked this question to almost everyone I met, and they would give me variations of the same answer as Abid had given me. Yes, the Norwegian culture was linked to Christianity through its long heritage, values and morals. This is why, as Halvor Moxnes (2011) says Christianity is often represented as ‘Norwegian values’ and something that is ‘ours’, and this can, as seen above, lead to distinctions between ‘us’ the Norwegian Christians and ‘them’ the foreign who are not Christian. But the reply was always followed with a caveat; values and morals cannot be equated with beliefs. As Sebastian put it “Christianity is not culture, and it is problematic that it is presented as such.”

When I mentioned to Ola and Håkon that I had been to the Bible Marathon they did not seem too enthused. “It’s great that they’re bringing the Bible to the people, but it’s like they are too afraid to actually talk about the important questions.” Ola told me. I had found out about the marathon through reading Dagen, a Christian newspaper, and I jokingly asked whether it was

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17 Which of course is not always the case. A lot of the immigrants coming to Norway are, as we saw in the previous chapter, Christians.
mandatory for Christians to read Christian newspapers. Håkon said that he was not a big fan of Dagen, however he sometimes read Vårt Land, but tried to stay away from the comment section. “Have you seen it? It’s just filled with atheists who hate Christians and instead of commenting on the article they go on about how all Christians are stupid.” Ola nodded in agreement and said, a bit irritated, that he was getting sick of how his faith was understood and presented in the media: “Whenever there’s a debate about religion on TV they invite a liberal Muslim, a liberal priest, an atheist and the most outrageous conservative idiot they can find to represent Christianity.”

This was also part of the reason why they did not seem too eager when talking about the Bible Marathon. They questioned what kind of Christianity that was really presented. Putting the spotlight on the Bible was obviously considered a good thing, but they felt as if the people behind the whole anniversary celebration tried to push a liberal form of Christianity where everyone’s opinion mattered the same, even if that opinion was at odds with what the Bible said.

Allowing for Magic to Happen

Tanya Luhrmann (2012) poses the question “How are Christians able to hold on to their faith despite the frank skepticism that they encounter again and again?” (p.300) An interesting question indeed. Throughout my fieldwork I encountered several occasions where the worldly was presented as something they had to work to resist. The only way to truly be able to do this was by reading the Bible and trusting God to guide them. Maria expressed once that “It’s so typical, the Norwegian society is supposed to be so liberal, but not when it comes to us, they never want to listen what we have to say.” Pål Repstad (2005, p. 16-17) has noted that when the media is continuously representing liberal Christianity it may lead to conservative Christians feel as if they are being “persecuted and unfairly treated, so their need for unity is enhanced” [my translation]. The way my informants saw it was that the boundaries between them and the secular society was not put there by them, it was put there by society who did not want to listen to what they actually had to say. They felt they were not represented in any public debate, and that a conservative Christianity was, as Ola said, almost always represented by “…the most outrageous conservative idiot they can find…”

As mentioned above, feelings of not belonging within what was considered the norm of the society were not uncommon for my informants. They wished that there would have been
more room for their opinion in the public debate and were getting tired of being misrepresented. “Christianity is all about love, and people don’t understand that. They think that because I don’t agree with gay marriage, I hate gay people.” Ola explained to me. The magic that Karsten talked about involved meetings between people of different opinions, “only then can we live together.”

Being misrepresented and misunderstood and as a consequence feeling like you are outside the norm are notions Jacobsen (2002) describes in her ethnography about young Muslims in Norway. She suggests that it is common to understand things based on a dichotomy between modern-traditional and moderate-extreme. It is interesting to see the similarities in the ways Jacobsen’s young Muslims navigate and negotiate belonging in the Norwegian society with my informants. Often in the public debate the two religions are presented as opposites (Gullestad, 2002b; Moxnes, 2011), but based on my research it seems as if the lived realities are very similar. The dichotomies described by Jacobsen are also relevant to how my informants are understood. They feel as if people understand them as being a particular way, but they are not really interested in hearing what they have to say. This is why, when I walked in to the language café they stopped talking. They knew they were discussing a divisive topic, and being in an environment where they did not necessarily have the opportunity to fully explain their reasons, they would rather not try to offend anyone.

Conclusions

Having said this, it is important to note that my informants were very clear on the notion that if people did not consider themselves Christians, they did not expect them to abide by the rules of the Bible. For an example, they had no problems with me living with my boyfriend before getting married, but if someone who considered themselves Christians they would most likely have sat down and talked with the person. They believed that by living their lives by following God’s words which were represented in the Bible, they would have a better life. And although they wished for everyone to get to know God, they did not expect them to. However, they wished that people could be more willing to listen to what they had to say and not judge them based on preconceived notions.

In this chapter we have seen how my informants negotiate their belonging within the wider society. They feel as if the general society have moved away from its Christian roots and that
there is no room for their conservative interpretation of the Bible. This is often reflected in conversations surrounding homosexuality, or in lived experiences where they prefer not to engage in activities they deem sinful. This meant that they could look at themselves as a minority and feel like the general society made boundaries. Notions of Norwegianness became relevant because although they were Norwegian they did not feel that their way of life was accepted or represented within the boundaries of what was considered ‘the norm’. What is more important is to look at the lived experiences of the people within the nation, and when doing so it becomes clear that there are a lot of similarities between my informants and young Muslims, as described by Jacobsen (2002).

In the next chapter we will further look at how my informants navigate their lives within the Norwegian nation state and how they negotiate belonging by using the example of how they celebrated the Norwegian constitution day, the 17th of May. By looking at national belonging and nationalism through the lens of the celebration of Norway’s constitution day, the 17th of May, I wish to highlight how boundary making differs on different levels and how the idea that everyone can belong in the church of God plays in to how they view both themselves and the general society. We will further look at how the migrant youths at the festival are being presented with tools on how to feel belonging in Norway and how considering oneself Norwegian is seen as a matter of both entitlement and as a way of feeling at home.
7 Feeling or Being Norwegian

On the 16\textsuperscript{th} of May, the Mission Church was filled with people of all ages, some seemed stressed while others seemed to be enjoying themselves tremendously while milling around carrying decorations in the colours of the Norwegian flag; red, white and blue. Ola had yet to arrive and I could not see any familiar faces through the plethora of people moving from one room to the other. Around 6 o’clock I caught a glimpse of Ola standing outside, trying in vain to open the door while not dropping any of the bags he was carrying. I immediately went and opened the door while simultaneously taking hold of one of the bags, inside it was table cloths and serviettes decorated with the Norwegian flag. Relieved to get in, and to get some help carrying, Ola smiled and told me to follow him upstairs to where the language café was to host the annual 17\textsuperscript{th} of May breakfast the following morning.

As he led me up the stairs and through a hallway I realised how much bigger the church was than what I originally had thought, during the café we would normally be downstairs in an area which seemed to be intentionally designed to host a café so I had not had any reason to explore much of the building. Upstairs however, there seemed to be several meeting rooms, offices and a small kitchenette, I followed Ola to the biggest meeting room where we put the bags on the floor. He immediately started planning how we were to transform the meeting room, which looked a lot like the inside of a church with an aisle dividing two rows of chairs and a huge figure of Jesus on the cross in the front. To the left of Jesus was a piano and to the right was a white screen used to project song lyrics during meetings and services.

As Ola was planning the transformation, Håkon and a woman I had never seen before entered the room, she turned out to be Ola’s sister, Hilde, and was there to lend a helping hand to her little brother who at this point seemed to be increasingly stressed out by the thought of hosting such a big and important event. We spent several hours carrying tables and chairs, decorating the tables with white cloths, red, white and blue ribbons and flowers, and as a finishing touch we put folded serviettes adorned in Norwegian flags and placed them on top of equally extravagant paper plates. When we finally finished, Ola opened a bottle of fizzy water, sat down and exclaimed “\textit{I am going to be so happy when tomorrow is over and done with and I can just concentrate on my exams.}” Our efforts had paid off and the room looked like the perfectly assembled exhibition of national pride one would expect from a room which was to host up to eighty people in a great celebration the following day.
Introduction

In the previous chapters I have discussed personal faith, church communities and the greater community of Norway, within the context of certain theoretical parameters. I have discussed how people understand, negotiate and move between different figured worlds and how boundaries and stigma not only restrict, but also guide their movement between different aspects of their lives, how they understand each other and how other people understand them.

In this chapter I will continue to look at communities, by focusing on the greater community of Norway and where the previous chapter focused on the feeling of belonging, this chapter will be more focused on the ‘politics of belonging’ (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006). The language café’s celebration of the 17th of May, Norway’s constitution day and the second day at the youth festival, will be used as a frame around a greater discussion surrounding nationhood, nationalism and Norwegianness. How that ties in with ‘politics of belonging’ will also be discussed.

First, I will provide an introductory explanation of what the 17th of May is, how it is celebrated throughout the country, and how this is reflected in the language café’s breakfast event. Next, I will look at how my informants place themselves in regard to the greater Norwegian society and how that is reflected in their outward portrayal of the celebrations of the 17th of May, and how these issues are reflected upon in general social settings and in everyday life. I will then use an ethnographic example of the second day at the youth festival to reflect on how entitlement or choice is a defining factor in being able to say one is Norwegian.

In the end, I wish to summarise the chapter by drawing comparisons between perceptions of the nation, their lives within it, and their roles as Followers of Christ within the greater nation. This discussion will lead on to the following chapter were the connections between nationhood and religion in general, and Christianity in particular will be further investigated.

What is so Special About 17th of May?

The 17th of May is in Norway a date that for most inhabitants of the country only equals one thing: Celebration. Norwegian children get out in the streets to parade under a banner representing their schools, commemorating the writing of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. Whether the children themselves are aware of the importance of what they are celebrating or
not, they are without a doubt aware of the connotation to the date 17th of May and they are from a very young age instilled with the ideals surrounding the celebration\(^{18}\); Democracy, Freedom and *Likhet* (understood both as sameness and equality). Unlike many other country’s national celebrations, Norway’s constitution day focuses on the children (Blehr, 1999; Gullestad, 1997). Across the country small towns, villages and bigger cities arrange parades, festivities and gleeful activities directed at children. For older children\(^{19}\) it has become increasingly common to start the day with an elaborate breakfast, often accompanied by champagne, before venturing out in the streets to watch the younger children parading and singing national anthems. The language café’s breakfast is not any less celebratory, but it is alcohol free and the emphasis is put on both teaching immigrants about the 17th of May and to have fun and celebrate in a setting where everyone is welcome to join, regardless of age and religion, and without the perceived negative influences of alcohol.

According to Eriksen & Sørheim (2003, p. 94) the building of history is more important in Norway than in other countries. Håkon emphasised this point by starting his speech with a brief history lesson, directed at people who were new to Norway and thus indirectly implying that people who had been Norwegians for a long time, or all their lives, would already be familiar with the history.

\[I\text{ don’t know how well you know the history behind our national day, but I am thinking that a history lesson is fitting. Briefly told: Before 1814 Norway was in a union with Denmark, during this time Denmark was part of the losing side in the Napoleonic wars and thus had to give Norway over to Sweden. It was in this period our own constitution was signed in Eidsvoll and in a short period of time, we were an independent state. Shortly thereafter we entered in to a new union with Sweden, but could keep the constitution.}\]

Norway's constitution did not just make it so that we could become our own independent state, but it also gave freedom to the people by dividing the power, so that when we entered in to the union with Sweden, the Swedish king had less power. The constitution was not perfect, but values like

\(^{18}\) After year 4 in school, children are supposed to be able to “converse about and explain why 17th of May and 6th of February are celebrated, and tell others about national days in other countries” (http://www.udir.no/ki06/SAF1-03/Helg/Kompetansemaal/competence-aims-after-year-level-4?lplang=eng)

\(^{19}\) On the 17th May it is emphasised that everyone is allowed to be a child.
As the breakfast was being held in the church, several similar gatherings across the country followed the same recipe where the ideals of the constitution were presented as those of democracy and freedom, and the allegiance and gratefulness for being allowed to reside, live and enjoy life in such a wonderful place were expressed through re-iterating the story-telling of how Norway as a democracy came to be and through feeling a sense of community when uttering the words of the national anthem.

“\textit{Yes, We Love This Country!}”

“\textit{Ja, vi elsker dette landet, som det stiger frem…”} The entirety of the people in the meeting room were standing up, singing the words of the Norwegian national anthem. Around me were people from all corners of the world, dressed in \textit{bunads}, suits and carefully picked out dresses. The efforts put in to the previous night and this morning’s preparations had paid off, people had happily eaten the food we had put forth and were complimenting the tricoloured flowers and banners neatly placed on the tables. The atmosphere was calm and content, and although some people had expressed concerns regarding the act of getting up to sing the national anthem, everyone had joined in when the piano started to play. During the first verse, almost everyone (with the exception of a group of Asian tourists who had joined a friend to come celebrate with us) had been reciting the text with no aid from the printed text in the programme Ola had made. By the second verse I could see eyes covertly searching for the lyrics on their programmes and by the third verse, everyone was holding the programme to read the lyrics. There was no shame in not knowing the lyrics to the third verse, but it was obvious that it was expected to at least know the first verse by heart. After the piano had stopped playing, applause erupted as if to both thank the pianist and as an audible jubilation to confirm the lyrics of the song; yes, we did love this country, and we were here to celebrate it!

Although when asked most of my Norwegian informants would downplay their position of being Norwegian and rather accentuate their position of being \textit{followers of Christ}, they could never get away from the fact that their nationality was Norwegian. The social scenes wherein they navigated their encounters both with themselves and with others through the language café were undoubtedly Norwegian. Hence Norwegian ways of being were repeatedly reproduced both in blatant and more banal (Billig, 1995) and everyday (Skey, 2011) ways. It
was not as if they were unaware of this, as a matter of fact, small quirky things that were considered ‘typical Norwegian’ were often the source of conversations and subsequently a good source for laughter.

During one of the cafes Olivier, a regular at the café, was eating a slice of bread when he suddenly stopped and just looked at it. The rest of the people around the table looked at him with bemusement, and when he noticed this he explained that bread and pålegg was so confusing because there were so many rules. The Norwegian people around the table laughed at his comment, but those who were not Norwegian just nodded in agreement. This sparked a conversation on how to eat bread with pålegg, what kind of pålegg goes with what, and why it is okay to eat ham with white cheese, but not with brown cheese. This conversation was also repeated during the 17th of May breakfast when many of the guests seemed rather unsure about how to tackle the huge table with various food laid out in front of them. One of the young boys on my table who was of middle-eastern heritage, explained to his friend who was ethnic Norwegian: “It’s not always that easy for us foreigners to understand how to eat Norwegian food properly. The food we eat at home is very different from all of this bread, but I grew up in Norway so I understand how to compose a brødskive.”

Although far be it for me to say that Norway is the only country in the world that has unspoken rules of what spread to put on your sandwich, it was these small things that seemed to become relevant for the non-native Norwegians when I asked them what they thought of as being typical Norwegian. Rarely did they speak of the bigger things that one might think are blatantly obvious, like the celebration of the 17th of May or Bunads, but they would rather accentuate things that for Norwegians seemed ‘natural’ and just the way things are, like the unwritten rules of composing a brødskive and how it seemed so important for Norwegians not only to own a house, but to add on to that with perhaps a cabin and/or a boat as well.

**Extraordinary Ordinary**

During the celebration of the 17th of May Norway as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) is both celebrated and reinforced throughout the country. Often through speeches held by prominent members of local communities (Buxrud, 2015). As most national day

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20 Which incidentally sparked a discussion on how in Norway there only seems to be two types of cheese; brown and white. Olivier, who was French, almost seemed to find this offensive.

21 Literally means a slice of bread, but in this context a closer translation would be an open sandwich.
celebrations around the world, this particular day is a mark in the calendar where national pride and patriotism are not only celebrated, but also highly encouraged. It is also, a day where the multicultural Norway is highlighted and celebrated through (amongst other things) speeches (Buxrud, 2015; Buxrud & Fangen, 2017). Everyone is welcome to come join the breakfast and everyone is entitled to celebrate, as pointed out in the speech of the day, performed by Håkon:

Freedom is a word that’s usually linked to a lot of feelings. Some of you might have come to Norway because you come from war struck countries. You might have experienced war and persecution yourself, or you might have friends or family that experience it. I think that perhaps many of you who might have fled from your home country because of war or other things understand better than me what it means to celebrate 17th of May.

In this part of his speech he points to the fact that everyone in this room were not only welcome to celebrate, they were perhaps even more entitled to celebrate the values that 17th of May, according to Håkon, represents; democracy and freedom, than Norwegians who had led a relatively sheltered life where things such as freedom and democracy is taken for granted. Inadvertently Håkon here touches on what Elgenius (2011) says about national celebrations and that the day in itself is a confirmation and reproduction of community-building, and in prolonging that; of nation-building. The 17th of May is a day where being Norwegian is not questioned, because it promotes the core value of democracy: freedom. On this day the Norwegian ‘we’ is expanded to include everyone, while at the same time it is also diminished in the sense that the people on podiums giving speeches promoting inclusion and liberal values are mostly part of the majority population, and thus is in a unique power position to define who ‘us’ and ‘we’ are, as Døving (2009:108) states “It is the majority’s history and traditions that makes the context, or the frames for the development of a multicultural society.”

Blatantly Banal

Although the 17th of May is an expression of what Skey (2015) refers to as ‘ecstatic nationalism’ and describes as “Events designed to generate forms of social solidarity linked to a national community or movement” (p.95), the components of this particular event are to be found in the increased attention given to mundane tasks and activities, things people do on a
regular basis without giving it a second thought. As such it exemplifies and highlights representations of everyday life in a ritualised manner, in other words; the 17th of May becomes a blatant portrayal of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig 1995). The celebration of the country’s constitution day through such a mundane activity as a breakfast is thus an interesting concept in the grand scheme of things, and opens up for an interesting conversation on Norwegianness in the context of my informants.

However mundane the breakfast might seem, the event in and of itself stands out in that it involves concepts which, standing alone, are mundane and banal, but put together forms a ritual. Ola, who every week arranges a language café consisting of many of the same elements as this breakfast, became ridden with stress by the thought of being responsible of this particular celebration because it had to contain certain elements to make it stand out and to make sure he stayed within the confines of the traditions he had to follow. His ever-increasing stress-level made it evident that the breakfast had to be a success, the event was not only important for the café, but for Ola personally.

Looking at the example from the 17th of May and seeing how hard the volunteers worked to make the celebration both fun for them and to an extent educational for the people who were new to Norway, shows that taking part in what is considered Norwegian is important to them. While other celebrations would perhaps focus more on the telling of the history surrounding the 17th of May, Håkon through his speech, focused on how the ideals of the Norwegian constitution could be transferred and understood through the words of God in the Bible, as shown in this example:

Whatever you might think about when hearing the words freedom and 17th of May, there’s one thing that’s for sure. God has promised us freedom. God has never promised us that it will be easy, but he has promised that those who believe in Him will receive this freedom. In the Romans 8:1-2 it says: “If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won’t be punished. The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death.”

The Bible was used to exemplify Norwegian values and the values put forth in the constitution. Aside from the verse above, Håkon mentioned another bible verse in his speech,
both verses referring to freedom and how to cut loose from the ties we have to the modern world.

This is also where Ola’s remark about feeling as if Norway had left him behind, becomes relevant. On the one hand, several people expressed a sense of loss because they felt that Norway, the country they were born in and which was important enough for them to plan an elaborate constitution day celebration to celebrate, had rejected Christianity. On the other hand, they wanted to cut loose from the worldly.

It became obvious during the celebration that not only do my informants feel like they belong in Norway, they also hold the power to grant belonging (Antonsich, 2010, p. 650) to immigrants, as shown in Håkon’s speech. They are in a position where they are able to negotiate the boundaries between ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’. As Nira Yuval-Davies (2006, p. 204) says: “The boundaries that the politics of belonging is concerned with are the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’.” In other words, these boundaries constitute any given ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006). Belonging to the imagined community of Norway, or the Norwegian nation state, is simultaneously taken for granted (Billig, 1995; Skey, 2011, p. 2) and negotiated, by showing how Norway’s history can be reflected in the Bible while at the same time underlining the challenges they faced in their everyday life. Still more importantly than being able to feel belonging to Norway, it was clear that it was within their ‘figured world’ (Holland, 1998) they felt at home.

“The Norwegians Don’t Have a Choice but to Accept That We Are All Norwegians.”

The Saturday of the youth festival was dedicated to a seminar called “Different Together”. It was being held by Sebastian and Mette, a married couple who met when she was doing missionary work in West-Africa and who now resided in the South-East of Norway. The white screen which minutes previously was used to project the lyrics of songs of worship was now showing a videoclip from Youtube called “This is Norway22”. The video was a funny

22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebqdwQzmSHM
little clip which caricatured Norwegian’s habits and ways of being. It was obvious that a lot of the people sitting there either recognised themselves or someone they knew in the stereotypes being portrayed. The biggest laughter was achieved when the voiceover explained *russetiden* by saying: “We drink and drive red and blue cars while not doing our homework.”

After the videoclip, Sebastian started talking. He addressed the majority of the audience who were migrant-youths and said “*God has given us a model for how we can integrate, he has called us to be where we are. Not where we’re not.*” The message was clear, there was a meaning to why we were sitting right where we were: God’s will is everywhere and he works in mysterious ways. “*Norwegians don’t have a choice but to accept that we are all Norwegian.*” The audience was eagerly paying attention and just as under the speech the previous day I could hear people’s acknowledging “mhms” and “amen” from around the auditorium. It was obvious that Sebastian had hit home with not only the migrant-youths, but for everyone listening. The video we watched earlier was being used as an example of the ‘typical Norwegian’ (although exaggerated greatly) and the challenges the Norwegian youth, including those present, met in their everyday life. Matters concerning alcohol and sex were especially brought forth as examples of a society which had deviated from God and his will, a notion which I have mentioned several times previously and which kept being repeated throughout my fieldwork. The point was to show that the youth did not have to participate in “sinful” activities to belong in Norway. There were alternative arenas, like the one they were in now.

By arranging festivals that crosses denominational boundaries and which solely is based on the commonality shared by a common belief, the hope is to create an environment where the youth can feel at home and where they feel belonging. Belonging in this sense refers both to ‘feeling at home’ (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006) within the smaller figured world (Holland, 1998) created by this gathering, but also ‘politics of belonging’ (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006) within the imagined community (Anderson, 1991) of Norway. Sebastian who was doing the speech did himself migrate to Norway from West-Africa, so when he told the youths that Norwegians just had to accept that they are Norwegians too, it seemed to have more of an impact on the youth listening than when Håkon said the same thing during his 17th of May speech. After all, Sebastian was a man who, although moving to

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23 Celebration of the end of 13 years of schooling.
Norway as an adult, understood how it felt to be visibly ‘different’ and have to make yourself at home instead of being entitled to belonging.

Choosing or Being Entitled to Belong

Eriksen & Neumann (2011) explain that historically “There is an unbreakable bond between Norway understood as the Norwegian people and Norway understood as the Norwegian territory. If people do not cover the territory, Norway is no longer Norway, and if the territory is not homogenous, it stops functioning as a nation” [my translation]. Which is an example of how to define an ethnic nation. The problem with this definition is that even if someone has made Norway their home, but does not have the necessary roots to claim a belonging they can, by definition, never be Norwegian (Eriksen & Sørheim 2003), which raises the question of whether being Norwegian is purely a matter of whiteness.

By looking at these two examples it is easy to see that neither Håkon nor Sebastian considered Norwegianness to be solely a matter of whiteness. This, however did not mean that other people did not. Leading up to 17th of May 2016 there was particularly one discussion in the media which highlights my point24, a woman in Stavanger had gotten a bunad from her husband and as she was wearing a hijab, she wanted the hijab to be in the same style as her bunad. By the help of local seamstresses she got a specially embroidered hijab to wear with her national costume. This in turn led to a heated debate not only concerning whether it was okay to wear a hijab with a bunad, but whether she could be considered Norwegian at all. Although the hijab-debate is only one example, the attitude held by some people that you cannot be Norwegian if you are Muslim, or if you are not white, is familiar to most people. Sebastian told me he had several times experienced episodes which had made him feel unwelcome in Norway, and he told me

“It’s a problem that Norwegians are taught that they are so inclusive and liberal, I have black skin and I have several times experienced the opposite. I wish that they could instead teach Norwegians how to be inclusive and liberal.”

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The awareness of prejudice can be seen as a reason why both of them chose to use the word Norwegian to incorporate all those who listened. To reassure them that they are welcome to belong in the country.

As opposed to Håkon, who was in a position of power, Sebastian did not have the perceived entitlement to grant belonging within the nation state. Although the words they were saying were very similar, the message they conveyed was actually rather different. When Håkon said “we’re all Norwegian today” he opened up the definition of being Norwegian to include those with immigrant backgrounds too. He was referring to ‘politics of belonging’ (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006), while Sebastian on the other hand, was talking about belonging as ‘feeling at home’ (ibid.). Sebastian and his listeners might not have an ancestral lineage from Norway, but they had all made a home for themselves in the country.

**Conclusions**

As we can see in this chapter, the 17th of May celebration is a day representing feelings of unity and belonging, it becomes a joint memory for an entire nation and there is a need for continuity to uphold the feeling that the nation is indeed one, however much of an outsider one might feel any other day of the year. Except for the absence of alcohol, the café’s celebration of the constitution day was not any different from all the other thousands of celebrations taking place around the country. It focused on national pride and highlighted the parts of the country’s history which was relevant on this particular day, often from a biblical point of view. Neither was it really very different from any other day at the café, although obviously it was more thoroughly planned and formally executed.

When putting the example from the festival alongside the celebration of 17th of May, it becomes clear that belonging is something that matters on all levels and for everyone. However, the need to feel at home within the nation is given more precedence when talking to the migrant youth. For them it is more important to feel at the nation they are living in is considered their home by themselves. In both examples we can see how boundaries are being simultaneously drawn and torn down. For the migrant youth they are being told they are Norwegian and at home in Norway, while at the same time shown what part of the Norwegian society they do not need to take part in. On the 17th of May exclusionary boundaries between those who are not Norwegian and those who are, were broken down.
By looking at these two examples it is interesting to see how notions like ‘Norwegian’, ‘Belong’ and ‘Us’ are negotiated and narrated differently by different people and in different occasions, while also observing that the Bible is always used as the final answer.

In the next chapter I will provide an overall discussion and conclusion of the thesis which will further explore how everyday religion, community, boundaries and nationalism is negotiated and understood by using the Bible as a GPS for life.
8 Conclusive Remarks

The hot summer weather came early while I was doing my fieldwork, and I was sitting on Maria’s balcony with a discarded blanket next to me. We were in the middle of what was supposed to be an interview, but that had ended up being a conversation back and forth, when we started talking about discussion boards online. I mentioned that I had seen several places that Christianity was used an argument against immigration and after thinking for a bit she replied by saying “I have seen that. I think they are completely missing the mark. They have obviously not read the Bible. Because they [immigrants] are welcome, Jesus was an immigrant, too!” Her reaction was repeated by everyone I was talking with, Michael told me flat out that “I think that it is totally bullshit. It’s totally against the teachings of Christ.”

Their responses perfectly encapsulate the research aim for this thesis, namely, why do my informants spend their time working or volunteering to include immigrants in to both the Norwegian society and to a Norwegian Christian community, and within that, how are belonging and differences negotiated? The answer would always be ‘through the Bible’, or as stated by Sebastian during the festival by using “the Bible [as] a GPS for life”.

In this thesis I have chosen to look at how young Christians negotiate belonging, both within Christian communities and within the wider Norwegian society. Through participant observation I have gained an understanding of how my informants understand and define themselves and others within different contexts.

In this thesis I have shown how Christianity has, and continues to, influence perceptions of what is considered Norwegian values (Moxnes, 2011) and how intertwined the historical idea of Christianity’s presence is with common understandings of Norwegian values, traditions and conceptions of who ‘we’ are (Gullestad, 2002a; Iversen, 2012). Furthermore, I showed how the ways in which my informants view Christianity is often seen as parallel to what the Norwegian church represents.

In other words, this thesis has explored how for my informants, being a Christian is a choice, a choice that has to be made every day, and it is a commitment. It is not enough to pretend to believe, or to say you are a Christian without abiding by the Bible. A person has to strive towards a life that is as close to Jesus’ teachings as possible. Worship is important, but a personal relationship is the most important thing and if this relationship is present, everything
else is of less value. Being a Christian means caring about other people, but it also means being part of a community. It means supporting other people and helping them, regardless of their own beliefs, but hoping that they will see the light. It means sacrificing some of the things that a secular society sees as normal and expected, but doing so with the knowledge of being part of something bigger. It means understanding that it is difficult to follow the rules, but that there is room for failure. Most importantly it means to have something in common. They have a thing that is greater than anything else, in common. This means that even in a gathering of people who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and who are different ages and have different interests, people bond and they have something to talk about. They share challenges and they share beliefs, they share a struggle and a want to not succumb to a life lived in sin. It also means seeing people as people and understanding that everyone is God’s children, everything else is irrelevant.

By having this understanding of faith, my informants strongly distinguish faith from the Norwegian values that are often presented as Christian and consider themselves in a minority position within the Norwegian society. Notions of belonging, especially as feeling at home (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davies, 2006) are considered important factors in how they negotiate and conceptualise everyday life. The nation is not perceived to matter as much as belief, but it is still an influential factor in how they perceive themselves because they lead their lives and form their figured worlds (Holland, 1998) within the imagined community of Norway (Anderson, 2006). Although leading life within the Norwegian society necessarily means being influenced by the banal realities of everyday life (Billig, 1995; Skey, 2011) within that society, the biggest and most important influencer in every decision they make is the God’s words as presented in the Bible.

This can further lead to a further discussion on notions of Norwegianness, because in theory my Norwegian informants ‘tick all the boxes’ of what is considered Norwegian, but they do not feel represented or understood by the general society, and look at themselves as part of minority. That however does not limit their notions of who is Norwegian, or who are welcome to claim belonging to Norway, as shown in chapter seven. This becomes increasingly interesting seen in light of the upsurge in nationalistic rhetoric which emphasises national heritage and Christianity which has been prevalent both within the borders of Norway and abroad in recent times, and could be the subject of a further study.
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