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# Placemaking and Belonging in Grønland

*An Ethnographic Study of Constructions of Place  
and Identity in an Oslo neighbourhood*

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## Abstract

Based on the empirical study of small businesses in Grønland - Oslo, this thesis is an examination of 'place' as process and form. It is an approach to Grønland as a sum of social processes that are historical, political, and cultural in nature. The argument for social processes as a placemaking tool is based on the feelings of belonging that my informants derive from their shops and from Grønland. The entitlement they feel to the area, and their efforts to mark it with signs, symbols and practices give them meaning. In so doing, Grønland is formed and transformed, and as a result, creating a constant shift of meaning and transformation between the people and the place. Because the biggest population of Grønland is African and Asian background, there are discussions on migration, globalisation and transnationalism, as well as anti-immigrant rhetoric in Norway. As a conceptual tool, this thesis is also an argument for the 'bounded fieldsite' at a time when globalisation threatens the relevance of boundaries. The same sentiment of boundedness or restriction extends to the ethnographic tools used. In the study of abstract subjects like 'place' and 'placemaking' as this thesis does, it is helpful to base oneself in a defined fieldsite (arbitrary location), as a window into the abstract, as opposed to a multi-sited ethnography. A small Somali shopping centre and one shop, in particular, were my base in the field, and this allowed me to connect specific practices of shop owners to wider shows of solidarity, for instance. Ultimately, this thesis is an ethnographic study of place, placemaking, and belonging in Grønland.

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To Abdul. I am grateful to have met such a kind and helpful person who knows “everything and everyone” in Grønland. I thank Lati too, for introducing me to you.

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# Introduction

On the 27th of August 2022, the district of Old Oslo in conjunction with several youth organisations in Oslo organised *Grønlandsfest* - a celebration of Grønland, Oslo's most well-known immigrant neighbourhood. On the day's programme were song performances, a debate on the gentrification of the neighbourhood, entertainment by two deejays, and the winner of the event's writing contest was announced. The topic of the writing contest was *Mitt Grønland* - "My Grønland". I would like to introduce this thesis with the winner's submission below.

## **MY GRØNLAND**

My name is Sumaya Ali Isse. And I always hear about Grønland, but never *from* Grønland.

Grønland was my physical home for 17 years. 17 nice and warm years. Until the strangest thing happened one day. I met a person. A bizarre person who told me things I had never heard of.

This person who had never set foot in Grønland, the literal and metaphorical heart of Oslo, and came to me again and again. Either *she* told me what she thinks Grønland is or *he* questioned my Grønland, my existence and/or characteristics. So much so that I actually began to doubt, even though I knew the truth. I began to choose my words carefully, careful not to speak too passionately, and honed the uncomfortable fake laugh. You know, the one around *them*. The ones I didn't grow up with. The ones that I let wreck my identity and what I held dear. You know who I'm talking about. Who else has the audacity to tell you about how and where you grew up? Not only that, they will also tell you where you are from. Without asking you, the person whose hometown and culture are in focus, what you think. Maybe, and don't take my word for it, but maybe I know better than you?

What was my strength and pride had overnight become my greatest shame. But what was it that I did that was so shameful?

"Isn't it dangerous in Grønland?"

"What do you mean?"

"Yeah, you know, everything you read about Grønland and crime"

"Where did you read this?"

"There are always stories about Grønland in the newspapers"

"Yes, because newspapers have always been a reliable source of information. And I am sure that those who write that repugnance have an inside perspective on what it is like to live in Grønland. Thank you for this insightful conversation."

"How do you manage to speak Norwegian so well?"  
"Hmm, how do you manage to speak only Norwegian?"  
"When did you come to Norway?"  
"Yesterday, you?"

"You are so good at speaking Norwegian"  
"Oh, you too! How long did it take you to learn it?"

Instead of answering like that, I'd rather be liked for something I wasn't. Later, I regretfully realized that this was the real shame.

I was asked to describe my Grønland, but for me Grønland is a *mine*, a what and who. Grønland is not something you can own, but a feeling. Grønland is a way of being, a way of thinking, a state of being. Grønland is a way of holding your head high. Grønland is seeing beauty where others are fixated on difference. Grønland is creating an impenetrable community, despite the large flow in and the large flow out. A community that has always been characteristic of Grønland, even before the diaspora. Grønland is a delicate humility. The type you acquire when you yourself have been on the outside. Like everyone who has been on the outside, the world's image of you is rarely correct.

The real Grønland. Grønland is a mother who wanted a better life for her children. Grønland is a father who does not want his children to witness the war, as he did. Grønland is a boy who runs and jokes with his friends. Grønland is a girl who reads every minute of the day she can. One who devours Discovery and Animal Planet documentaries on the historic television set. Grønland is a newborn brother who is cared for by mum, dad, siblings, and his hip uncle and aunt - all under one roof. Grønland is the elderly Pakistani uncle who helps you bag your goods in Ankara. Grønland is a nickname like Ankara, which came long before my time, although the shop is now called Pak Star. Grønland is a kindergarten aunt who gives warm hugs and hides you under her jilbab when you are sad. Grønland is the rare teachers who transcend prejudice and disapproval and find a way to relate to children growing up in a different culture. Grønland is children who grow up in 1,2,3 cultures, who learn to embrace each other in all 3 without completely fitting into any of them. If you look up from the screens, you see that my Grønland is nothing like the repugnance and crime it is portrayed as. My Grønland is my childhood home, a place where my most precious childhood memories seek shelter from this uncompromising reality.  
(SuperGrønland,2022)

This thesis is an inquiry into Grønland as a place in Oslo whose reach seems to go further than its geographical demarcations. It is a question about the people who live and work in the neighbourhood, those who move through, and even those who have never stepped foot in it -

how it is perceived in public rhetoric. What is it to *be* in Grønland? How do people constitute the area, and how does “it” in turn affect its environment in a dialectic relationship? I imply the agency of place – of Grønland, as a social force constituted by people, politics and history, that adapts to changes that have happened in it in time, but which itself has stood the test of time. As a space loaded with meaning for the people who live and work there, and one that exudes different meaning to ‘others’, a place that is embodied. From Sumaya’s poem above, “Grønland is not something you can own, but a feeling. Grønland is a way of being, a way of thinking, a state of being. Grønland is a way of holding your head high.” Grønland is a culmination of social realities and processes, while also being a distinct form of space, buildings, and small businesses.

Somali-owned businesses were my main window into the themes that command this thesis, and in particular, as I will explain in more detail further on, mama Najma’s shop. By zoning in at her shop, I found concrete ways through which people - ethnic minorities - assert their identity and claim belonging to a larger community in Grønland. Through interactions with other business owners and everyday people, I saw small acts of solidarity and resistance, which accumulate to characterise the neighbourhood. The buildings, shop names, sounds and smells are telling of the people who live in Grønland, and the people who it is meant for. History, on the other hand, tells a story of how Grønland came to be, its maker, who it was meant for, and how it has fared through the years. In both the past and the present, Grønland has retained its distinctness - a quality of vibrancy, unpretentiousness, ethnic diversity, and small shops, a homely quality to some. Both throughout history and today, that Grønland-ness is also marred by crime, chaos and difference.

This thesis is concerned with understanding Grønland as a place that is constituted by a distinct set of practices - in the domains of business, street life and through networks of solidarity. The social patterns and expectations that these practices manifest, in turn also shape the people who live in, or interact with Grønland, and continually, the place itself.

So far I have introduced the research question of this thesis - an ethnographic study of people and place as processes and forms that continually reshape each other. I am now going to share my first impressions as I entered the field of Grønland, and revisit once more, the background of this work. After that, we will briefly travel back in time to contextualise Grønland in history, for history is one of the processes that I argue forms the neighbourhood. There is a more concrete account of history’s role in the formation and maintenance of Grønland in chapter 1, but here, it is merely an introduction, and attempted comparison between Grønland then and now. I then take us through my journey into the field, detail the methodology used, and finally, lay out the theoretical framework of the thesis before proceeding to the first chapter.



## First Impressions

“Grønland is the place where Oslo’s pulse beats the hardest” -(Stedanlyse, 2017).

I lived in Grønland throughout the length of my ethnographic fieldwork, and I can readily add my voice to the chorus of others who describe the neighbourhood as the heartbeat of Oslo. I had been to Grønland countless times before, but it became even more vibrant and complex, both upbeat and slow under my then-observant eye. There was hardly a quiet moment. If I stood on my apartment balcony that faced the popular Smalgangen alley, and even at 3 o’clock in the morning in the middle of a pandemic with no bars or restaurants open, I was sure to hear a friendly brawl between a group of teenage boys, a not so friendly one, or someone shouting for no apparent reason. The passageway is almost right above the metro station whose entrance stairs open into both ends of the alley, and whose tracks run beneath my building complex. On one end is the Olafiagangen open area on the eastern side of Akerselva and on the other, the Grønland square. The third and fourth stairs descend to the metro underneath the Nylandsbrua bridge at Olafiagangen and across the main street through Grønland - Grønlandsleiret right by the infamous Stargate pub, still on the eastern bank of Akerselva. All four metro entry points have a regular cluster of people hanging around, usually teenage boys selling drugs or drug addicts around Stargate pub. Grønland square however is the centre of the hustle and bustle.

There is a steady rhythm of people traffic: the middle-aged men, mostly Somali and Sudanese who are normally seated on the benches at the square discussing one thing or another in their respective languages, or simply watching the world around them. There is the seemingly Norwegian lady at the metro entrance always asking for a cigarette or some change from anyone who will listen. There is the homeless Romanian man sitting outside the grocery chain store *Meny* who will beg you for money with a pitiful face and then wink, blow you a kiss and say he loves you when the initial request is not met. You will most likely also see a group of giggling school girls hanging around, some with hijabs and some without, with

heavy makeup and failed attempts at looking older. Not far away is going to be an equivalent group of boys with fresh haircuts, designer tracksuits, and incredibly clean Nike shoes. Amidst that you will hear at least four different languages from people walking briskly by and talking to each other or on a mobile phone, a taxi driver waving to get your attention and then asking if you, “sister”, would like a taxi ride because he has great prices. In what feels like the background sound to all of this are drivers angrily hooting at someone who isn’t driving when the traffic light turns green, another who isn’t giving right of way at a turn, or seagulls hovering over bread crumbs, dustbins, and leftovers at the square.

As a result of all of this activity, the air is heavy. A mixture of cigarette smoke, the smell of sunkissed fruit and vegetables as you walk past the many Frukt og Grønt (fruit and vegetable) shops, fleshiness past the doors of Halal butcheries, and the aroma of curry from the corner Tandoori restaurant competing with the greasiness of the newly opened Burger stall will waft through the already dense air. Occasionally, you will catch a whiff of marijuana in the air, especially towards Olafiagangen and the streets further away from Grønlandsleiret. These whiffs grow into short steady streams as it gets darker and especially on weekends, the concentration is centralised under Nylandsbrua, towards Vaterlands park and the Oslo Sentrum Radisson hotel. The young men who hang around the area often offer marijuana and other substances for sale to whomever they deem a prospective buyer, if not a regular customer. In particular, this area around Akerselva - the Vaterlands bridge that connects Brugata to Grønland - was built in the early 1600s as the entrance portal into Grønland (Stedsanalyse, 2017, page.5). What welcomes you *now* at this century-old entry point is a strong stench of urine that is a reliable constant on one side, and a signature smell of beer and beer breath emanating from the Stargate and Underbrua pubs on the other side of the bridge.

I moved to the neighbourhood at the beginning of April 2021 to immerse myself in the field as far as was possible considering the covid-19 restrictions at the time. I found a nice apartment along Smalgangen - loosely translated as “the small alley”, a building complex right by the main Grønlandsleiret street through Grønland. The alley, which is Grønland’s main shopping one starts a few metres from Olafiagangen and stretches out to Grønlands torget - the square. The shops in the alley range from kebab shops, a halal butchery, one of Grønlands most popular Frukt og Grønt shops, both new and second-hand clothing stores, home supplies stores, a pharmacy, a forex bureau, electronic gadget repair shop, cafes, grocery stores, and textile shops. In terms of economic activity, this alley and the general area

are reminiscent of the place's working-class history, whilst simultaneously being a far cry from it through the current types of businesses and the ethnic makeup of the neighbourhood.

My six months of fieldwork in Grønland were initially meant to find ways in which independent small shops could be considered as a form of resistance to majority ethnic rhetoric about Grønland as a place packed with criminals and antisocial, anti-Norwegian immigrant groups. After a few weeks in, I was already fascinated by the way this place seemed to have its own magnetic field, a force that was distinct to Grønland and the people in it. All economic and social activity seemed to move at a different tempo, a different rhythm, and according to different norms as opposed to say, neighbouring Bjørvika or even Grunerløkka, a neighbourhood that is also ethnically diverse. I decided to focus on Grønland as a social and economic field that is maintained in constant making and remaking processes while simultaneously maintaining a distinct spatial and conceptual character. I zoned in further on small Somali shops to examine their role in the making of Grønland, and that's when the key insight of this thesis started to become apparent - that while various influences and processes continued to maintain and remake Grønland, the place in turn (trans)formed people, the society, and economy in a causal relationship. While I sought to understand the socioeconomic and historic forces that distinguish Grønland as an urban enclave, I also discovered what Grønland *means* to people, what Grønland *is*, and how Somali shops are affirmations of identity and belonging. This thesis is therefore a study of the relationship between people and place through temporality - history and the present -, socioeconomic processes like social norms, solidarity, and small shops. Although there is considerable research and data on "people and place" or "place attachment", most of it is from the environmental or ecological approach which is in essence, the interaction of humans and nature. Some studies are spiritual, some regarding cognition, while the closest to what I attempt to show here is cultural - binding people and their worldview to a geographical location over time.

By trying to show the continuing consequences of the 1600s' Scandinavian politics on a neighbourhood in the Norwegian capital that is dominated by African and Asian immigrants, this thesis is on a little-trodden path. Research of immigrant neighbourhoods, ethnic enclaves or the metropolitan city is saturated with mostly American and realities (Park, et al, 1925, Wilson and Portes 1980, Logan et al, 2002) With the global political economy as the overarching approach, it touches upon the linkages of time - past, present, and future -, space

- physical and phenomenological -, cultures - “ethnic” and hybrid, and the systems in which they exist. Away from the broad strokes of *people and place* that I have implied so far, this study is anchored in the world views of everyday people who assert their identity on the streets of Grønland, find belonging in Somali shops, and mark the environment through acts that can be interpreted as resistance and solidarity.

## A brief history of an alley of sin

The place where I lived and did my fieldwork - in and around Grønland’s main shopping street Smalgangen - still carries traces of its history. In the 17th century, Grønland, as we know it today, was below sea level, and during the demolition and revamping of the city in the 1950s, builders found iron hooks in house walls that were used to moor boats. As the water level sank, it left behind cultivable land- lush green fields that inspired the name Grønland, literally: “green land”. In the 19th Century city of Oslo, then known as Christiania, farmers and carpenters used to come to the Grønland square to sell cattle and lumber respectively. The loads of money they made typically went to the bars and brothels that *were* Smalgangen, and stories of farmers who woke up with empty pockets were common. The expression *å bli bondefanget* – referring to how visiting peasants often got tricked, robbed, or swindled in the big city – allegedly has its origin during this period (Hollie,2010). Smalgangen was the city of sin, or more appropriately, the alley of sin. And Grønland in general, was considered an unattractive place to live or raise a family.

In *Everyday Life in The Gentrifying City*, anthropologist Tone Huse (2014) shows how the place went from being called a slum to being labelled a ghetto, further revealing the negative stereotype that Grønland has suffered over the years. The neighbourhood has and continues to go through changes- facelifts as some old buildings were demolished in favour of more modern ones, the residents who have also started to look different with time, and the economic activity, especially the small businesses that are increasingly run by immigrants (Huse, 2014). After the Second World War, work immigrants streamed into Norway, mostly from Pakistan starting in the late 1960s. With deliberate political will, most were settled in Grønland. It became the place one could live as a young and single person, but most moved

out as soon as they planned or started a family. In this way, Grønland is still a transit place (Stedsanalyse). The prejudices against this neighbourhood have morphed but persisted to this day. I have met people from the westside of Oslo who have never been to this eastern part of town, and a couple of colleagues who asked me if I felt safe living there, especially as a woman. A knife stabbing in the area or a burglary in the news every now and then don't help this image at all. But the crime, the class of residents, the businesses, and even the smells of Grønland today are a result of historical processes. It is important to have this background in mind when trying to understand what *is* now, and the wretchedness that nearly always has been.



Smalgangen August 1939. Photo: NTB/SCANPIX

## Getting into the Field

“I know everything and everyone, but no one ever asks me. I will tell you about everything.” Abdul told me this the second time we met, and he would thereafter be my ‘key’ into the field. He is a short and somewhat chubby Somali man in his mid-forties with a bubbly personality and an air of self-assuredness about him. I was introduced to him through an old friend of mine, who I had told about my fieldwork and explained my difficulty in getting in touch with interlocutors. Abdul was forthcoming and eager to help, a welcome change from most of the dismissive shop owners I had talked to before. I explained that I wanted to get in touch with Somali shop owners in order to understand how they conducted business on a

day-to-day basis. Abdul was happily on board - he said that he would introduce me all the somali shop owners he new and show me around Grønland. We would meet at the café on the ground floor of my apartment building a few times a week and map out the day ahead. He would tell me which shops we would visit that day and who he knew there, before we headed out. While walking, Abdul pointed at different shops telling me who the current owners were, the years in which they opened, who the initial owners were, where they lived now, and why the closed stores ran out of business. Every so often we would meet someone he knew, who would or walk over to greet him while throwing an inquisitive glance my way. Then the flow of names, years, stories, rumours of the Grønland streets would continue. He would stop sometimes to make sure I wrote down something he thought important, literally dictating as he watched me write every now and then.

Through Abdul, I got a pathway into Somali-owned businesses that would have taken months to get on my own, if I ever did. Some Somali shops have no indication of what they are called on their facades, and some are referred to differently by customers and friends, from what appears at the shopfronts. Abdul pointed to a shop which had a clear sign above its door saying it was called Dukaan shop, and told me it was called “Mama Najma’s shop”. To him, the shopfront sign might as well have not been there. I asked him how come he called it mama Najma’s shop while it went by Dukaan on the sign and he looked at it like he had never seen it before. He brushed it off and told me not to worry about the sign because he knew for sure that that shop was mama Najma’s shop. Then it happened again and again. Most of the shops went by names which had nothing to do with the visible names on their entrances and windows. Even Pakstar, one of the biggest Paistani-owned frukt og grønt stores is *really* called Ankara by the people who live and shop in Grønland (SuperGrønland, 2022). Eventually, I went back to Dukaan shop by myself, introduced myself and my intentions, mentioned that I was referred by Abdul and that I hoped to talk to mama Najma. Everyone seemed to know the man indeed, and when I mentioned mama Najma, and ‘inside’ name, it felt as though I become a little more familiar in a matter of minutes. Mama Najma’s shop consequently became my main fieldsite, along with the small centre in which her shop is. From there on, my network began to expand within the field and as Abdul got busier, I began to stand on my own two feet. We however continued to meet sporadically until the end of my fieldwork, and we still catch up with each other over tea sometimes.

Before I met Abdul, I had approached some of the few shops that were not closed at the time as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. One of them is a fresh fruit and vegetable shop, perhaps

the most popular in the area, right at the end of Smalgangen alley towards Olafiagangen. There was a limited number of people who could be in the shop at a time, so my request to hang around inside was denied and I resorted to hanging around outside. I watched as people came and examined fruits and vegetables on the stalls outside, and as workers took cigarette breaks in between the continuous refilling the emptying fruit stalls. The "boss" was never there whenever I was, even after I made an appointment with an employee for a time when he was thought to come to the store. Days later, I finally met him and asked if I could observe and talk to him and some employees about a school project on immigrant businesses. I also offered free extra help if the need would arise at any point during my fieldwork. but got a blatant "No". He said he did not like such discussions. I assumed we had not understood each other so I stressed that this was a master's programme fieldwork project, that I did not work for any state institution, that identifiable information would be anonymised, and that I would not share any personal information and findings with anyone else or any other project besides my masters thesis. He was vigorously shaking his head the entire time and, and then added that even the COVID-19 restrictions would not allow it. I would make the customers uncomfortable, he said, and if officials from the municipality came on any of their unannounced visits to make sure regulations were being followed, his business would be in danger. There would probably be one person too many in the shop, you see. "No". At this shop and most others in Smalgangen, I resorted to merely observing, and had small talk with owners and employees here and there. My main field site was in a small commercial centre on one of Grønland's busy streets. The centre was divided in half by a small corridor. There were 3 stalls on one side: a money-sending business and forex bureau, a tailor, and a travel agent. On the other side was Dukaan, also known as Mama Najma's shop and a canteen or small kitchen area. This small hub was my primary fieldsite and mama Najma's shop was the more particular point of interest. The shop sold everything from clothing and cosmetics to snacks, bedding, and kitchenware, and it was the only one among all the other businesses that had a steady and relatively high flow of people traffic on an everyday basis. I visited other small shops in Grønland whenever I got a chance to ask a few questions or be a fly on the wall for a day or two, sometimes on the reference of mama Najma herself. Grønland in its totality was my overall field. I made it a point to only buy from 'foreign shops' whenever possible during my fieldwork, to consciously take in my experience as a shopper there, the shop layout, products, employees' attitudes, and the air around. I engaged in small talk with shop owners after paying for my groceries, and asked some if they were hiring. That enabled me to start seeing networks, distinctions, and similarities between various businesses in

Grønland which would later on be highly informative to my thesis. Choosing mama Najma's shop as my base while examining Grønland on the grander scheme of things was a deliberate methodological tool as I illustrate in the next part.



A small shop in Grønland. August 2021

## Methodology

My fieldwork consisted mostly of participant observation and interviews. I lived in a small town called Hønefoss about 60km north of Oslo right before my fieldwork. And even with the relatively close proximity of my field site, I decided to move to Grønland so that I could have an experience as close to full immersion as was possible. I spent days on end at Mama Najma's shop, talking to her and the many other people who came to the shop, helping to arrange products on the shelves, or being completely ignored while everyone else talked and laughed away in Somali. I followed Abdul to one of his two jobs as a social worker about 15 minutes outside Oslo by the metro, I had a Somali friend help me to translate during a couple



of interviews, and I learnt how to make hand henna designs during my six months in Grønland. However, at the beginning of my fieldwork in April 2021 when I moved to Oslo, the city was under lockdown as a preventive and containment measure against the COVID-19 pandemic, so setting off was challenging. Shops, shopping centres, full-service restaurants, warehouses, and training studios were all closed. We were required to wear protective masks and keep a distance of two metres at all times, and the only establishments that were open were those that were ‘essential’. Those that sold food, groceries, and pharmacies. This left me without a ‘site’ for a while. The fruit and vegetable shops that were open had long queues at the entrances due to the then-limited capacity inside, and face masks proved to be a serious hindrance in communication and expression when I approached people. This barrier in interpersonal connection continued, although becoming less with time due to fewer restrictions, to be a challenge throughout my fieldwork. During the first two months, therefore, I sat on public benches outside shops with my notebook and observed the people who walked in and out of the shops, those who worked there, and those who walked by on the streets, and took in the atmosphere. Sometimes I entered the shops and examined the products, asked where the body lotion was made, or which company imported the coconut milk. I also walked a lot around the neighbourhood taking note of all the little shops I would come and visit once the city opened up again. The first months were frustrating, as I felt like I was losing time and there was no telling whether the city-wide lockdown would be lifted or extended due to the unpredictable trend in COVID-19 infections.

I met Abdul in May just before the country opened up again. I shadowed him for a couple of weeks, walking with him through Grønland as he pointed to different buildings, shops, and people while telling me their histories, current statuses, and what he predicted to be their futures would be because he had been around long enough to know ‘how it goes’. I took quick short-handed notes on such walks which he would insist we go over after every walk so that he could help me fill them out in case I needed clarity on whatever he had said earlier, or what we had seen. This was helpful as I got a chance to review my notes while the happenings of the day were still fresh and I had him around to clear any blurriness or ask follow-up questions. Walking with Abdul greatly shaped my approach and interactions in the field. I am certain that my association with him opened doors for me that would have been difficult for me to open as a complete stranger in Grønland. Our walks and meetings were an improvisation of method at a time when standard ways of doing ethnographic work were nearly impossible due to the pandemic. I soaked in Grønland and Somali businesses through

his over 20 year experience in Norway and received a 101 crash course on the place, people and culture before I set out on my own. I approached the people who would become my main informants with what felt like a ‘cheat sheet’ of ‘insider’ references, names, words, and a historical backdrop.

One of the ways I tried to get ‘in’ before I met Abdul or moved to Grønland was by asking people if they knew of an affordable apartment for rent in the area. Finn.no (n.d.) is the biggest online marketplace in Norway, where I could easily find rental property listings. However, I wanted the house-hunting experience to be part of my way into the field, thereby familiarising myself with people, and possibly social and economic network. And who knows, maybe I could indeed end up finding a place to stay this way. So I walked into shops and asked, with low expectations of actually talking about apartments and higher hopes of breaking into conversations and meeting potential informants. Instead of the curious and even suspicious looks I expected, I got serious answers. I was told that I could leave my number and they would call me if they heard of something by some, one shop owner said that there was a place he knew about, but it was a shared living space if that is what I was looking for. Common questions that I was asked were about my budget, and whether the apartment had to be in Grønland. I was stunned, but also incredibly excited because it felt like I was getting a taste of what the next six months would bring. I was experiencing a different type of information network that seemed like an everyday practice here. The cherry on top of it all was a lady in Grønland Basar shopping centre who asked me if I wanted to rent “svart eller hvitt” - black or white - without batting an eyelid. She was essentially asking me if I wanted to rent in, or outside the formal housing market because *black* in this case was synonymous with illegality and *white* the opposite. I could choose between the formal and informal housing market. I am inclined to say that this choice could only be readily available in Grønland compared to other parts of the city, because the probability of getting the same alternatives from a random person in Frogner - a neighbourhood on the posher side of Oslo - is next to none. There is much less ethnic minority presence in public space and merely asking someone at the mall about apartments for rent feels unnatural and out of place. This alternative way of life and the availability of choices like *svart* or *hvit* choices in Grønland are what this thesis investigates.

A crucial part of my method here is also an overlap with its theoretical framework: the use of my primary fieldsite - mama Najma’s shop, as an ‘arbitrary location’ (Candea, 2007).

‘Arbitrary’, seen in isolation from Candea’s theory is misleading, as it infers vagueness and abstractness. Within the theory however, the method is grounding. It is “the actually existing instance, whose messiness, contingency, and lack of an overarching coherence or meaning serve as ‘control’ for a broader abstract object of study” (Candea, 2007, page 180) By this approach, Candea hopes to remedy the incompleteness and arbitrariness that comes with multi-sited or multi-local ethnography. By finding a fixed area, geographical or not, as a field site, we are able to use it as a window into a bigger, abstract, and actual arbitrary subject. The chosen fieldsite is then an ethnographic tool itself in my interpretation. And in my case, mama Najma’s shop becomes my window into the larger and complex Grønland, into meanings of small shops to immigrants, and into some of the processes I examine in this thesis. In his defence of the bounded fieldsite, Candea tells of a constant feeling of missing out, and never being in the right place at the right time during his first ethnography in a village in the north of Corsica - France. In what he calls the spirit of multi-sited ethnography, he followed people, stories, metaphors, and debates through several spaces in and outside the field (page 173). The resulting interdeterminancy of not knowing which contexts to seek, people to follow, or how much information is sufficient is what I wanted to avoid. Needless to say that no fieldwork is without complexities, and however finite fieldsites or theories are, there is always more complexity ‘within’ (Strathern, 1991). The arbitrary field is however more structuring and works as a conceptual tool, as I explain further under the ‘Theoretical framework’. Below we revisit the ‘*svart eller hvitt*’ scene at Grønland Basar as a lead into a discussion on my positionality in the field, and ethical evaluations.

## Positionality and Ethical Evaluation

The exchange I had with the lady at Grønland Basar made me self-aware as a black person in the field that I wanted to study. I suspected that the lady who asked me whether I wanted to rent *svart eller hvitt* would not have been as blunt to a caucasian stranger, so I became conscious about my appearance as a loaded marker, in meetings with new people. To the black and brown people that I approached, my physical appearance alone made imagined *samenness* a starting point for whatever information they could share, and it gave me a level of inclusion in the socioeconomy that would otherwise not meet the eye. Skin colour was an automatic indicator of a shared racial experience in Norway, a foreign-ness with my

immigrant interlocutors, and therefore an understanding, and inclusion in the ways in which life is negotiated as a result of that identity. Throughout my experience in the field, ‘we’, ‘us’, and allusions to kinship like ‘sister’ and ‘daughter’ were common associations to my place and relationship there. However, just my blackness could only go so far in some contexts. As a Ugandan non-Muslim, I was excluded from the ‘us’ when mama Najma talked about Somali culture and Islam. We however reconnected as countrymen when she told me that her ex-husband had travelled back home to Kenya, and I shared that my father was actually Kenyan. Speaking Swahili, we were kinned again. I found the terms ‘insider’/’outsider’, and ‘native’/’non-native’ difficult to apply, as different dimensions of my identity were underlined in different situations and at different times. Not only are these terms essentialising (Narayan,1993), but they are also inapplicable in some cases, and outdated in the current world order. Living and doing my fieldwork in Norway- where I live, did not make me a ‘native’ anthropologist any more than it made Grønland a bound Somali cultural territory(I expound on this under my theoretical analysis). *How Native is a “Native” Anthropologist*, Narayan (1993) suggests that we enact hybridity and do away with the colonial ‘native’ because we as anthropologists are bicultural at the very least- part of the world of engaged scholarship and that of everyday life.

By defining myself as a black immigrant woman in the field, I am removing myself from the common study of outsiders by insiders and vice versa, especially in Scandinavia anthropology. Even though *Small Facts and Large Issues* (Gullestad, 1989) is over three decades old, it still holds some truth: Anthropology, especially in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, sees more differences than similarities in culture and way of life. With a few exceptions, it is “an anthropology of insiders and of outsiders who have settled in” (page, 72). I, therefore, did not consider myself as a native or not, but rather as a black immigrant woman, especially because that is how I and my interlocutors saw me.

Regarding my accommodation in the field, I ended up renting ‘svart’. On one of my house-hunt rounds in Grønland, I met an acquaintance who I told about my project and that I was looking for a place to stay in the area. As luck would have it, *they* happened to have an available apartment at Smalgangen. The issue, they said, was that they could only rent it out ‘svart’. There the word was again. He explained that if I took it, I could not be registered at that address, there could not be any form of a written contract, and they would be the legally registered resident living in the apartment. I took it. We were both aware that the arrangement was on the wrong side of the law, and acknowledged the amount of trust and risk that we

giving and taking on. I asked myself if I was facing an ethical dilemma, if I was doing harm or in any way acting outside the discipline's ethical guidelines. What was clear was that it was an opportunity to 'participate' in the field I wanted to study. I saw it as an opening to truly experience and embody part of the risk and precariousness that came with the place that I wanted to be a part of. *That* was part of life in Grønland, and since I was not putting my landlord in danger, I chose to rent their apartment as a medium of 'participation'. I considered how hopeless I would feel if my landlord were to suddenly force me out of their property since I was not protected by a tenancy agreement. Should there be a situation where the police came knocking on the door, I would be caught on the bad of the law. He too was not guaranteed payment each month. If I refused to honour our agreement, they would not be able to report the case to the police. The risk and precariousness involved were a fair price to pay for such a connection with my field in my evaluation.

## Theoretical Framework

This thesis is an *explanation* of Grønland, rather than the treatment of the place as an already-existing fact. As a single neighbourhood, Grønland boasts the highest number of immigrant residents in Oslo (Statistics Norway, 2022). Politicians have employed that fact, among others, to show the multiculturalism and diversity of the city (Huse, 2014), thereby creating a precedent for policies that maintain or transform the place. Somalis and Pakistanis constitute the highest numbers of residents in the area, and there is a high concentration of small shops and businesses in the neighbourhood. As a result, or cause as we explore later, there are particular social norms in Grønland, and conceptualisations of place as a space loaded with meanings and feelings. The status quo has come to be through social, historical, and political processes that require anthropological study - because "all associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, not given natural facts" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This thesis is therefore an exploration of the principal social, economic and political processes through which Grønland as a distinct conceptual and literal place is made, maintained, and transformed. Ultimately, it is a study of place as process and as form.

Form requires boundaries, and boundaries - cultural and geographical - are increasingly cast in the past as limitations in a now 'globalised' and 'deterritorialised' world. In this thesis is

an argument for the continued relevance of boundaries in anthropology. If not for anything, as thinking tools. Transnationalism - the flow, extension, and operation across borders, and a central characteristic of globalisation, is not a new phenomenon. People have been moving across countries and continents for centuries, but what has changed now is *who* is moving where (Mintz, 1998). The massive movements of slaves from Africa to the Caribbean were just that, and Europeans *just* travelled to, and even lived permanently in South Africa and other countries far away from theirs of origin at the time. Then it was helpful to think the 'region' of Africa, the Caribbean, or Asia. Now, with a change in who is moving where and in what capacity they are travelling and resettling, it is 'translocality'. Without minimising the impact and reality of globalisation, the foundation of this thesis is a conceptual treatment of Grønland as a bounded 'region' or 'neighbourhood'. On that note, I present Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) book on the deterritorialisation of culture, placemaking and identity as a result of mass immigration and globalisation: *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. This thesis benefits from the essays' discussions on culture and identity as moveable, transferable, and transformable. That is the theoretical direction I follow to understand the sense of belonging and Identity that my informants derive and create from their small shops and in Grønland. All the people I worked with are refugees, immigrants or Norwegian with refugee or immigrant background themselves. It is clear through this thesis that they too are in a constant process of negotiating a place for themselves in Grønland. Their idea of home and where they belong is fluid, while also *set* in the small shops, and in Grønland. The theoretical framework of this thesis is thus a treatment of place and identity as results of continual processes. The processes are ongoing because people continually affect place, giving new meaning, transforming it, or maintaining it. Place then acquires renewed meaning and agency to affect people in a circular movement.

'Place' and 'placemaking' mark the beginning of chapter 1, which is an introduction to the main processes that I argue form Grønland. The first section looks at what 'place' as used in this thesis is, and thereafter, the making of it. We then step back in time so see how royal policies from King Christian IV's castle molded Grønland in the 1600s and in the present day, along with current local government policies. Another vital process is the 'street code' - norms and processes that have become distinct characteristics of Grønland. Chapter 1 ends with the consideration of some of the placemaking processes seen as forms of resistance. Chapter 2 compares and contrasts the small businesses in Grønland with standard Norwegian grocery stores to show different contextual processes affect the nature of business. What,

then, constitutes 'business as usual'? Next, we approach the illicit practices that are embedded in the everyday lives in Grønland, and their implications on the place and people in the neighbourhood. I then turn to small businesses , mama Njama's more specifically to show that shops are not just shops. They are memorial monuments, assertions of identity, and social meeting places. The last section is about the role of the state, or lack thereof, in the creation and maintenance of small businesses in Grønland, while the last chapter takes up businesses and practices in Grønland, which I consider to be reciprocal acts and expressions of solidarity in the community. Before the conclusion a reflections of sorts on the anthropological treatment of place and the bounded fieldsite. It is a defense of the conceptual boundedness of fieldsites by all means, but also an acknowledgement of the increasing mobility and abstractness of culture, people, and place.

# Chapter 1

## From the Castle to the Street corner: Making Grønland from above and below

### Placemaking

Let us start by defining the anthropological ‘place’ as I use it in this thesis, as opposed to ‘space’ or ‘a place’. A place is a physical, geographical location that is also quantifiable. For example, Grønland as a place is a neighbourhood in the east of the Oslo city centre that is also bordered by the Oslo central station railwaylines in the south, Tøyen in the north, the Akers river to the west, and Gamlebyen in the south. Grønland as ‘place’ on the other hand has been defined as Norway’s “multicultural melting pot” (Nikel, 2011), or the “heart of Oslo” (SuperGrønland, 2022). Place, as the two metaphors is closer to my approach of the concept. Such places are spaces loaded with meaning, that are “socially constructed by the people who live in them and know them; they are “politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions” (Low and Laurence-zúñiga, 2007, page 15). Place, here, is therefore a sum of social processes, and the resulting form that it takes on as I illustrate in this thesis. It is the meaning that people give and get from the place, “a state of being” as Sumaya wrote in the introductory piece of prose, it is “not something you can own, but a feeling”. Grønland is therefore a totality of social constructions - a field entangled in constant fluctuations of historical effects, political influence and social change, the process of which is placemaking. Why, though, do we need the analytical construction of place and the concept of placemaking?

The placemaking processes which move against ‘place’ as a naturalised circumstance, a pre-given cultural-territorial entity, are what require anthropological study (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). South Sudan as *the* place of the Nuer for instance is an assumption, a wrong one at that, that the people we study stay put in the places we study them. The Greater Upper Nile region however, seen as a representation, negotiation and creation of identity and



culture, a relationship of space, culture and power, is more helpful foundation for understanding the people and their cultural practices. I categorise the following arguments into four main processes that together contribute to creating Grønland: 1. Political and historical action, 2. Social process, 3. Sensory systems, and 4. A deliberation of placemaking as a form of resistance. The placemaking processes that I describe below are useful in connecting specific pathways of history and social action to Grønland and the people that live there today.

## “Destroyed by Fire and Resurrected by the King” - (Andersen, 2014): History and Power

On 17th August 1624, Oslo was destroyed by fire. The then king Christian IV used the opportunity to rebuild the city more westward, and adjacent to the Akershus Fortress so that the city could be protected within the range of the canons, and with wider streets that would hinder the spread of fire. (Andersen, 2014, Norsk Folkemuseum). He renamed the city Christiania after himself and ruled - literally too, as he used a ruler in the reconstruction plans - that the city would be divided into two; the east and the west. Grønland and Vaterland fell *just* outside the new Christiania boundary to the east, and was systematically for the poor and the disadvantaged. Orders were given that the best areas, which were in the west would be given to the rich. Allocation of the good locations in the west were also on conditions that the new owners would build brick or stone rental houses for the poor in the east, which selectively excluded the poor who could not show capability of building within the required four years of settlement in the more affluent area. “The rich should be given the largest and the best properties” the king instructed (Sprauten, 1992, p.157 find my translation) Furthermore, the lucrative timber business was reserved for the rich, better education systems were found in the west, and elites had the upper hand in choosing where and how to live due to proximity to the king and high society. “East enders” were thus bound where they were, in the sense that those who could not afford to live within the new city borders were forced outside to settlements like Grønland to the east (Andersen 2014, page 81).

I suggest that the King’s reconstruction of the city, intentionally or not, lay the precedent for what the places became and continues to become today. With Grønland now in Old Oslo -

*Gamle Oslo*, Grønlandsleiret became an important street connecting Christiania to the Old town, especially for businessmen heading to the tanneries and storing boards in the city (Børrud, 2005). They would then find shelter, food, bars in Grønland, and people - the poor and workers - settled adjacent to Grønlandsleiret. This created a growth of small businesses that catered to merchants who passed through to and from the city: lodgings, inns, bars, and brothels that became characteristic of Grønland for a considerable number of years. Immigrants from rural areas who came to Christiania to sell goods or tan animal hides “settled where the main roads led them, namely, the eastern suburbs.” (Andersen, 2014, page 85). This account of history is a demonstration of the influence of political power on place. Through King Christian IV and the rebuilding of Christiania after the fire, Grønland was fated as an area of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the low class. His directives deliberately created a divide in the city and systematically reinforced differences in class that were bound to geographical area. Grønland was left outside the new city walls, allocated to the poor and filled with immigrant tradesmen then, just as it is home to lower class populations and immigrants today. It is no coincidence then, that villas dot the westside of Oslo, while apartment blocks pack the eastside.

The eastside is also home to the highest number of immigrants in Oslo. As of 2022, there are 819,356 registered immigrants in Norway. The highest 105,477 of the number are of Polish background followed by Lithuanian, Swedish, and Somali come in fourth place at 28,088 (Statistics Norway, 2022). As of 2021, immigrants or Norwegians with immigrant background made up 33,7% of Oslo’s population (Oslo kommune, 2022). Pakistanis have the highest number at 22,629, Somalis come in next at 16,838, followed by Polish and Swedish immigrants. Majority of the top two groups of immigrants live in Grønland, and it is currently the only place in Norway where the population of immigrants - mostly from Africa and Asia - make up more than half of the overall population in the neighbourhood, according to. As of 2022, the population of Norway is 5,425,270. That of Oslo is 699,827, 60,209 of whom are residents of *Gamle Oslo* borough, where Grønland is located. For more context, the geographical area of Oslo is 454km<sup>2</sup> while that of *Gamle Oslo* is 7.45km<sup>2</sup>. Until 2018, *Gamle Oslo* was the highest populated borough but now comes second after Grunerløkka which sits on 4.75km<sup>2</sup> (snl.no). Out of the seven neighbourhoods in *Gamle Oslo*, Ensjø has the highest population at 10,190 after seeing a recent decline of residents in Grønland with 9,733 while those in Ensjø have only recently gone up (Oslo kommune, 2022). These statistics show not only the class of the people living in *Gamle Oslo* judging from the number of people per

square metre compared to the rest of the city, it also shows their ethnic or national background.

The ethnic and class composition of the Grønland population are some of the distinguishing factors that give the area its character, which is an almost direct linkage to the Grønland of workers, out-of-town immigrants, and small businesses. Grønland is therefore a result of the historic and political processes I have shown above, and as result, also a basis for current debates on immigration in Norway.

Anti-immigration policies and sentiments have spread in Norway since September 11 and the July 22 Utøya terror attacks ( Andersson, 2011; Bangstad, 2014, Gaas et. al 2011; Jensen ,2014; ). Neighbourhoods like Grønland are particularly targeted by anti-immigrant public and media rhetoric as well as tightened immigration and asylum policies, that seek to manage and control immigrant dominated neighbourhoods (Wiggen, 2012). Grønland has in recent decades been subject to public debates about lack of integration into Norwegian culture and language, thereby creating parallel enclaves, discourses that have echoed across European capitals in recent years. Although on the extreme side in comparison to Oslo policies, I use the following example from Copenhagen to show the role of state policies in controlling and (trans)forming place. The Danish government in 2018 passed the ‘ghetto deal’ - *Et Danmark uden parallel samfund: Ingen ghettoer i 2030* (regeringen.dk, 2018). In the ‘deal’, select neighbourhoods were identified as ‘ghettos’ following the criteria that their residents had higher than average unemployment rates and below average education levels. More remarkably however was that more than half of the residents were of immigrant background, or Danish born with immigrant background. The Mjølnerparken neighbourhood in Copenhagen fits the bill on all the above, just like Grønland in Oslo would. The law proposed a mass eviction, resettlement, and privatisation of social housing - all without any input from the residents - to allow more Danes to move into the then ‘improved’ neighbourhood, and consequently creating a more ‘mixed’ society. The ‘ghetto deal’ entails tougher, and shocking punishments for crime in these neighbourhoods. Should an individual commit a crime, their entire family can be punished by eviction from their home. Children of immigrant background face a compulsory 25 hours of kindergarten a week, and must not exceed 30% of the school’s intake. Failure to abide by these rules on the families’ part can lead to the loss of welfare benefits. The ‘ghetto deal’ is a forty-page publication, so I am not able to cover all of its contents here in the interest of time. However, I believe the use of state or institutional

authority to dominate place, to *make* place and administer restriction and discrimination has been made clear in this example.

Ghetto labelling is in itself problematic and significant in the formation of places that are not in fact ghettos (Huse, 2014). However, what I highlight next are the similarities between Copenhagen's ghetto policy and the residential mix policy of Gamle Oslo. As a state-led gentrification tool, cities usually use a policy of residential mixing to claim a containment on what are thought to be rising ghettos (Huse, 2014). In the case of Gamle Oslo, gentrification processes that started in the 1980s and the project has seen an encouragement of ethnic Norwegians - synonymous with middle class/better social standing - to move to Grønland in a bid to make the neighbourhood more attractive on the market (Huse, 2014). The lower class - also synonymous with immigrants - are not protected from the increased costs of living that come with gentrification and are therefore forced out. They are forced out of their neighbourhoods, out of Grønland, just as the same class is forced out of Mjølnerparken, albeit, less violently. Although the presence of immigrants in these neighbourhoods is resilient, these processes show the state's hand in the creation and control of Grønland, just as King Christian IV's 1624 directives still do. In *Seeing like a State* (2008), James C. Scott draws attention to the states increase their control by increasing the legibility of people and places. The social mixing strategy as applied in Grønland should be seen as such - a reading of people, and although Scott refers to the literal legibility of space as in grid streets, public space design and such, I extend his concept of *legibility* and *control*, to *people* rather than to space. In the state's *reading* of people, they are categorised in terms of ethnic background, employment and educational level, gender, age and the like. Given the demographic constitution of Grønland with high numbers of immigrants with generally low levels of education and high levels of unemployment, it becomes an ethnic or immigrant enclave. Enclaves are associated with a higher probability for a country to vote for the far right (Demireva & Zwysen, 2012). That means that the statistical categorisation and conceptual classification of a place like Grønland as an immigrant enclave diminishes sympathy towards immigrants. It creates a hostility from the majority population that is based on the fear of resource exploitation of the country's resources by the unemployed, uneducated, and most probably poor immigrants. Ethnic Norwegians question fairness and democracy, when predominantly immigrant areas seem threatening to their wealth in a welfare state where the resources they are entitled to are thought to be taken up by such neighbourhoods. Bringing in more ethnic Norwegians in Grønland therefore waters down the concentration of immigrants,

takes away the perceived threat of ghetto formation, and provides for more *legibility*. Justifications for the residential mixing include, but are not limited to; better integration for immigrants who interact more with their new ethnic Norwegians and a better cultural understanding for the Norwegians. Studies have however shown that attempts at forced social mixing leave neighbourhoods in an even wider social inequality gap and creates more conflict (Huse,2014). In the following section, we take on the ‘code’ of social norms in Grønland.

### Street Code: Social Norms and Process

So far in the analysis, we have seen the ways in which political decisions have historically shaped Grønland as a place - from the Danish king's directives in the 17th century, to more contemporary housing policies in Oslo. There are however other processes placemaking processes which approach from lower ground - the street, rather than the castle and government ‘above’. Processes that are seen, felt, and practiced by everyday people in Grønland, ways of life, and codes of living. The “Code of the Street”, identified by sociologist Elijah Anderson (2000), is a set of informal rules that govern interpersonal relations in inner-city neighbourhoods that are resource-deprived, racially segregated, and have poor public services. Anderson writes about inner-city black America whose levels of violence and history are incomparable to those of Grønland or Norway, but I borrow his theory to explain social action in Grønland as having distinct norms, informal rules, and its own code. This *code* can also be seen as “...the symbolic repertory whose meanings individuals learn and use as members of particular social networks-” (Low,1996, pg 384). *Meanings* include social capital or the relations between people based on reciprocity which I elaborate in the next chapter. Sandberg (2008) calls it street capital in his study of ethnicity and violence on the streets of Oslo, and much as it is about crime in the city, it is intertwined with everyday life and people’s relations with each other. His analysis is a direct contextualisation of Grønland a Scandinavian inner city. The social process through which Grønland comes to be, as opposed to white majority neighbourhoods, Grønland looks and seems ‘chaotic’ - as an *ethnic* Norwegian resident who lives in the westside of Oslo described it to me. I argue that the perceived ‘chaos’ of Grønland hides an informal system of social conduct that *insiders* understand and live by, and that marks Grønland as a place that is

*theirs*. There are things that are accepted and those that are not, perceptions of space as I show below, that are unknown to *outsiders* and can only be known by living in or being in repeated engagement with the place.

There is, for instance, an accepted dress code in Grønland. “Decency” in Grønland shows *insider* identity, or at least familiarity and respect for the place. A Somali friend who lives in Asker, a suburb outside Oslo, told me that his sisters dress just like any other Norwegian girl – wearing jeans and a t-shirt maybe - save for the hijabs, but when going to Grønland for something as simple as grocery shopping, they wear their abayas-loose full coverage dresses commonly worn by Moslem women. “It’s just something about Grønland,” he said. What it is about the place is that it is embedded in meanings and cultures, “codes of the street” that have *made* it. Those like my friend Ahmed’s sisters who go to Grønland often to buy halal and Somali groceries *know* how to be Grønland-proper. They are Somali themselves, Muslim, and have been to Grønland often enough to *know*. I, on the other hand, learnt the hard way. On a hot July evening after a day of fieldwork, I went home, changed into a short dress and walked through the Grønland square to meet friends for drinks. Although fewer at this time of day, there were still some men at the square benches, among them Abdul and about three others that I was acquainted with through my fieldwork thus far. I smiled and waved at them but all I got back was disapproving smirks and half-hearted waves. These men were what you would call “side-walk friends”; we familiarly greeted each other when we met and would exchange a few words if I was on my way elsewhere, but there was no attempt to do so this time. They seemed to be almost ashamed to know me- their hands folded firmly across their chests with no plans to extend in greeting and their faces etched with judgement and disapproval. I later understood that I had broken a silent rule on how to dress. They had “taken me in”, considered me an insider at this point, and there I was in a dress that did not even reach my knees, *in* Grønland. The same men look at seemingly Muslim, Somali or Pakistani disapprovingly when they are without a hijab or “decent” attire, sometimes even being vocal about it. I heard of instances where especially young girls are scolded by complete strangers about what they wear or the amount of makeup on their faces. The men have sometimes even gone as far as to call the person’s parents if they know them to report the bad behaviour in hopes of inspiring discipline at home. They sometimes investigate to find out who this person’s parents are. Is there someone in the community who knows them? Is it one of those decadent Somali kids who are adopted or fostered in Norwegian homes? The Street eye ( Jacobs) is always watching. The eyes on the street are as much a form of

protection, comfort and safety just as they are disciplinarian and judgemental. Going to or through Grønland does not necessarily make one an insider. I used to go to the neighbourhood every now and then to buy groceries and felt like I *knew* the place, but it was not until I lived there and made a social network that I learnt” the street code.”

Grønland is made of a collective surveillance by the people. It's not just the men at the square, it's the women in the shops too, gossiping about a flamboyant gay man who just came in to ask about incense sticks. It's me, who after a couple of months being “sidewalk friends” (Jacobs) with a Somali couple neighbour heard what sounded like a violent fight from their door and wondered if I should knock on the door or call the police. We are all the surveillance of the area, and we are surveilled by it. I noticed that after a while doing fieldwork, I could tell by watching the people traffic who lived in or was a regular in Grønland, and who was an “outsider”. Outsiders walked generally faster, they were going to or from a particular shop or place, with an urgency about them. Insiders walked more casually. Even if the purpose of the walk was to buy groceries, they could meet someone they knew so a slowness could invite a short conversation in that event. Sometimes, because they live in the area, they had baby strollers or toddlers with them, which would automatically command a slower pace. The fast walkers and the more leisurely ones show two distinctions in the way people relate to Grønland. To the former, it is a means to an end - a point or pit stop on the way to somewhere else. To the latter, Grønland *is* the end - a place to be, to hang out, to belong. Grønland as a means to a different end-Majority of outsiders are also generally white, especially those wearing business casual attire. These are a very rare sight in Grønland, while they are the norm a couple of minutes away on the other side of the train rails at Bjørvika. What is common are women wearing abayas, African print clothing, hijabs or other loose dress that offers full body coverage. It is also common to see men, especially in the warmer months of the year, wearing thawbs - long ankle length gowns that are commonly worn by Muslim men. People and place watching as a monitoring tool are embedded in everyday Grønland practice in Grønland is a way in a characteristic way. From watching to feeling, ‘sensecapes’ below is an exploration of feelings as placemaking tools.

## Sensecapes: Place through feeling and perception

“Ethnographers need to pay careful attention to the roles and effects of emotion on recognition, way finding, and emplacement” (Ross, 2010, page 58)

From self-appointed “watchers” (Jacobs, 1961) to language, way of dressing and general code of life in Grønland, this section takes us through ways in which the neighbourhood is made through aesthetics and emotions. I analyse the different ways that people feel Grønland and how they, therefore, relate to it. This section highlights an important factor that is usually not accorded ample attention in studies of urban place or landscape - senses. Since this thesis shows the different ways that people find and re-form belonging, it is only right that we treat the landscape as inhabited and experienced through a multisensory mode of being with and in the world (Bunkse, 2012). The term ‘sensecapes’ occurred to me simply as a wordplay on landscapes - so rather than the way an area looks, it would be the way an area *feels*. David Howes (2021, page 14) put it more adequately as “ The idea that the experience of the environment and of other things which inhabit the environment, is produced by a particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study.” This definition is my point of departure as I show Grønland through the way that people “sense” it and thereby derive and impact meaning on the place.

Place is embodied. It is a practice, habit, and routine if you like, that is imprinted on bodies and senses through interaction. I know through past experience of being in Grønland that it is “okay” to cross the road despite a red pedestrian traffic light, that a mixture of sounds and smells all at once is “normal”, that a fight could break out anytime and it would not shock me. Bunkse (2012:12) refers to it as an acquisition of familiarity. While referring to Canadian nature, he says that looking at pictures and designs does not make one one with the landscape. Rather, “Having a handful of thorny needles from a devils club may hurt for a week, but it is thus that one becomes part of the landscape.” Through seeing and hearing a group of Somali women talking and laughing with each other, buying from one of their shops, tasting the curry at Pakistani restaurants all create familiarity. What Bunkse calls familiarity, Ross(2010) also calls intimacy - a rhythm and deeply emotive-emotional ingrained practices that submerge all of our senses as we go about ordinary everyday activities. She did her fieldwork among residents of a shack settlement in South Africa who



were later moved to “proper” housing in a quiet neighbourhood with neat grided streets and properly numbered houses. They could not describe it, but something was “amiss” with life in the supposedly better neighbourhood. Despite the grided and straightforward streets, it was hard for the new residents to navigate the area because of intimacy with it - a history of activity within the landscape. The smells of coffee in the morning, garbage at midday and dinner preparations in the evening in the cluster of shacks was absent in the new settlement and this consequently also tampered with the people’s sense of time. The way that we relate to places is conceptual and multi-sensorial. Bourdieu(1990) sums the arguments of both Ross(2010) and Bunkse (2012) in *Habitus*. “Habitus is the individual embodied system of ‘disposition’ and ‘inclination’ enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations by integrating past experiences.” (Sandberg,2008).

One of the things that struck me first in Grønland was the names of the small businesses I intended to study. Most of the shops’ names allude to faraway lands and “foreign” languages. “Lakshmi textiles”, “Beirut kebab”, “Juba shop”, “Mesob restaurant”, “Istanbul frisør”, “Waaberi restaurant” the list goes on and on. Although I focused on Somali businesses in the end, this “other place” naming was not reserved to them. Nearly all non-Norwegian-owned shops had “exotic” names. Svein Svendsen AS, Knut Hansen Rørlegger, Storgata skomaker and the like are shop or business names that are readily found in other parts of town, but not in Grønland. The immigrant entrepreneurs in Grønland employ the imaginative use of memory and displacement from their home countries (Leonard, Biasharat), to negotiate a “re-identification” of themselves within this *new* place. Small businesses were named after the owners’ countries of origin, their mother tongues, a childhood memory, or a family member lost in *the war* back home. I suggest that these visible naming systems are a social production and construction of space (Low). In the shops’ names is a longing for homes lost, a memory of the past, and a hope for the future. These feelings and assertions of roots and identity are a big component of what makes Grønland “exotic”.

The inside of Mama Salado’s shop is no less “different”. There aren’t enough shelves inside to house all the products she sells. There are abayas and other clothes hanging on small hooks nailed into the walls very close to the ceiling. Some of them are on clothing racks in the centre of the shop and others close to the walls. On the display window facing the street are shelves with hair and skin products, perfumes, teas and spices in no particular order. Just outside the entrance are packaged blankets piled on top of each other, boxes with ladies’

handbags and sandals thrown in haphazardly, and a table with boxes of Somali biscuits on top of a pack of dates and a tin of honey wedged somewhere in between. Mama Salado told me that her shop was almost how she remembers shops in Somalia. Never mind that she left Somalia as a girl, and has never been there in about 10 years. Even though the way shops are set up in Somalia may have changed, her memory connects her to what was in the space she called home, as she tries to re-create that in the space she now calls home. The purposeful design of shops in Grønland, I argue, is a reinforcement of values, memory, and *re-creation* of identity.

In *Language and Space*, Levinson (1996) challenges anthropologists to go beyond the common study of the use of space, spatial symbolism, and settlement patterns and look at how people conceptualise space. This is helpful in not only showing the role of language in the anthropology of space, but also the linkages between world views, aesthetics and art, and linguistic tools used to demarcate space. The way we refer to places, spatial arrangements, or where we are going, is significant in showing what these places mean to us and what we think of them. “Uptown” and “downtown” can mean Majorstua and Grønland respectively in the case of Grønland, but the words or names also conjure up images of two different classes or meanings we attach to the places. In the same way, I argue that calling a restaurant “Saray” or “Mama Salado” helps in spatial distinction, a way of separating a space of personal or communal meaning from the rest. The collection of all the small “foreign named” shops give Grønland its image.



Architecture, art, and style are other ways through which Grønland is produced. One of the many Turkish restaurants along *Grønlandsleiret* has framed pictures of Antalya on every single wall, small traditional artifacts scattered on shelves and the counter-table remodelled in intricate Turkish design. The only mall in Grønland, Grønland Basar, could easily be placed somewhere in Pakistan and not be out of place with its high round pillars, Islamic motifs, and “oriental” interior design. None of the shopping centres in the western parts of Oslo are built this way. While the owners of, say, Turkish restaurants in Grønland can be said to exercise their memory of their homeland, the case is different for Grønland Basar. In fact, the mall is owned by Thon Eiendom, a Norwegian real estate company. I consider the “oriental” design of the shopping centre as a marketing tool, even a commodification of culture, which we

explore further in the next chapter. Here, it contributes as a way through which the Grønland aesthetic is made. On one hand it is indeed another layer of the exotification of Grønland while on the other, it is a mirror of the the people around it.

Grønland is not an ethnic enclave like a Chinatown, there is no created lingua franca, like Spanish in Miami-Florida with the increase of Cuban-born immigrants, but I suggest that it is an enclave all the same, with the same distinction in place, language and aesthetics, only more diverse. By that I mean that whilst the Grønland “aesthetic” is not reflective of *one* ethnic or religious group, it’s sum is different from that of the “mainstream” majority and a collection of ethnic-minority groups. Tøyengata, a street off Grønlandsleiret was not so long ago known as “little Pakistan ” (Huse, 2014) as it was lined with Pakistani businesses. Today the street contains everything from Somali shops, a Vietnamese grocery store, Yemeni restaurant and Turkish barber shop. The ethnicity has diversified, but the spatial “enclosure” remains. While walking on the streets of Grønland and even inside shops and restaurants, you are bound to hear anything from Somali, Urdu, Pashto, other languages that are not completely Norwegian. “Not completely” because if you do hear Norwegian, it is most likely broken, or *kebabnorsk* - Kebab-Norwegian.

The word was first used in a 1995 master’s thesis at the University of Oslo to describe the impact of foreign language on the youth lingo in Oslo (forskning.no), and has since been standardised as a description of a multiethnolectic speaking style that infuses Norwegian with (most commonly) Arabic words, Urdu, Turkish and Somali. *Kebabnorsk* is a sociolect that is spoken by especially second-generation immigrants in Grønland, and more generally in “the east” of Oslo. I suggest it is a spatial marker of the proposed enclave suggested above just as broken Norwegian is. I understood everything Mama Salado said in Norwegian, but every now and then she would pause to look for a word, and her Norwegian was marred by grammatical errors. Her sister who was often making food at the cantina next to the shop never spoke to me except with short “nei”s accompanied by a head shaking gesture or “ja”s with a nod. Otherwise, we would use a middle man for communication. I asked my Somali friend Ahmed to be my translator during an interview with another informant - Mama Najma - who said she could not do it in Norwegian. Lack of proficiency in language is not for any other reason other than its prevalence as heard, used and known in larger society rhetoric and thereby a signifier of the people and space in which it is. In sum, Grønland is *made* by all of these different assertions of memory, values, and identity on *space*.

## Placemaking as resistance?

This chapter ends with a brief exploration of Grønland as a place fraught with actions and processes of resistance. Could some of the place-making processes we have seen so far be a form of resistance and resilience against anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric, “ghetto-labelling” and such that taint Grønland? Resistance is always in relation to power or oppression, but both actions can take on an abstract and pervasive form, and can even be oblivious to themselves. Power in this instance is not structural, institutionalised, or visible (Scott), but rather works to oppress people in everyday situations, or through languages. Take for instance the dispersion of people on the bus when Sahra, with her hijab boards, or said ghetto labelling. This kind of oppression is not strategic, episodic, or sovereign, and neither is the resistance I am trying to suggest here. Resistance here would not be organised and would be hidden in things like kebabs and “foreign” shop-naming, what Scott (1985) calls “everyday resistance”. One of the *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) that could be used by my informants with low education and no political organisation. Gupta & Ferguson (1997) show another aspect to this kind of resistance as “...as an experience that constructs and reconstructs the identity of subjects” and that connects it to place-making and identity (p.28). They go on to explain that the said experience is something that changes you, that can be transformative on an individual. It can also lead to a reinforcement of prevailing practices and identities and communities, thereby ironically contributing to maintaining the status quo . Farah, a Somali data engineer I met one day while I was at my main field site, told me that Somalis could be themselves - whatever that meant - in Grønland because everybody already thinks it’s a Somali place. Halima, one of the girls who would regularly visit the small centre (find a name for this) told me she used to try to have Norwegian friends, dress in a more western way, and try to learn the language, but she seemed to always hit a wall. To the rest of the world, she was a Somali Muslim, carrying with her all the burdens associated with the two marginalities of being a (black) immigrant and a Moslem, so she decided to give up trying altogether. In Grønland, her people understood her, accepted her, and didn’t judge her based on generalisations and stereotypes. She now wears abayas and her social circle is mainly made up of fellow Somalis and others living in the Grønland area. This particular action was transformative on her and her way of life.

Some of these processes should be looked at as resistance. In the “Network Society”, Manuel Castells (1996) considers groups of people who are defined by their resistance to hegemonic culture in places where they are supposed or even forced to integrate into it- resistance identity. Following his logic, I see some of my informants’ actions as refusal to conform to the hegemonic power to “be more Norwegian”. Norwegians, the majority in this case, do not feel the coercion to belong. Somalis, Pakistanis and other ethnic minority however feel the force to include themselves in the majority. By failure or refusal to belong, they are forced to reinforce, accentuate, advertise elements of their identity and culture. Even formerly dormant cultural practices among immigrants become salient in the face of hostility from the majority group. That is not to say that all who wear abayas, speak their mother tongues or burn incense in their shops do so in opposition to wider Norwegian society. What I refer to here are groups into which people like Halima and teenagers who speak kebabnorsk belong, who have been excluded in one way or another from the majority and now define themselves by their resistance to that exclusion. These groups then consequently exclude The dominant Norwegian culture, an approach that Castells calls “the eclusion of the excluders by the excluded” (Castells,1996 ). Such resistance identities are seen, heard, felt, *sensed* in Grønland and are woven into the fabric of the place.

This section is an effort to give *place* and the systems that make it due importance in the analysis of identity and belonging among my informants in Grønland. Through King Christian IV I have shown how history and power from “ above” shaped Grønland for years to come since 1624. We have also seen that creation of an “immigrant” lingo - kebabnorsk the way people talk is also a way through which place is made. Implicit “street” ways of behaviour and being are also a sunstantancial characteristic of people in Grønland and thereby the place too. I have also explored the way that we sense a landscape as another way of making it through sesnsapes. Finally, I have considered resistance identity as a tool that defines the streets of Grønland.

## Chapter 2

### The Economy of small shops

This chapter starts with a comparison of the typical shopping experiences at a standard Norwegian grocery store and a shop in Grønland to open a discussion of the contextualisation of business logic, motivations and meanings of businesses in Grønland. Then comes the analysis of illicit practices that are sometimes tied up in the economy in Grønland. Thereafter, I show the ways in which businesses are social with the main example of mama Najma's shop as a popular social meeting place. The chapter by showing ways that state institutions influence my informants' lives, which, rather indirectly, transforms the place they live in.

### Business as Usual

The average Norwegian middle-class shopping experience looks something like this: it happens at chain grocery stores like *Kiwi*, *Coop*, or *Meny* where the service, products, and even the layout will be the same whether one enters a *Kiwi* in Kjelsås- a suburb in Oslo or in Verdal- a small rural municipality in Norway. The stores have well-defined opening hours, even on public holidays, which are communicated clearly usually at the entrance and on their websites. The shopper is guaranteed to buy products at the same price regardless of the location of the store and to get a receipt on payment. The general attitude and behaviour of the employees are also almost identical - a practiced professional courteousness that is void of personal familiarity. There is limited small talk or references to you as a person, but rather to you as a shopper. This of course summons into question the attitude of said shoppers who also interact with the employees not as social persons but as workers. Worker and shopper usually only seek each other out when the former wants to ease the shopping experience, or when the latter needs help with easing or quickening the shopping experience. On an average trip to the grocery store, the shopper finds the items they want in the different aisles that are sectioned by product type- "dairy products", "soups and sauces", "tea and coffee" and so on, they proceed to the till to check out, the cashier and shopper may exchange a quick "Hei!" as the cashier starts to scan the shoppers' items. When the scanning is almost done, the cashier asks "Pose?"(Bag?) to which the shopper answers yes or no and after payment, the cashier asks again "Kvittering?"(Receipt?) to which the shopper answers again in the affirmative or

negative. When the transaction is finalised, there may be another quick exchange of “Ha det!” (Bye!) between the two and off goes the shopper. In much of ethnic Norway, that is business as usual.

In Grønland, business follows a different script. Some of the shops I worked with had no indication of the shop name or working hours on the facade. They had no specified working hours for their clients or even themselves, most of them did not have a payment terminal and consequently could not provide a receipt at the end of a transaction. Mama Najma’s shop cannot be found on any internet search engine. The sign outside Mama Najma’s shop says it is called *Xaasqa shop* (changed name), even though the people who *know* it know that it is “actually” called Mama Najma’s shop. The service you get at the shop depends on who is in the shop that day, whether they are in a good mood or not, if they have company or not, and it can also depend on who you, the shopper, are. If Mama Najma has some friends over at the shop and they are catching up on the week’s gossip, the shopper is left alone to figure out what they want and then approach Mama Najma with a question, for payment, or leave. On a different day, she will exchange pleasantries with customers, many of whom are regulars, or ask about their families - usually in Somali. On days when she is feeling low, a regular customer will notice her quietness, ask about it, and a conversation will ensue. On some other days, however, she will not be around. Then, a friend of hers or her sister will be sitting in for her. On several occasions, her niece who was visiting from Molde was in the shop. When Mama Najma needs to run a quick errand in the middle of the day, her neighbours watch over the shop, and she does the same for them. On the days that she was away from the shop, she said that she would be sick, have a doctor’s appointment, be at another friend’s shop, or use the opportunity of someone else’s availability to stay home and take a day or two off.

There is no clear arrangement of items in the shop besides the abayas that hang from the clothing rails along one of the walls of the small room. Otherwise, there is an array of different kinds of beauty creams, perfumes, hair oils, soaps, and other cosmetics lined on top of each other following no apparent order or system. Most of the products are usually one or two items of each. Most of them do not have price tags on them and the prices may change depending on who is in the shop or the shopper’s bargaining power. For the period I conducted fieldwork there, there was no proper inventory of the shop taken, but there were unopened boxes of new items in the shop and in storage whose number Mama Najma said she knew even though she did not tell me. Different items were mixed together in different



parts and shelves in the shop and there was no telling how many boxes of Blue Magic hair oil or incense wax were in the shop altogether. But again, Mama Najma insisted that she knew what she had in the shop and the prices of each item by heart. Compared to business operations in Kiwi, Mama Najma's shop lay on the other side of the coin. This difference in the way businesses are run is shared with other small businesses, and more so those owned by ethnic minorities.

Before I focused on Somali businesses, I visited a Polish-*owned?* supermarket just outside Grønland, and towards the city centre. Here, there were aisles and a product placement system that was consistent with the average Norwegian store. However, there were hardly any items with English or Norwegian labels on the packaging. They had what seemed like Polish or Russian wording, and no other product description in a more contextually familiar language. When I asked the girl at the till if I could conduct my fieldwork there, she said that she was not sure as she was just an employee. I was welcome to hang around and ask her questions on the days that she worked, she said, but she could not say on the days that she did not. When I asked about the manager or owner so that I could get permission for access, she told me that the manager did not come around often. The managerial position was mostly for formality, and even she would not be able to give me the permission I wanted. The owner was in Trondheim where he had a similar supermarket and was hardly ever at the Oslo branch, so I was given a phone number and email that I could contact him through. I did not get a response to the phone call I made and the email I sent so I went back to the supermarket after a couple of days. I wanted to know when the girl I talked to usually worked and if I could get a hold of the manager. The girl told me that she did not have definite work hours or days, and neither did the shop. She was supposed to work at least three days a week but sometimes she worked two, others four and sometimes none at all. The supermarket's working hours as painted on the entrance doors said that it was open 10:00-20:00 Monday to Friday, 12:00-18:00 on Saturdays, and closed on Sundays. She told me that sometimes they would open at 12:00 on weekdays, or not open at all. Even though she did not know why she only worked when she received a phone call. She did not like it at all.

Another starkly different business practice in small kiosks, which would not be so eye-opening in places like Uganda or Kenya where I am from, was the selling of single cigarettes rather than by the full, and might I add - unopened- pack. The first time I witnessed this kind of transaction in Grønland was at a kiosk that was owned by an Ethiopian man,

which has since closed. The kiosk sold shisha pipes/hookahs, tobacco, smoke pipes, e-cigarettes, and other smoking accessories. Customers, who were for the most part drug addicts, came in and bought one or two cigarettes with a coin, asked to borrow a lighter, or buy a single sheet of tobacco rolling paper. Just like Mama Najma and the Polish store, the kiosk did not have definite opening hours. The owner did not have employees who could work while he was indisposed, so the shop could close at midday and reopen at four o'clock in the evening on any given day. Sometimes he would come to the shop by appointment. To select customers, fruit-flavoured tobacco used in water pipes could also be sold- the importation and sale of which is illegal in Norway.

Before scientific analysis, what is apparent so far in small immigrant owned businesses in Grønland is their *flexibility*. Flexibility in time, relations, prices, locations, and the businesses themselves. Business hours can be extended, paused, or cut. Prices can be negotiated. Relations can be highlighted, downplayed, taken advantage of, or ignored. The longevity of businesses is (sometimes intentionally) conditional. The average Norwegian store on the other hand has a more set system of operation and a plan for temporal sustainability. It is apparent to anyone who cares to compare, that Grønland is *different*, to anyone who has visited the small shops a couple of times that *they* are different. To show that small businesses in Grønland are different is not the aim of this thesis therefore. Rather, it is to show how they become different, the relevance of that difference to the people who operate them, and to contextualise the alternate way of life for the wider society. My repeated use of “different” here does not prolong the us-them hierarchical and discriminating language that was rampant in early anthropology. It is to recognise and acknowledge diverse world views in order to properly appreciate and understand them. The contrary would be to ignore and reject their existence, with consequent conceptual erasure, which more often than not results in conflict. There is no home for forced homogeneousness or a blindness to diversity in the current global political economy.

Although I have contrasted standard Norwegian chain grocery store experience with that of independent immigrant-owned small businesses, my interest lies with the latter which has been under-studied, misread, and therefore misunderstood and misrepresented. By applying a universalistic, capitalistic, and neoliberal economic model to the small shops, they can be seen as disorganised and failed attempts at achieving the standard Norwegian retail shop logic and organisation. With foundations in Marx (), Weber () and Polanyi (), several more contemporary studies Geertz(), Bourdieu(),Portes & Sensenbrenner())... have shown the

limitations of economic thought that insists on a pure market. Although even *Kiwi* is not without social structures in the way they run business, they strive for it, and on the surface, it looks like a mission accomplished. Lien(1998) takes Viking Foods, a Norwegian food manufacturing company that was undergoing growth and reorganisation in the 1990s and therefore expanding their marketing department to better compete on the international stage. The process of hiring advertising agencies involved the invitation of interested agencies to have “competitive presentations” in which they would show their cooperation models, economic results, international networks, brand-building and other qualifications of merit. The presentation meetings or selection process lasted from January to March. In the end, when asked how better advertising agencies were chosen, Viking Foods marketing managers said ‘ “I’d say we select *people* more than we select agencies.”’(page 52, my emphasis) , and that it is a question of *trust* in the *people* you meet. After three months of several two-hour long competitive presentations of brand-building skills, personal preferences were the ultimate deciding factors. Lien calls the process a “purification” ritual that aims to keep the market freedom to end or extend contracts while also less formally keeping social relations that are key when client and agency work closely together for long periods of time. This is an example of how the average Norwegian business - like *Kiwi*-works and “stages” the “purification” of the market. *Mama Najma* however does not even try to achieve that level of detachment from social relations. Granted she has a much smaller business than Viking Foods or *Kiwi*, but a common neoliberal assumption would be that hers, or all businesses for that matter, aspire to build their brands, expand, have an “international” standard, and ultimately and economic disembeddedness (Polanyi, 1944). On the contrary, some of the businesses, I will show, aspire for a deeper entrenchment in kinship, religious and cultural relations and are not looking to say open another branch elsewhere or invest in marketing solutions.

Karl Polanyi theorised the influence of social structures in economic activities as the embeddedness of the market in social relations. This was after the neoclassical school of economics posed the economy as consisting of self-interested rational human behaviour without other institutional or social influence. He acknowledges the fact that no society can or has existed without some kind of economy, but that it is only until recently that the economy is said and forced, if I may, to be controlled by markets. “In spite of the chorus of academic incantations so persistent in the nineteenth century, gain and profit made on exchange never before played an important part in human economy. Though the institution of the market was fairly common since the later Stone Age, its role was no more than

incidental.”(Polanyi, page) I consider that in the same way, small businesses in Grønland use the more essential system of economics that reveres social relations above economic gain, and that Karl Polanyi refers to in the quotation above. The commerce that goes on in Grønland has economic gain as a goal. It is however not the only, or over arching one. In instances like the example I show below, profit, later on profit maximisation is not the target at all. A fellow student at the University of Oslo and second-generation Somali immigrant, Sadik told me that his retired mother sold clothes at their home. She sometimes joined forces with other women who wanted to import merchandise into Norway, they would have everything bought from China or elsewhere, put it in one container and share the costs of shipping it to Norway. The other women own shops in Grønland or send their shares further to Somalia or Kenya to re-sale to retailers there. Sadik’s mother keeps her imported items - mostly clothes and shoes - at their home and sells piece by piece to friends and family who come to visit, at little or no profit. I asked Sadik why the mother did not get a shop or at least be a wholesaler to the small shops in Grønland. Even I found difficulty in making sense of why someone would go through with what I imagine to be a mentally taxing process of shipping a container for no profit. Sadik told me that it was a hobby for his mother. She had been a businesswoman all her life, so when retirement came, so did a boredom and dullness she had not known before, and did not like. She therefore went back to what she knew best, only for leisure this time. She asked friends and relatives to go to her place to see what she was selling and would usually sell at prices that covered her costs, but would give some items away to the local Imam’s wife, niece or other relative. Upon evaluation, I consider Sadik’s mother’s actions an excellent example of Karl Polanyi explanation on gain and profit. That for years in our history, profit has been an unintended by-product of economics and not the ultimate goal. That it is possible that Sadik’s mother’s ultimate goal with her commerce was to revive her social life, and give familiar meaning back to her life. A life and retirement that would probably have looked different somewhere in Somalia rather than the more isolating Norway? Sadik’s mother does not technically or legally run a small business, but the same logic applies to mama Najma or mama Nasra. The latter are more established as businesses but as I continue to show through this thesis, they care less about profit and gain than capitalism assumes.

Granovetter (1985) built on Polanyi’s theory to show that even in the modern economy that claims to filter out social relations, they persist. He, however, came from a more balanced and critical approach while tackling ‘the problem of embeddedness’. According to him, economic

theory ‘under-socialises’ human action- undermines the social influence in economics, while social theory “over-socialises” behaviour - magnifies social influence in economics. Lien (1998) also criticized anthropologists for focusing primarily on gift exchange of inalienable interdependent transactors - basically ‘over-socialising’ human behaviour -, while economic theory also looked at commodity exchange as done with alienable objects and between independent transactors - essentially ‘under-socialising’ behaviour. Lien and Granovetter among others then offer a kind of bridge that connects social theory and economic approach to provide a more realistic framework of human economic action. “The embeddedness approach to the problem of trust and order in economic life, then, threads its way between the oversocialized approach of generalized morality and the undersocialized one of impersonal, institutional arrangements by following and analyzing concrete patterns of social relations. Unlike either alternative,..., it makes no sweeping (and thus unlikely) predictions of universal order or disorder but rather assumes that the details of social structure will determine which is found.” (Granovetter, page 493). I, therefore, do not assume that business is without social relations in Kiwi, or that Norwegian entrepreneurs are atomised individuals who only have self-interests as the goal. In the same spirit then, this chapter/thesis is not to show that immigrant business owners in Grønland only act towards social ends. It is to show how familial, religious and cultural elements work and persist in the economic sphere of their lives.

## Grønland Under-the-table

On some of our walks with Abdi, he would point out Somali shops and tell me everything he knew about them. Every now and then he would mention someone who had “bought the key”, “sold the key”, was “having problems with the key”. “The key” is an informal business leasing system common in Grønland, where shops exchange hands without the transaction being validated on paper. The business or shop in question can be leased out the way it is - with all existing inventory to go on as it has before, or it can be only the commercial space and legal name that are traded. The Key therefore becomes a symbol of this transaction, but also a literal show of ownership as an actual key to the property is exchanged. Hypothetically

speaking, if a one Fadima wanted to get a key, they would look for a business owner that I will call Ibra. Ibra has a shop or restaurant that he owns (sometimes owning the property itself too). Ibra gives Fadima the key to his shop with everything in it for Fadima to run. Fadima comes empty handed -so to speak to the shop, without inventory, to take over the shop in whatever state she finds it in. Fadima can run the shop on monthly or annual basis but nothing is contractual and the arrangement can change anytime from both parties. Ibra will ask Fadima to pay him a monthly fee and then Ibra may travel. (Usually) A time comes when Fadima wants to open her own shop, or simply can not run the business anymore. She then hands the key back to Ibra who usually “gives” it to someone else. The key is symbolic for not only the informal leasing system among Somalis and immigrants generally, it is also an opening into a social and economic class and belonging for immigrant entrepreneurs and status seeking individuals who would otherwise not have another way in. We will dissect this deeper further on in the chapter.

Buying and selling/renting of shops and commercial spaces outside the informal and illegal system is normalised as a way of negotiating with strict, tedious and long processes of the formal sector. The key helps the seller retain their social status(explained later), but more importantly their official ownership status and the benefits that may come with it. I have heard stories of many families and single men who moved to England or back\* to Kenya after years of living and working in Norway. After acquiring Norwegian citizenship, it becomes easy to relocate to nearly anywhere in the world while maintaining welfare benefits from Norway if needed. Ownership of a shop in Norway provides the proof of residence in Norway needed for benefits to be released. That is the main reason behind the selling of “the key”. The seller need not be outside Norway for them to benefit from this transaction however, but it is common that they actually live abroad. Abdi told me a story of a man many years ago who moved his family to Kenya but maintained a residential address in Norway and “sold” his family benefits to another family in Norway. For years, the buyer family took their young son to dentists’ appointments as the young son of the “seller” family until one day they were asked for IDs that had not been renewed and did not properly match the family that was claiming them. It was a big case, Abdi said.

For the buyers of the key, it is a less risky, less demanding and easier way of getting into business. The key system skips bureaucratic paperwork involved in starting up an establishment, it gives people who would otherwise not be eligible to start a business an

alternative entry point. The practice of “the keys” provides people with a quick way to access the commercial field by circumventing official, restrictive and burdensome paperwork. Eligibility in terms of understanding the Norwegian legal framework involved, the language sometimes, starting capital, a permanent job, experience or profession to qualify for a loan. The buyer is trusted by the seller to run the business successfully and thereby have the ability to pay. The buyer is held accountable by community and religious ties\*, and their own desire to make a living. No one of the shop owners\* I talked to mentioned “the key” system or any knowledge of it, but many of them, including mama Najma, said they were just helping the actual owners who were never there during the period of my fieldwork. The fact that “the key” was never mentioned to me points to either the practice being an open secret, the knowledge of which incriminating to share with others outside one’s close family and friends, or to me possibly being an unfamiliar and untrusted “outsider” who might deal with the information in unpredictable ways.

The informal and illegal business in Grønland brings to light the entanglement of the economy in extra-legal arenas of life. It goes beyond small businesses and extends to the housing sector, of which even I was a part as mentioned earlier. I rented the apartment I lived in from a friend of a former boss who wanted to rent it out but keep his name registered to that address. As part of the deal, I got a reduced price and could not have my name registered to the address. This he explained he did all the time. He bought property, “lived in them” for about a year to avoid the taxes that come with selling without living in an apartment for about a year, and then sold as soon as market prices went up. It is also common that the families in the dentist deceit example I mentioned above also exchange social housing the same way they did dentist appointments. It is also commonplace for taxi drivers and the clients they drive to negotiate taxi fares. I have personally become so used to this so much that I now hardly ever just enter a taxi without negotiating the fare to my destination first. Some taxi drivers offer a reduced fixed price if you are willing to pay in cash or via vipps - a quick money transfer digital application. Others also have alternative payment machines from the official taxi company ones that they use their side businesses as sole proprietors. This allows them to run their own businesses while they are in employment and most probably using their employers’ resources. Illicitness therefore becomes an almost inseparable part of small businesses - and life- in Grønland, deflating the pure market bubble. It strings along the theory of economic embeddedness, as a confirmation that indeed, there is more at play other than resources, profit and gain. Under-the-table taxi payments are possible because of

the driver's empathy towards the fact that I am a student, so a little price reduction might go a long way, or simply out of spite for whatever taxi company he works for. It needs to be stressed that personal gain is not outside the question here, it simply is not the lead motivating factor, at least not in *all* instances.

The illegality of transactions in Grønland is set in not only negotiations with the formal economy but also ethnicity performances and perceptions. Without invalidating other factors that may also be at play, migrant identities were more entangled the illicitness that I discovered. Ethnic Norwegians too engage in illegal activity needless to say, but that in Grønland is normalised among black and brown people or those perceived to be immigrants. People with those identity markers are assumed to be aware, condone, or be part of illegal or alternative economic activity. My landlord was a middle-aged man from Iran who found no difficulty at all in telling me about the kind of rent arrangement we would, later on, agree to have. I too only bargain taxi fare, even grocery store prices if the person in question is "foreign-looking". I once heard a rumour that there was an immigrant doctor who could provide whatever COVID19 test results- positive or negative- one wanted in a space where it could not have been said if it was not only black, brown, or immigrants in the place. There are also ways to send and receive money without identity verification, which pertains mostly to immigrants who send remittances to their home countries. The traditional Somali hawala system is not as lucrative as it once was due to the stringent laws that were introduced against them world wide but more so in Norway after the September 11 attacks (Gaas). There has also been a digitisation of the system. One of my informants told me about a money sending application that was developed but "a young Somali guy in Sweden" called. However, immigrants still use money sending kiosks to send money to their home countries for reasons such as a lack of papers lower transactional fees, or as an avenue of laundering money.

Just as commerce is laced with illegality, so is it with morality and obligation. All small Somali shops that I visited had a charity collection box usually placed by the entrance, or payment point. The boxes indicated that collected funds would go to orphans or people in need. The boxes were managed by the Muslim community, which did not pay the shops to have them there. The shops did not get anything of the money collected. I explore moral acts



like these which exist because of the small businesses, and which reinforce the fact that the market is not a lone, self sufficient institution.

## Drinking tea for the community.

“They sell more tea than the stuff in their shops.”- Sadiq

Mama Najma also sold tea at the canteen next door and her sister made chapati, mandazi, and other Somali pastries. Throughout the day, people would come in to hang out at the “centre” to drink tea and talk to each other. It is on such occasions that I usually became a fly on the wall as I felt completely ignored and out of place when they spoke only in Somali, laughed away, and did not try to acknowledge my presence. It was mostly men who came in, some of them taxi drivers taking a break and some of them unemployed men who usually hang out at the Grønland square. Next to the centre was another Somali shop owned by mama Nasra whose customers came to the centre to drink tea. There are community cafes where mostly men gather to drink tea, catch up and watch football. One such shop was one owned by my mama Doua and her son, they also owned a shop and made more from the community cafe. Drinking tea is not so much about enjoying a hot beverage as it is about socialising and community building. In many shops, money made from selling tea or from community cafes goes to helping the needy in the community. This can go from helping a struggling family in Oslo to an orphanage in Mogadishu. Mama Doua and her son made so much money from selling tea that they built a school in Somalia. Mama Doua’s son Hassan currently splits his time between Somalia and Norway as he runs the elementary school in Somalia and comes to Norway for the shop and runs fundraising campaigns all over Oslo for the school. Such results or at least goals for such results are the reason people drink tea. Men’s community cafes are also socialising spaces, but specific to Somali culture and objectives. They are not designed for aesthetic appeal, there is minimal furniture, some seats and tables are makeshift, in some there is a lone flatscreen mounted on a wall.

At Mama Najma’s, it was hard to tell that there was also a cafe. When I first got there, I was told there was a canteen but by the looks of it, I assumed it was closed or non-functional as there were no display disk of the snacks or pastries that the canteen served, no visible reception or payment area, no sign to indicate that one could buy food or drink at the place. When people came to the centre, mama Najma’s sister served them tea and pastries in a most

informal manner- sometimes placing a snack directly in someone's hand with her bare hands or putting a cup of tea on a seat next to them as there weren't enough tables. This way of serving, receiving and consuming food looked to me as a friendly or familial sharing of food rather than a buying and selling of food. It is how it is meant. Selling tea is not the main business- it is a side "gig" for the community so it is not taken with the same seriousness as the main business- the shop, even though it reportedly brings in more money.

Besides tea selling are the little charity collection containers at nearly every immigrant-owned business in Grønland. These containers are for different causes. In some "Frukt og Grønt" supermarkets, the money collected goes to pilgrimages to Mecca, youth groups affiliated to a mosque in the neighbourhood, or "the poor". At mama Najma's shop, the collection box was for orphans.

This kind of tea selling, charity collection, and even ways of socialising during meals point to beliefs and ways of life to conceptions outside Grønland. The economic aspect of buying and selling is not lost, but it is nearly drowned in peace building efforts in Somalia or culture preservation in the way that food is served. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) theorise the intersection of immigrants and the embeddedness of their economic behaviour quite well. They systematically show the different sources of social capital in immigrant communities like the one(s) in Grønland, and the tendency of ethnic minority businesses to embed their economic activity in social networks. By explaining concepts like enforceable trust, bounded solidarity or morality during exchange, they diagnose ethnic enclaves and immigrant economic life creditably. It is through their analysis that the informal tea serving at Mama Najma's shop can be interpreted as a need to strengthen cultural practices in the face of hostility from the larger society. Because "people think we're all uneducated, poor people without documents" (page) the Nicaraguan immigrant community of Miami resorted to wearing near-forgotten items like *cotonas* - cotton shirts usually worn by Nicaraguan Indians. "The people who always wore American brands and European clothes in Nicaragua now come shopping for a *cotona* to wear to parties" (Portes, 1993page) said a store owner. It is clear then, that hostility towards immigrants and unfavourable laws from host countries can cause the creation of ethnic enclaves. To some extent, they also show the effect of factors outside the geographical boundaries of the enclaves. A fitting example is San Francisco's Chinatown whose organisation followed the kinship group or clan that incorporated male descendants from a common ancestor, just as it was in Kwangtung where most immigrants

were from. that example shows a cross-boarder reach towards factors other than those within communities, which I believe to also be necessary for the study of immigrant communities and businesses.

It is against this background that I would like to add emphasis on external, cross-border, and even cross-temporal elements that also contribute, or at least facilitate the creation of the types of social capital that Portes & S describe. A broader spotlight shed on external factors to immigrant communities is needed to get a more rounded understanding of the embeddedness in immigrant economic behaviour. It is impossible to ignore the Somali civil war that has been ongoing since the 1980s while studying anything to do with the Somali community in Grønland or Norway. It is afterall the reason for the substantial numbers of Somali refugees in Norway, for starters. Paying attention to that almost guarantees an understanding of the Somali demographics in Norway, and more specific to this section, why they drink all of that tea, or have those charity boxes at every shop. The economy in Grønland is then seen as embedded in a longing for lost homes, a discomfort, struggles to learn a new language and develop new skill sets, or a gratefulness to be alive. Drinking tea then becomes more than a business transaction. It becomes a moral obligation to stand in solidarity with fellow countrymen, to support the less fortunate back home, and to enact culture. Drinking tea or buying something from a Somali shop rather than any other becomes a pledge of allegiance of sorts - bounded solidarity.

Paying due attention to history also shows the embeddedness of current economic activity in Grønland, in King Christian IV's commands that we remember from Chapter 1. His orders in the 1600s are pivotal in knowing why Grønland's residents are largely of lower social economic status today. Social housing policies consequently show a systemic *placement* of immigrants in certain parts of town and an exclusion from others. I am not suggesting that Portes and Sensenbrenner should have covered all of the other factors of embeddedness just as extensively as they did social capital. I am suggesting that elements outside the "bounded" immigrant communities should have been discussed more or at least their existence and importance acknowledged.

Businesses are also a status symbol in addition to a genuine interest in entrepreneurship. To me, mama Najma was a middle-aged Somali lady who was trying to get by. To herself and

the Somali community, she is a respected businesswoman of high social status. “If I meet someone and I say we can meet at *my* shop, it feels good”-Mama Najma. Mama Sahra next door said that having a shop as your address means you are not an ordinary common person. You are worth something and are respected. The sense of belonging and respect among one's own people that is often hard to find in a place away from home is a strong and important factor.

“When I walk down the street here, people know me and respect me as a businessman in this country. There is a difference in the status that you have in a country where you are known and in a country where you are not known.” Omar Abdullahi, Mogadishu’ Hørst, 2015

The PRIO report with an interview from a Somali diaspora “returnee” in Mogadishu that I argue is reflected in the Somali entrepreneurs that I interviewed in Grønland. Away from places where they feel like they belong and matter, together with the difficulty of entering the Norwegian labour market and integrating, businesses are a portal of dignity for Somali shop owners. Both Mama Najma and mama Sahra expressed personal and social satisfaction in identifying themselves as shop owners

## State institutions and small shops

Mama Najma said she did not work because of a leg deformity/injury she got years ago while working as a cleaner. While at work one day, she slid on a wet floor and fell, badly fracturing her right tibia and fibula-the two main bones of the lower leg. She underwent an operation at Rikshospitalet for it but things went wrong somewhere during the healing process. She says she complained to the doctors about excruciating pain in the leg while she wore a cast but was told it was normal and that she should not worry. Months later, they realised her bones were deformed and healing crookedly. She could not complain further, the damage was done and there was no turning back. This lone story illustrates a lifeworld that informs the general experience of Somali immigrants of Mama Najma’s generation. Without homogenising their ‘experience’, I would like to point out the common junctions that their lives share. As refugees who came to Norway as adults, they come formally uneducated because of the war that has been ongoing in Somalia for decades, displacements in camps or other temporary

homes in Kenya and other neighbouring countries before they finally make it to Norway. Here, there is an emphasis and even necessity of ‘the language’ to get a job, to get an education, to get ‘integrated’, to get accepted. For a Somali woman who comes to Norway in her 30s like mama Najma or the Sheikh's wife, it becomes difficult to learn a new language in an alien alphabet with an illiterate background, knowledge of just Somali and Arabic, possible trauma from the war or experiences fleeing. On top of that, she is unskilled - at least in this kind of labour market. She is therefore left with the option of low-skilled jobs like cleaning with more exposure to work hazards. Her disfigured leg can be explained simply as a medical procedure gone wrong. It can also be a result of a language barrier between Mama Najma and her doctor(s), being unable to express herself or her pain and worries to the doctors, being unable to understand them or their orders properly, a lack of an interpreter in the meeting of the two or even the lack of knowledge of her right to ask for an interpreter.

Mama Najma is now incapable of standing or walking for long periods of time and therefore unable to work manual or low-skilled jobs as she did before. She now survives on disability benefits from the Norwegian Labour And Welfare Administration (NAV) and spends most of her days “helping” her ex-husband to run the shop. At first glance, she is *another* unemployed Somali woman who hangs idly around the area and helps out sometimes at the shop. A deeper and more holistic look at her life contextualises what is the experience of many immigrants and refugees and Mama Najma herself in complex connections of immigration law, discrimination and misrepresentation in health institutions and the welfare system NAV too. To understand how these small businesses work is to understand how all the different factors seemingly outside the establishments actually are central to the creation and running of the shops.

Entrepreneurship in itself is a coping mechanism from the exclusion in the mainstream job market where Somali refugees are either underqualified, unskilled, uneducated or lack proficiency in Norwegian or English. With the immigrants’ skills and qualifications brought with them from their home countries rendered useless in their host countries, they form a community based on shared adversity (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). The sense of a community based on the resistant identity (Castells, 1996) is what gives birth to ethnic enclaves like Chinatowns all over the world. The mid-1800s saw a mass emigration of Chinese escaping famine and civil conflicts towards the California gold rush (History, 2018). They thrived alongside the blossoming American economy but suffered when it declined.

Chinese labour was then seen as a threat to mainstream economy and the Chinese faced racial discrimination and repressive legislation. Large numbers retreated to a neighbourhood in San Francisco that became somewhat closed off to mainstream society geographically, linguistically, culturally and economically. They opened restaurants, clothing stores, banks, and schools that were culturally tailored for themselves, all of which was started on the basis of social capital (History, 2018). I argue that although it is a different context in terms of the people and the place. The situation of the Chinese in San Francisco is similar to that of the immigrants in Norway today.

Political debates and mass media rhetoric developed significant exclusionary potential after the the 22nd July 2011 attacks in Norway (Andersson, 2012; Jensen, 2014). Before the national realisation that the terrorist was in fact Anders Breivik, an ethnic Norwegian man, there was already anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and anti-multiculturalism hate spewing from internet platforms (Andersson, 2012). In the real world, Muslims and immigrants had braced themselves for the hostility that was to come. The normalised public and even political critique of Islam and migration is the responsibility of state institutions. The government condones and even incites boundary construction and the amplification of difference between ethnic minorities and majority, which cause people like my informants to retreat further inside their 'enclaves' into inclusive systems- systems that they create themselves. After the 2011 attacks, the government presented a white paper to the parliament that suggested more including and understanding ways of constructing Norwegian national identity. After the neo-Nazi attack on Norway, the country's previous image of neutral innocence was broken (Andersson, 2012). The country which has a far-flung history with colonialism and stands on the great Scandinavian values of democracy, the welfare state and egalitarianism had been thrown in unfamiliar territory and had prepared remedies. The problem was that the remedies did not include claim of responsibility from Norwegians. The white paper's plans were between the government and immigrants - an unequal starting point of conversation. Writing about the whitepaper, Jensen (2014) said that "this focus on nation-building shares the stage in the parliamentary debates with an understanding of integration as a two-way process between immigrants and institutions that leaves little to be expected of the majority population beyond non-discriminatory behaviour" (page 573).

In nearly all ways, the government's policies here are an overlap with political processes that influence or determine placemaking. However, I included this particular example for the sole

reason of my informants at the small shopping centre in Grønland. As we sat outside mama Najma's shop sometimes on slow days for business, a conversation about *staten* would ensue with whoever else was around. Often, they alluded to the state and as an abstract thing that they did not quite understand but that they feared, and knew that had control its business. Those who complained about discrimination, of self-alienation due to hostility from the majority population all pointed to Norwegians - the people, as part of the issues they had. Their difficulties and exclusion of the spaces and conversion

## Chapter 3

# The Gift of Solidarity: Care, Reciprocity and the Sameness of Difference in Grønland

“ The theory of the gift is the theory of solidarity” Mary Douglas in the foreword of *The Gift*.

This chapter delves into another aspect of Grønland-ness. A part of everyday life that is characterised by reciprocal care, kindness, and commonality that form a unique solidarity. Solidarity has for a long time been a rooted topic in the social sciences. From the Marxist () theory to the Durkheim() school, solidarity within social classes has been a central point in organisation and mobilisation in society. In a broad stroke, it is one of the weapons of the weak (Scott) resisting prevailing unjust or oppressive governing systems. On a closer look, the concept branches out in various ways besides that based on class. In Grønland, I try to illustrate that the solidarity I introduce here is one which is majorly based on ethnicity. Just like any other acts or movements of solidarity, the solidarity you find in everyday life in Grønland is based on a shared conceptualisation of sameness as “the others” in Norwegian society, and contained in small businesses, on the sidewalk, in the neighbourhood. Unlike the Scandinavian or Norwegian equality as sameness that Gullestad (2002) theorises, the ideology of sameness in Grønland is partly based on difference. With increased immigration and immigration debates came a rise in racism and nationalism in Norway. There is an imagined idea of Norwegian-ness as whiteness, and therefore an ethnification of national identity (Gullestad, 2002). This idea extends from the so defined Norwegians to the “others” - my informants and the majority population of Grønland. Imagined sameness is therefore based on ethnic difference. As non-ethnic Norwegians, there is an imagined shared life experience. From refugee backgrounds, exposure to racism, cultural or religious difference, or lack of the Norwegian language proficiency, life worlds that are typical for immigrants or non-ethnic Norwegians are a binding factor. Last but not least in the layers of imagined sameness is the localisation of the actors in the everyday acts of solidarity. Grønland is a distinct and specific site for the concepts I attempt to analyse here. Refer to chapter 1. I have not experienced the instances of kindness, generosity, care and solidarity that I did in Grønland elsewhere in Oslo. Elsewhere, I may be asked where I am from or if I am



Norwegian. In Grønland, I am naturally part of the field. It matters less what my nationality is as a black woman, but more that I am ethnically different. I naturally belong because I am equally different vis-a-vis the ethnic majority population, and therefore have automatic inclusion in the sphere of solidarity and exchange.

Exchange and reciprocity in this chapter is in reference to Mauss' classic - *The Gift* (1967). His theory in basic terms says that there is no such thing as a pure or free gift, that gifts are given and received under implicit moral obligatory terms of reciprocity. The exchange of gifts therefore attaches and indebts the receiver to the giver, and vice versa upon reciprocity and on grounds of moral obligation. I would like to suggest that the everyday acts of kindness, generosity, care and inclusion in Grønland are done in solidarity and given as gifts. I am attempting to marry aspects of the two theories as explanatory tools of daily life in the neighbourhood, but I say aspects with utmost intent because the totality of both theories does not apply. Solidarity as we see in this chapter can be explicitly and intentionally expressed, but it does not have the robustness of a movement with actual impacts on the status quo. Just like the everyday acts of resistances in chapter 1?, solidarity here is not structurally organised, the people themselves may not formulate their actions as those of solidarity, and it is not directed to any particular governing body. It is an unthreatening incorporation in everyday life that has become a naturalised treatment of ethnic others in Grønland. The theory of the gift as I use it is also differs a little from its original application in terms of awareness and intention. I suggest that the daily acts of kindness, of care, of generosity, and banding together in Grønland are randomly distributed moral gifts. An act of kindness in one instance may not be demanded or expected, but is given in the hopes that the receiver will offer a similar kindness back at some point in time or elsewhere. In this sense, gift exchange does not follow a particular order or target particular individuals as is the case with the North American potlatch system (Mauss,) or the Island Kula (Malinowsk.). The most defining consideration in the case of Grønland its spatial form and the people of colour that interact in it. It is a moral obligation to help where you can, to see, show and share commonality, and to care. All the above are expected to be reciprocated, but not necessarily in a direct back-and-forth route or cycle. That way, the "spirit" of the gift is more free and pure on an individual level but more binding on a group level. Still, however, more lax in the sense that there are no specific obligations put on particular people in their individuality. The ambiguousness of a person's belonging to an unclearly defined community makes it easy to navigate in out of moral, solidarity and care obligations without wrongdoing. There are

countless times when I was warned by my informants not to forget myself and be Norwegian. If I said I was not hungry when offered something to eat for example, I was turning down an offer of kindness, acceptance and inclusion. I was removing myself from the obligation of offering the same care to someone else, and therefore not claiming my membership to us - immigrants, black people, non-Norwegians.

Gifts of solidarity are spontaneous and sometimes targeted acts of care and kindness that are normatively reciprocated within a socially disadvantaged group as a means of collective support as in Portes' () "bounded solidarity. Unlike well-established gift systems, exchange is not predictable or contained in a particular framework of rules. Membership to the structure is not explicitly defined and neither is the function. Actions of individuals are based on a collective commonality of imagined lived differences based on ethnicity and location in the case of my informants in Grønland. Within the random and sometimes intentional acts of generosity and care is a statement of solidarity.

From here on I am going to divide the chapter in three parts: one on implicit and organic solidarity, the next on intentional and explicit solidarity, and the last part on the implications of solidarity to the people that practice it.

## Implicit Solidarity

From my fieldnotes

Pakshiya Textiles shop

When I moved to Grønland for my fieldwork, Oslo was still under a COVID-19 lockdown, which means that only essential shops were open and operational. While walking one day, I saw a small textile shop by the roadside. The information on the glass door said that they sold all kinds of textiles and offered sewing services too for curtains, couch cushions and such. There was also a phone number. I needed curtains at my new place, and it looked like a small Pakistani/Indian-owned business judging from the name of the shop and the textile designs and patterns that could be seen through the glass window. So it seemed like the perfect way to get curtains while also possibly entering my field. I already had some sense by now that in Grønland and with businesses there, nearly anything could be negotiated and that may not be as they look on surface level. So even if the shop was clearly closed and didn't have a website

where I could have whatever I wanted delivered home, I went ahead and called the number on the shop door. I told the lady who picked up that I wanted to buy some amount of material and have it sewn into curtains. With no mention of the COVID restrictions that barred us from meeting properly, she told me that she would be at the shop the next day at a given time. Before the agreed time, she called to say she would be running late because she was supposed to take a birthday cake to her niece's place.

She arrived with her husband, they opened the door for me and closed it while I was inside. I was told to feel free and look around for the material I wanted. Not long after, they opened for someone else who seemed to be a regular customer, friend, or relative - they spoke the same language. While we were in there, a Somali lady who was passing by saw us through the glass window and tried the door to get in, and then knocked when it didn't open. The lady owner opened and asked what she wanted, the Somali lady said she wanted to look around it it was open. The owner said that it was not open, but that she could look around and buy if she wanted to. Another couple was passing by and was let in in the same way.

Suddenly, we were five customers in a supposedly closed shop. We were all there out of a refusal to see and take things as they are presented. I saw and knew that the shop and all such shops were closed due to restrictive measures against COVID19 but called anyway. The Somali lady also knew that shops are closed, she tried the doorknob, it didn't open but she knocked anyway. The couple who owned the shop definitely knew that the order of business at the moment not being open, but they opened for us anyway. Legally, there were a couple of rules we were breaking. Morally, the people probably just wanted to be human together with all the isolation that came with the pandemic. Textiles are not the most essential things one would truly need during a pandemic. The Somali lady and other couple were in fact just passing by on their way elsewhere, so the shop was not their initial goal, they did not need to buy anything. The couple who owned the place cannot have opened just for the possibility of making a few hundred kroner. In fact, none of the other customers came in with the intention to actually buy and the owners knew it. Making or spending money had little to do with what happened that day. Even I could order cheaper already made curtains from IKEA.

The ethnographic scene above illustrates care and responsibility between folk that I argue is typical in Grønland. I touched upon solidarity in the second chapter of this thesis, as a

placemaking tool and more broadly as a concept that explains the banding of immigrants into so-called enclaves as a coping mechanism against the wider and usually unwelcoming society. Solidarity as I explain here is an extension of that understanding of the term to show concrete everyday experiences through which it is manifested and maintained.

Durkheim(1893) defined this type of process as mechanical solidarity - the social cohesion of people in a society based on homogeneity. The common denominator in Grønland is ethnic otherness - a differentiating marker that is contested. No wonder then, that Durkheim theorised mechanical solidarity as belonging to simple “traditional” societies without complex structures and whose homogeneity was ordinarily familial and kinship ties. The ties in Grønland go beyond family to cover ethnicities, but we all are entangled in family or kinship relations and language in the end. It is why an Afghani man will call a Somali stranger “brother” or why mama Najma called me her “daughter”. Social cohesion in Grønland is based on imagined shared interests and beliefs and not structurally defined goals and motivations. With the background of the larger society being dominant and excluding, it is when solidarity among the “others” is born. Usually, it is within smaller and more specific communities based on one ethnicity, for example, the Pakistanis, Vietnamese, or Somalis. The scene above however is a mix of ethnic backgrounds albeit with a common denominator - all immigrants. I suggest that solidarity and reciprocity is stronger and more binding within ethnic communities than it is in multiethnic arenas.

My ethnographic work also happened during the COVID-19 pandemic which I argue magnified socioeconomic class differences (among other factors) in terms of exposure risk, contraction of the virus, and death. That reinforced people’s own class identification and therefore a shared consciousness of their position in society, bringing about a class-based solidarity. This kind of solidarity borrows from the Marxian school but is watered down in leaving behind extreme market and class inequalities.

Scenes like that are common in Grønland and it is upon that foundation that I introduce the notion and significance of solidarity in the neighbourhood. Portes (1993) explains bounded solidarity as that where immigrants stick together and look out for each other because of their shared difference and treatment from their host countries or societies. This is indeed the case in Grønland. There are Somali and Pakistani communities among others who have closely knit communities that serve to support mobilise and protect members of the group. However, there is a more encompassing solidarity in Grønland that does not follow specific national ethnicities but rather, is extended to a group who across ethnic and racial divisions share membership in a general category of “otherness”, shared affinities and aversions - close to

Durkheim's meaning of mechanical solidarity - and as opposed to the ethnic majority of Norway or Oslo.

The next part of this chapter turns to a more deliberate show of solidarity that is mainly as a result religious ideology. Religion is however also a driving force in cases of unstructured and implicit support and togetherness in Grønland. There was a significant rise of Islamophobia in the west after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. In Norway, there was a widespread negative sentiment among the people, but more quantifiable and outright, in the political arena towards Muslims. Fremskrittspartiet - The Progress Party is right wing and commonly known for its anti-immigration or Islam policies and ideology. In 2007, Carl I. Hagen who was the party leader from 1978-2007 said that "not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims"(Eriksen, page 11, 2013). That such Islamophobic bigotry from a person of great power and influence is tolerable has a spill over effect to the rest of society, creating a hostile environment for Muslims. The everyday discrimination and hate that my informants face as a result of not only their ethnicity but also their religion forces a reclusiveness into their communities where they find support, care and inclusion. I heard several stories similar to those I've heard and read about countless times before about people who had impressive resumes but claimed to not get jobs because of the Muslim or non-Norwegian names. I assert that not only is this a reason for solidarity actions, it is also an indicative factor in the formation of small businesses in Grønland.

## Drinking Tea for Mogadishu: Explicit Solidarity

At mama Duoa's cafe in Grønland, drinking tea is not so much about enjoying a hot beverage as it is about socialising and community building. Profits made from selling tea and pastries at the cafe go to the maintenance and development of a primary school Mogadishu-Somalia. Mama Duoa's son Hassan had been raising money through charity projects to help children in his war-torn home country Somalia. Gradually, he and the mother established the cafe in Grønland whose main goal is to support the school that the two of them started in Somalia. Hassan currently splits his time between Somalia and Norway as he runs the elementary school in Africa and comes to Norway to administrate the shop and run fundraising campaigns all over Oslo for the school. Hassan's example is the most concrete

one of intentional moral obligation to act and support others. One of the elements of solidarity as is the case here with Hassan's cafe is an awareness of one's actions and their implications on society. Hassan's motivations and goals are clear to him and to the community onto which he leans. The Somali community is aware of the scarcity of educational resources in Somalia as a result of the war and in that way it is a shared concern and limitation. By creating fundraising projects, Hassan is a mobilising tool for care and solidarity in the grander scheme of things. We have seen that there are transnational links in processes and forms of life in Grønland, and even funds collected from tea drinking are directed to Mogadishu. However, the mobilisation of those funds, the support for the project in Mogadishu, the generosity all happen in Grønland. The cafe itself could not be elsewhere because of the process and form of Grønland as we have seen in chapter 1. Through history, welfare policies, existing street norms and culture on ground make Hassan's cafe site specific. Not only would there not arise a need for it in the more affluent suburbs in Oslo where most of the residents are ethnic Norwegians,

In certain instances, the explicit and intentional show of support and care can also be interpreted as activism. In what I conceive as similar ideological motivations to those of Hassan in Grønland, The Society of Muslim Brothers uses food too to help the less advantaged in Egypt (Naguib, 2015). Hassan el-Banna - the founder of the movement in 1928 did so with a call to action for fellow Egyptians to concern themselves with the welfare of their community and the less fortunate. By the time of Naguib's fieldwork in Egypt between 2008 and 2011, they were distributing food to those in need. The Hassan of Grønland and the one of Egypt both started with assessments of the need in their respective communities for care, and the failure of the responsible governing institutions to provide it. Food riots were rampant in Egypt between 2007 and 2008 as a result of inflated food prices. The high food costs extended into the following few years, which coupled with corruption of government institutions, police brutality, high unemployment, and an array of other grievances led to the Egyptian revolution in 2011. The youth group of The Society of Muslim Brothers defined their work as activism when asked. They did challenge the governments by providing food to the needy and did mobilise the rest of the community to support and care for others. Their work contributed to political and social change, the very goals of activism. Hassan of Grønland too, while caring, supporting and mobilising is creating change, and awareness and having a real impact on people's lives in Somalia and in Grønland.

Another example of such explicit solidarity are charity boxes are a common sight in Grønland shops. Small plastic containers with a short linear cuts on the top, enough to slide a

coin or money through. There was one at mama Najma's shop, one in many other Somali shops, at Pakistani owned grocery stores and at Turkish fruit and vegetable shops. Some of the boxes would be collected and the money sent to orphanages or poorer people in and outside Norway according to the wording on them. Some were fundraisers for collective hajj - pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca. Whatever reason stood inscribed on top of the collection boxes, the same principle applied to all of them. They were all conscious efforts to assemble support, care and inclusion of the weaker "others" in Grønland. All of the containers I saw were in ethnic minority owned shops only. The money collection containers were arguably by non-Norwegian identifying people and addressed to non-Norwegian identifying people if the inscribed languages were anything to go by. It was usually in Arabic, Somali, Urdu/Hindi and English. The charity container projects were an initiative based on a decent awareness of the communities' or individuals' weaknesses and a clearly worked out solution to address them together as people who suffer and understand the problems in question. Place is once again important in such efforts. Grønland is the site for such methods and means of solidarity because of the concentration of small businesses, demographic, and all other processes that continue to form it as we have seen already.

The moral obligation to partake in conscious solidarity efforts such as the ones above is strongly rooted in religion. "The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you" [Quran, 49:10]. This verse from the Quran creates kinship among believers - Muslims. This one "And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey Allah and His messenger. As for these, Allah will have mercy on them. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Wise" (At-Tawbah 9:71) calls for justice, unity and solidarity among people in general - "friends". I emphasise Islam as the base onto which explicit, intentional solidarity is grounded because it is the faith in which my informants believe, together with most everyday people in Grønland. Islam is part and parcel of daily life from speech, dress, food, work...it's everywhere. You will very likely take a taxi whose driver mutters a quiet "Bismillah" before they commence the ride, mama Najma, among others, sprinkled Insh'Allahs allover conversations whenever there was talk of hope or the future, and Fridays saw early or part time closure of small shops for prayer. The charity boxes that I mentioned earlier are usually centrally administrated by mosques or mosque affiliated cooperations in and outside Grønland, are directed to the same community.

I therefore argue that Islam is a central pillar in acts of explicit solidarity in Grønland, and other similar solidarity movements worldwide. Naguib's(2015) chapter about The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt is called Food for Faith which I suppose is a clear indication of religion's role in the organisation. The youth in the group stressed to her that the activism they were doing was Islam-based. It was important to them to present their work as religious practice done with that intent. Trans-national support movements have brought people from all walks of life in the name of religious practice. Daryl Li (2019) wrote about Muslims from all over the world who came together to support and stand together with Muslim populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina who were facing genocidal violence in the 1990s. The people who organised themselves in support did so as a form of religious practice, as jihad. That was a religious mobilisation of support for people who were facing injustices based on their religion. Pilgrims to Mecca in Grønland get financial aid because they are a part of umma - a community bound by their religion - so do the orphans in Syria, Somalia or Pakistan who receive help through charity organisations in Grønland. Explicit solidarity and care efforts in Grønland are thereby rooted in religious practices of support and protection, as well as moral obligation which I contend as based on religion too.

## Implications of solidarity and resistance

“Acting in solidarity can put us at personal risk, where there wasn't a personal risk before. Sharing sacrifice, risk, and resistance can strengthen communities or build new ones.” Bishara (2022).

It is common for the social sciences to elevate the goodness of solidarity and resistance as bringers of social and political justice. While that is true, it is only one side of the coin. I have combined resistance and solidarity here because the two concepts in whatever way they are expressed in this thesis often overlap and can be used interchangeably. I am going to show here the positive as well as negative implications of solidarity and resistance as manifested or understood in Grønland. Whether implicit, explicit, organised or spontaneous, acts of



solidarity and resistance as I have addressed them in this thesis rank high as some of the best defining characteristics of the neighbourhood.

On the good side, solidarity provides an alternative way of belonging and individual identification from a discriminating wider society. With racism, islamophobia, and anti-immigration sentiment that are themselves explicitly expressed sometimes but more often ingrained in social and state institutions, Grønland as a field of immigrant solidarity is like a home for ethnic minorities. The small shops that are clustered in Grønland, the way they are named and presented to the public, the mosques, the orient design shopping mall are all things in addition to the community solidarity make Grønland feel like it is familiar and representative of the people who live there unlike other places in Oslo with standard Norwegian shops and place design. I remember walking along Grønlandsleiret one day, past a Pakistani jeweller's store, and thinking to myself how that image of was so reminiscent of Jinja - the city in Uganda where I was born. The ground-floor street-facing shops with protruding ceilings from which shop front signs hang with Hindu, Urdu or English names in Grønland looked a lot like the ones in Jinja, which to this day has a very high Indian population and Indian owned shops. The familiarity for me inspires a sense of belonging, which my informants shared too. The Somali tailor who is mama Najma's neighbour told me that it was hard for him to buy from "Norwegian" shops. He felt more comfortable buying from Somali, at least foreign-looking shops because he felt like he *belonged* more to them. The lay out of products in mama Najma's shop reminded her of shops in Somalia because she replicated shops in Somalia while setting the products up in the shop

Acts of solidarity and resistance in Grønland work to distinguish the neighbourhood from any other in Oslo when it comes to the everyday proceedings of small businesses and life. Take this scenario during my fieldwork:

### **The Sponge**

It was late night and it was the only open shop at the time. I had been cleaning the place I moved to in Grønland before I realised I needed scouring sponges. So I went outside to see if there was any open shops and there it was, a Frukt og grønt along Grønlandsleiret. After looking through the aisles and failing to locate the sponges, I asked an employee there if they had any. He looked at the cleaning product aisle, couldn't find the sponges either, so he went to ask the older man at the till who looked like he could have been the owner. He came back to where I stood wearing an apologetic face. They were out of sponges. He must have seen the disappointment on my face because he then asked me to wait while he went to the room at the back of

the shop. He came back with a used scouring sponge explaining that it had only been used once and only with water, so it was clean. He said that knew it was so late and that I was very unlikely to get a sponge at the time since most shops were closed. He was therefore offering that sponge to help me in case whatever I needed it for was urgent, and that I could get a new sponge from another shop the next day. I recognised him wanting to help me as a person, a customer. He was not trying to sell something to me and had no business looking for a way to solve my problem of not having a sponge or even telling me the other shops that I could buy from tomorrow. I felt like he was really relating to me on a personal level, understanding the frustration that I was probably feeling for not being able to clean, intervening as another feeling human being.

Besides the fact that I felt like the my needs were actually cared for, this kind of care is more characteristic of Grønland than anywhere else in Oslo. Combined with the incident at Prakshiya textiles shop, it makes only two examples of incidents that are very common in Grønland and that to some extent are even expected.

Solidarity, especially that which is explicit creates a welfare security and protection net for the people and especially small business owners in Grønland. From Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) to mere trust that one's neighbour will look out for them, solidarity has and continues to bail people out of financial difficulty, health issues and social problems. Mama Najma said she was not part of it herself but knew some friends who were part of a similar scheme. For the Somali women she knew, their SACCO was not for economic gain but functioned as a social activity as they met once a week over food and to transfer the money to the next receiver in the rotating scheme. Sometimes, the money collected and transferred would help a member to buy a new TV or afford a trip to Somalia in the summer.

It is well known in Grønland that especially Turkish restaurant owners and those who run several Frukt of grønt shops are part of SACCOs that help new potential entrepreneurs and struggling ones out of financial dilemmas. While talking to Abdi on one occasion, I asked if he knew the owner of a Frukt og Grønt that I pointed out. He told me that it was the same people who owned all of them in Grønland. He told me that unlike Somali's who can be jealous of each other sometimes, "those" people (Turkish) collected money and owned things together and then also helped other Turkish people to start their own shops. True or not, there is indeed a connection between nearly all Frukt og Grønt shops. You may be confused as to

which Frukt og Grønt shop you are in when you reach the payment till of at least four of the vegetable shops in Grønland because of the employees at the tills. They are the same. I recognised a lady who apparently lived in the same building I did in, the top most floor as she always stayed in the elevator when I got out. Sometimes she would sit in the complex shared yard with a friend and smoke shisha, and sometimes she would just lay on the grass alone. We both recognised each other one day when I was buying groceries at the Frukt og Grønt in Smalgangen and said hello. Several days later, there she was at the till of another Frukt og Grønt along Grønlandsleiret. My confusion must have been visible because she explained that she worked there as well. After that incident, I started to take note of the same people that I saw at different Frukt og Grønt shops who seemed to be related in one way or another.

In addition to financial help, there is subsidised and sometimes free legal help that is specifically tailored for immigrants who do not speak Norwegian. Lawyers, especially of immigrant background themselves hang posters around Grønland, leave brochures at the mosques and small stickers at different shops advertising legal help for asylum seekers who need help with preparing their appeals to the Norwegian Immigration Direktoratet after being denied refugee status, unemployed people who need help understanding the Norwegian welfare system, or simply explaining their rights and obligations in Norway. Seen as individual cases, what I have described above shows expressions of, or born out of solidarity and resistance to mainstream society that help people out of a rough financial patch in their lives, turn their lives around by helping them to start a business, provide employment, and offer affordable or free legal services respectively. Seen collectively, all of these processes constitute an economy.

I suggest that all seemingly isolated results of solidarity, resistance and other placemaking processes in Grønland band together to form an economic bubble - an alternate economy. I am not implying that Grønland is an economic enclave or closed off from the rest of society in such extremities, but the neighbourhood does have alternative social and economic systems by which most of its inhabitants live. As mentioned above, there are services that are specific to Grønland or a similar demographic that were deliberately established as an alternative to mainstream services. Law firms promise interpreters in the some the most popular languages in Grønland - Urdu, Arabic, Somali, and Pashto, for their clients during meetings with state institutions, Driving schools also offer lessons in nearly the same languages, and some doctors also have interpreters or can offer services some of the languages themselves. The innovativeness of people to point out a loopholes which work

against or at least to the disadvantage of those like them, and to create products and services for that particular market and demographic is a income source in many of the instances, but it is also a form of care. Accumulated, the products, services and way of life creates a different community which reflects the people. To further illustrate how different the Grønland economy and market are from the larger Norwegian market, I would like to use the example of giant chain-store Lidl. The German retail brand had been successful in all countries in Europe and the United States where they opened their doors before Lidl launched in Norway in 2004. Four years later, the international discount retail store closed for good. It failed in the Norwegian market. Popular opinion is that the Lidl team had not researched the Norwegian market before entering it. Unlike everywhere else they had successful stores, Norwegians who are also price-sensistive shoppers, are more concerned about product brands and quality. Lidl has “exotic” brands or unbranded Lidl products with quality that was dubious for Norwegian shoppers who wanted brands that they were familiar with, Norwegian brands, there were also concerns that the chain-store was not part of the Norwegian labour unions and therefore did not adhere the same worker laws. Lidl’s incredibly low prices were not incentive enough for consumers to keep business above water. Lidl is an enormous multi national company with over 11,000 stores spread across Europe and the United States while Grønland is scattered with several small shops Lidl and the Grønland shops are on different sides of the scale in terms of size, reach, market strategies and so forth. For the point I am trying to make however, Lidl and the shops in Grønland have similar products - non-Norwegian, unbranded, low quality, and low priced. I wrote earlier that there is a time I had to ask an employee in a Frukt og Grønt if what I was holding in my had was baking flour. The product I was holding, which was packaged like baking flour, did not have a word of English or Norwegian on the packaging, or a familiar brand name from Kiwi or Rema 1000 which bought Lidl out of the Norwegian market. Grønland shoppers and shops play by different rules. The unfamiliar for a Norwegian shopper might be familiar to mama Duoa or at worst, have no consequence on whether she buys a product or not. The different market logic as I have shown above, different background, class and needs of people prompt different services and products and therefore subsequently create an alternative economy. I am careful not to say different economy, because however different product brands may be or however many languages a teacher at a school for adults offers her services in, there are some few Norwegian brand products sold in the shops in Grønland and Grønland still exists within the Norwegian economy and works withing the same legal framework. These are therefore not two parallel economies, but alternate ones.

With the creation of such a social and economic bubble which is more or less self sufficient comes the alienation of some people from the rest of Norwegian society. Some people in Grønland have never been to the west side of Oslo, and some have been a few times as tourists. The Eastenders really do keep to the east while the westenders, although for different reasons, keep to the west. One of the implications of people in Grønland staying or confining themselves to Grønland and the eastern part of is that it conjures up images of the divided city ( Low,1996). Oslo is by no means to be compared to some of the biggest American or African metropolitan cities when it comes to especially visibly wide socioeconomic gaps. However, when particular images, language and way of life are attached to one neighbourhood and not the other in the same city, it is a precedent for alienation, discrimination and a creation of difference. Small shops owned by immigrants

There is increased cultural, racial and ethnic disparities caused by a lack of interaction and language barrier between people in predominantly immigrant-populated areas and the majority population. Although the blame should not be entirely cast on the state, this ties back to the failure by local government to be more accessible and itself access people outside the ethnic majority under reasonable conditions. One of the best examples of solidarity and a lack of urgency to address issues concerning immigrants happened in the thick of the pandemic. News headlines soared about Somali households having the highest number of infections in Oslo. The socioeconomic contexts of the Somali households were not taken into consideration. There was a delay for the government to avail information regarding COVID-19 infection control information in multiple languages other than English and Norwegian, citing technical and resource issues. A private citizen from one of the eastern suburbs put together a translated media file in Somali and Norwegian faster than the state did. Redundancy on the part of the state aside, such resourcefulness is the result of engagement and care for one's community.

Below is a picture I took of a multilingual COVID-19 control poster at a fruit and vegetable shop in Grønland,



Membership in a community comes with its pressures to conform for some. Whether it be explicit rules and obligations or implicit expectations laid on people, collective solidarity and resistance processes mean the loss of individual expression especially when that expression is

parallel to the needs or methods of the community. Since the publication of Geertz's work on small enterprises in Bali in the 1960s, much has likely changed. However, his notes on how community needs prevailed at the cost of individuals' are helpful in comparing the Balinese community organisation several decades ago to that of Grønland today. It shows not only similarities and differences but also contextualises the Grønland situation on a global scale, highlighting common tropes and being potentially a stepping stone for future studies on the topic.

Balinese normally belong to several social groups called *seka* to which an individual is loyal. That means that successful entrepreneurs are obligated to share their profits with their group, for the better general welfare of the *sekas* under which they belong (Geertz, 1963). "The value of *seka* loyalty, putting the needs of one's group above one's own is, along with caste pride, a central value of Balinese social life."(page 84). People in the community, therefore, feel entitled to the gains of successful business owners, thereby clamping the growth of the individual and economic development of the enterprise. Every one of my informants who I asked about Somali clan systems said that clans were not so relevant anymore. They acknowledged belonging to clans and knowing more or less the members of their clans and those of the others, but denied that it had any bearing on their day-to-day decisions. Still, if conversations got deep enough, it would surface that such and such a person is not so trustworthy, that their clans have even had conflicts for years back in Somalia. A Somali friend told me that if she was buying anything from a Somali shop, it had to be at the one whose owner was from the same clan. If her aunt ever got wind of her buying from any other shop, she would kill her, my friend jokingly said. Even though clan membership is not visible or apparently of influence in everyday life, it rises to the forefront when its loyalty is called into question. - example of mama Doua's friend who smokes cigarettes in hiding.

Some people self alienate and cut off the community to relieve themselves from obligations of solidarity and assimilate in the Norwegian social context.

# Betwixt and Between: The Conclusion

The unstable fence between local and transnational

Towards the end of this thesis is a reflection on a problem that globalisation has presented in anthropology. The methodological and theoretical view of the people we study is either transnational and mobile, or *put* and bound geographically. I started the first chapter of this thesis off by evoking Evans Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940) and saying that Globalisation has challenged the idea that Nilotic people are bound to Southern Sudan. Today, people flee wars to start life anew elsewhere just as a good number of his informants' descendants are in Australia following the two civil wars in Sudan. Somalis have created strong communities in countries like Kenya, which houses the largest *Qurbajoogta* - Somali diaspora, and in Norway, with a much smaller one, but a significant all the same. With Globalisation came a turn in anthropology to leave "the ethnic enclave" and "community" behind as groups of people are in constant mobility, and so a need for new conceptual tools to deal with the current world order (Mintz, 1998). But as this thesis has shown, globalization may challenge traditional 'bounded' ethnographic methods and related analytical concepts - of the kind that Evans-Pritchard applied in his study of "The Nuer". Globalization does, however, not make them obsolete I have however thought about and approached the people I worked with as a community. Through the way that Somalis in Grønland live their lives and define themselves, they can be looked at as a Somali enclave, just as the Pakistani community was looked at as an ethnic enclave in Grønland (Huse, 2014). However, a massive, sometimes unpredictable, and - in Eriksen's (2016) conceptualisation - accelerated movement of people, commodities, capital, and information that characterise the current state of the world call for a renewed qualitative approach to the way we study (Mintz, 1998).

In clarifying this point, Sidney Mintz acknowledges the change in the world condition since *The Nuer* or *The Azande*, but his article *The Localisation of Anthropological Practice* is also a critique on the kind of anthropology that, following an assumption of a weakened state, moves to forget categories "such as 'region', 'culture', 'ethnic group' and 'society'" (page 118), and with that, abandoning the "primitives" and "natives" that came along with those categories. Himself a specialist in the Caribbean region, Mintz shows that a massive movement and settling of people across the globe has been happening in the world since before the word "transnationalism" was ever coined. Today's globalisation is therefore not an



unprecedented phenomenon. The major difference now is *who* is moving *where* and the ease and rapidness with which it is happening. Therefore, the movement and mixing of cultures, like Mama Najma and her counterparts sharing a street with Pakistani businesses in a country in which both are immigrants, is not new as much as it is considered an element of transnationalism. The Caribbean was a people and cultural cocktail since African slaves were taken to grow sugar by Europeans in the 16th century. The very foundation of America as we know it today is a mixture of people and cultures in addition to the indigenous Americans who are who got there in mass movements so much so that Spanish is a legitimate language in some states, while some people maintain a home in other places as well. As Mintz puts it “People are not maintaining an existence in two places for the first time in history. It is not unprecedented for people to retain much cultural material while acquiring and manifesting an instrumental and opportunistic attitude toward both cultural perpetuation and cultural innovation. People are not for the first time finding themselves in situations with others of more than one other cultural background, such that older values are being tested in a variety of new, multicultural situations (Mintz 1998, page 128).

I acknowledge that Somalis who own shops in places outside the horn of Africa are not a new phenomenon. It is also true that whatever Globalisation entails has been happening for centuries already and people have fled war, famine, or poverty, take Norwegian immigrants to America in the 1800s for example. There is allegedly even a Texan version of the Norwegian *bunad*- the national dress which normally has region-specific design depending on where in Norway one comes from or has ancestry. But even though the *bunad* exists in Texas, and I can have a Moroccan hammam experience in Oslo, does not render Norway or Morocco as regions irrelevant. We still need ‘regions’ and ‘communities’ as conceptual and methodological tools. What I argued against in Chapter 1 is the contemporary tendency in anthropology to ignore bounded places in favour of translocality. However, we need to *place people somewhere* to think, approach and analyse our empirical material. Even though the movement of people back and forth is not ground-breaking, the conditions under which it is happening now are different, it is faster, more frequent, and under a much different political economy than that of the Vikings or African slaves. I, therefore, see the need, also, for concepts like globalisation and translocality or transnationalism. Never before could the same information reach all corners of the world simultaneously and as fast. It is only in recent times that someone, somewhere in New Dehli can pick up the phone when another, somewhere in Bergen calls the Norwegian Air helpline with issues regarding a local flight.

With this in mind, Grønland, as a place marked by a strong Somali community, is a valid point of inquiry. However, the significance of Grønland as a region is watered down when the interconnection of the people takes centre stage, but it does not disappear. When the question is that of transnationality, then we look at things like the civil war in Somalia that led to political unrest and the movement of people fleeing the war on a grand scale. We follow the processes of that movement to foreign immigration policies of the countries in which they seek refuge. We look at transferable cultural, religious, economic and political practices. We look at interconnectedness. “region”, and “community” on the other hand require a more immediate and local attachment to people and place.

My point here is that the local and trans-local are both necessary at some point and less so at another in anthropological study today, especially to the questions that occupy this thesis. In small Somali-owned businesses in Grønland, the shop-owners' identity as Somalis *in* Norway, gives away a translocality between Norway and Somalia as much as it *grounds* the fieldwork in Grønland. Immigration and transnationality are implicitly referred to when I narrate a middle-aged Somali woman's quest to create meaning in life in Norway. In the current state of the world, Mama Najma in all her Somaliness is not bound to (and only) Somalia, just as she does not completely become Norwegian because of her current establishment in Grønland. The terminologies that we use are helpful and limiting depending on the questions we ask. Clifford has argued that, “It is now widely understood that the old localizing strategies - by bounded community, by organic culture, by region, by center and periphery - may obscure as much as they reveal” (Clifford, 1994, page 303). They obscure as much as they reveal indeed, but, I would add, should not be discarded in the past as “old” instruments as they still retain relevance in conceptualisation and methodology.

I argue that my informants exist in a conceptual liminality until we place them on either side of whatever serves to answer our questions. In fact, mama Najma “exists” in multiple places - her children are here in Norway, some of her extended family is in Somalia and some in Kenya. She often sends or receives things to or from Kenya relating to her shop. After fleeing from Somalia, she lived in Kenya's Somali region - Eastleigh - for more than five years before she came to Norway. Her attachment to Kenya is deep and strong, so much so that she calls it her home too. She has Norwegian citizenship now and she is Somali. With an interest in small businesses in Grønland, I approached her as a Somali woman with a business in Norway. It goes without saying that anthropology gives holistic attention to a given subject,

which means that mama Njama's background is taken into account. What I am doing is, precisely, showing that I am aware of my informants' transnationality, and of the effects of globalisation on them which have significant and even visible marks on their lives. However, to most effectively answer *my* question, it is not helpful to *think* of mama Najma as a person with a mobile identity and locality. It is more rewarding to approach her as someone with a stable identity. As a Somali woman who owns a shop in Grønland, but *with* her background in mind.

In my first classes in anthropology, like many other anthropology students I suppose, I was introduced to the Trobriand Islands, villages in Papua New Guinea and Africa as what used to be the standard of a field site. Preferably far away, 'primitive' and, perhaps most importantly, 'other' - different from authoritative white male researchers who were more often than not somehow affiliated with the colonial administrations of the people they studied. Gradually, we learnt that academia, anthropology included, had moved on to more self-reflected and less eurocentric methods and approaches to research. The periodic shakeups in the discipline saw an Indian anthropologist studying people in a Danish village, women's voices in anthropological texts started to be heard, and a Norwegian studied their own cabin culture, and here I am too, an African studying a Scandinavian city neighbourhood. Globalisation came, and along with it 'multi-sited' ethnography, 'translocality', 'deterritorialisation', and other such concepts that seek to move beyond boundaries in anthropology. There is no doubt that people and culture, even spaces are moving and changing more often and faster now than ever, and in all directions. However, we still need *a* site to keep up with the current heightened movement of the world around us. So I continue to advocate for 'regions' and 'communities', in line with Sidney Mintz (1998), as conceptualising tools, and the use 'arbitrary locations' (Candea, 2007), to study more complex and abstract subjects. In any case, we need boundaries because without them in this increasingly mobile world, fieldworker and fieldsite are bound to rush past each other in a quest to find common ground.

In a brief overview of this thesis, I introduced the project with my first impressions in the field followed by a brief history of the place that was my home for six months - Smalgangen. Thereafter, I explained my methodological tools and the implications of my positionality in the field. What follows is the part I enjoyed the most during ethnography and the analytical parts of this thesis- the outline of the theoretical framework used in this thesis - theories on place, placemaking, abstract locations, and of course, belonging. The following three

chapters are an exploration of the above theories through historical, political, and social processes, as seen through the windows of small Somali shops.

The overall theoretic substance of this thesis is not so different from its method. Place - how it is made, maintained, transformed, and the implications it has on the people in it, is the enveloping topic. It is my hope that studies like this thesis are a stepping stone for future studies on place, especially since it is ever evolving, But even more importantly since it is under threat in an overheating globe.

I arrived at the conclusion that Grønland is an ongoing process as much as it is a definite form. Within its form lies an agency and meaning that it gives to its environment. In simple terms, Grønland as place is created by local, global and temporal processes like social housing policies, immigration, and history. When it forms, it gives meaning. It becomes a home, a community, a neighbourhood, a place to belong. People are then (trans)formed by virtue of their interaction with the place, and that interaction in turn (re)forms the place in a perpetual cycle. The steady back and forth flow of process and form between people and place is what I conclude gives Grønland the rhythm that makes it the heart of Oslo.

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The prose piece in its original form

MIN GRØNLAND

Mitt navn er Sumaya Ali Isse. Og jeg hører alltid om Grønland, men aldri fra Grønland. Grønland var mitt fysiske hjem i 17 år. 17 fine og varme år. Helt til det rareste skjedde en dag. Jeg møtte en person. En bisarr person som fortalte meg ting jeg aldri hadde hørt om.

Denne personen som aldri hadde satt sin fot i Grønland, det bokstavelige og metaforiske hjertet av Oslo, og kom til meg gang og gang igjen. Enten fortalte hun meg hva hun mener Grønland er eller så satte han spørsmål ved min Grønland, min eksistens og/eller egenskaper. Så mye at jeg faktisk begynte å tvile, selv om jeg visste sannheten. Jeg begynte å plukke ordene mine nøye, passet på å ikke snakke for lidenskapelig og finpusset den ukomfortable, falske latteren. Du vet, den rundt de. De jeg ikke vokste opp med. De som jeg lot vrake min identitet og det jeg holdt kjær. Du vet hvem jeg snakker om. Hvem ellers har dristigheten til å fortelle deg om hvordan og hvor du vokste opp? Ikke nok med det, de skal også fortelle deg hvor du kommer fra. Uten å spørre deg, personens hjemsted og kultur i fokus, hva du synes. Kanskje, og ikke ta meg på ordet, men kanskje jeg vet det bedre enn deg?

Det som var min styrke og stolthet, hadde i løpet av natten blitt min største skam. Men hva var det jeg gjorde som var så skamfullt?

«Er ikke det farlig i Grønland?»

«Hva mener du?»

«Jo, du vet, alt man leser om Grønland og kriminalitet»

«Hvor har du lest dette?»

«Det er jo saker hele tida om Grønland i avisene»

«Jaha, for aviser har alltid vært en pålitelig kilde for informasjon. Og jeg er sikker på de som skriver den kvalmen har en innenfra perspektiv i hvordan det er å bo i Grønland. Takk for denne innsiktsfulle samtalen.»

«Hvordan greier du å snakke så bra norsk?»

«Hmm, hvordan greier du å snakke bare norsk?»

«Når kom du til Norge?»

«Igår, du da?»

«Så flink du er til å snakke norsk»

«Å, du også! Hvor lang tid har du brukt på å lære deg det?»

Istedenfor å svare slik, ville jeg heller bli likt for noe jeg ikke var. I senere tid, har jeg ergerlig innsett at dette var den ekte skammen.

Jeg ble spurt om å beskrive mitt Grønland, men for meg er Grønland en min, en hva og hvem. Grønland er ikke noe man kan eie, men en følelse. Grønland er en væremåte, en tankemåte, a state of being. Grønland er en måte å holde hodet høyt oppe. Grønland er å se skjønnhet der andre er fiksert på forskjellen. Grønland er å lage et ugjennomtrengelig fellesskap, tross den store strømmen inn og den store strømmen ut. Et fellesskap som alltid har vært karakteristisk for Grønland, selv før diasporaen. Grønland er en ømfintlig høflighet. Den type du tilegner deg når du selv har stått utenfor. Som alle som har stått utenfor, er verdens bilde av deg sjeldent riktig.

Det ekte Grønland. Grønland er en mor som ønsket et bedre liv for sine barn. Grønland er en far som ikke vil at barna hans skal vitne til krigen, slik at han gjorde. Grønland er en gutt som løper og tuller med sine kompiser. Grønland er en jente som leser alle minutt av dagen hun kan. En som sluker Discovery- og Animal Planet-dokumentarer på det historiske tv-apparatet. Grønland er en nyfødt bror som blir tatt vare på av mamma, pappa, søsken, og hans hippe onkel og tante – alle under ett tak. Grønland er den eldre pakistanske onkelen som hjelper deg med å pakke varene dine i pose på Ankara. Grønland er kallenavn som Ankara, som kom lenge før min tid, selv om butikken heter Pak Star nå. Grønland er barnehagetanter som gir

varme klemmer og gjemmer deg under hennes jilbab når du er lei deg. Grønland er de sjeldne lærerne som strekker seg over fordommene og misnøyen og finner en måte å relatere til barn som vokser opp i et annen kultur. Grønland er barn som vokser opp i 1,2,3 kulturer, som lærer å omfavne hverandre i alle 3 uten å helt passe inn i en av dem. Om man hever blikket over skjermene, så ser man at min Grønland er ingenting likt kvalmen og kriminaliteten det fremstilles som. Min Grønland er mitt barndomshjem, et sted der mine mest dyrebare barndomsminner søker ly for denne kompromissløse realiteten. (Supergrønland, 2022)

The timing and relevance of the piece of literature could not have been any more apt for my thesis. Sumaya Ali Isse, the authour of “My Grønland” was crowned winner at Grønlandsfest - Grønland party which took place at Olafiagangen - the same area under the Nylandsbrua bridge that I describe as being dotted with drug dealers and addicts. The lone men or small groups of teenage boys wearing hoodies and heavy jackets ready to offer some type of drug or other are welcome sight compared to some years ago when I first set foot in Grønland. Then it was an almost sinister looking dark place with many more drug dealers, it was not the place you could have a childrens party. Today, as part of Området Løft Grønland og Tøyen - A project by the minicipality of Oslo to ‘lift’ the Grønland and Tøyen areas, it is transformed to family friendly activity area that is lit up by string lights that hang over it from under the bridge at night. Sumaya’s piece of prose about her Grønland was read out loud in the ‘lifted’ Olafiagangen. It is clear in the text that she is protective of her Grønland, that she is frustrated by outsiders who speak of it negatively, that for her, Grønland is a warm home. A home where everyone is family - from the Pakistani ‘uncle’ at the grocery store to the Somali ‘aunt’ at the kindergarten, and a home where extended families live together in normalcy. A place whose characteristic community has been, long before even her parents came to Norway.