

Takk

Det har virkelig vært en interessant og lærerik prosess å skrive denne masteroppgaven.

Jeg vil først og fremst takke mamma, pappa og Toril for all støtte og oppmuntrende (og noen ganger litt strenge) ord, og for at de er flinke til å minne meg på om at jeg kommer til å klare dette. Jeg vil også takke masterklassen og mine andre venner for gode innspill og spennende diskusjoner, det har vært til stor hjelp. En stor takk til Stine Lise Jørgensen, Stine Bergersen, Sissel Halse og Gunhild Foss Heggem for gjennomlesing av tekst, det ble satt umåtelig stor pris på.

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Preface

I was going to America? To America! A place I had been dreaming of for as long as I could remember. It took a while before I realized it. It was my publisher who came up with the idea – I was going to visit the Norwegian America. (...) I was going to take photos of Norwegian Americans, documenting the Norwegian America, in my own way. But how was I going to meet this country, which I never in my wildest dreams thought I would ever get to experience? To be honest, I had only been dreaming about going. How would the Norwegian Americans receive me, how were they, and how was this fairytale land, which we all have a connection to in some way? What was it all about, America, everything I have been told, seen pictures, heard, or seen on the movies and on TV? Would I be met by guns, murders, car chases, millionaires, poor people, blacks, Indians, fat people, superficial people, huge building ... These were the questions that span around in my head during my first days in America (Johansen, 2007:7 - my translation).

This is part of the introduction to the Norwegian photographer Rune Johansen's book *Da æ va i Amerika (When I was in America)*. Johansen traveled in the areas of Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota, taking pictures of people, their homes and the surroundings. The feelings, the questions, the thoughts are all the same as mine before I started my fieldwork, and was about to travel to America for the first time, all by myself. This book is also one of the inspirations for my project and my thesis about Norwegian Americans.

“This time my thoughts went to America, and most of all to the Norwegian Americans, what we experienced on our journey, my thoughts, and impressions. I would never have been without this trip and my visit to the 23 Norwegian American families. It was a great experience. This book is a tribute to America, to the people, to the houses, the interior and the scenery. Just as I experienced it – When I Was in America” (Johansen, 2007: 7 - my translation)

Just as Rune Johansen concludes in his introduction, my fears about going to America went away the minute I met with the Norwegian Americans. I have yet to meet friendlier and more welcoming people, eager to include me in their lives, and share their stories. I will, just as Rune Johansen, conclude this preface by thanking everyone I met during my fieldwork, and dedicate this thesis to all of them.

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1. Introduction

“Where are your parents from? And your grandparents? Your great-grandparents? Eventually, if the questionnaire persists, we will find a transplanted root. The 100 per cent American is, after all, 100 per cent some thing else.”

(Motto at the Bicentennial Exhibition (1976) at The Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC. cited in Eriksen, 2010: 95)

As the quote from Thomas Hylland-Eriksen suggests, most of the people living in the U.S are in fact immigrants or descendants of immigrants from other parts of the world. The former U.S president John F. Kennedy wrote in the book “*A Nation of Immigrants*”, published in 1964, that “every American who has ever lived, with the exception of one group, was either an immigrant himself or a descendant of immigrants” (Kennedy, [1964] 2008:2). However, he continues saying that “some anthropologists believe that the Indians themselves were immigrants from another continent who displaced the original Americans – the aborigines” (ibid.:2-3). Even though John F. Kennedy wrote this book about fifty years ago, the theme is still relevant. This thesis will not deal with the history of either the U.S or the history of immigration from Norway, as there is simply not room for that. What I will focus on is the debate about ethnicity amongst white Americans. I will concentrate on ethnic belonging within the Norwegian American community, and discuss in what way the ethnic belonging take place. In order to do this I have mainly used theories from sociological perspectives. Both Mary C. Waters and Richard Alba are American sociologists who have done extensive work on ethnicity in America. Both the books *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Waters, 1990) and *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (Alba, 1990) will be important when presenting my theoretical perspective for this thesis.

Compared to many other countries, the U.S does not have a semi-mythical history as a nation - especially since the Indian history has been almost wiped out from the collective memory. In the 1990 census nearly 30 million, of the 230 million people that participated, reported that they spoke another language than English at home (Eriksen, 2010). Today the United States has about 310 million inhabitants. About 4.5

million of these claimed in 2000 that they had Norwegian heritage. 51,829 of these lived in Seattle (U.S.CensusBureau, 2010). However, if you include people who are married to a Norwegian American or those who just have a ‘special interest’ in Norway, the number of members in the Norwegian American community would be much higher. Relating to this, one can argue that the U.S is not an ethnic nation in the same sense as is Germany or France. There are many white Americans who have a non-American ‘ethnic identity’, such as German, Norwegian or Jewish. This form of ethnicity is often talked about as secondary ethnicity, since most of the Americans would primarily regard themselves as Americans. (Eriksen, 2010:168-9).

In the monograph *From many strands: ethnic and racial groups in contemporary America* (1988) Mary C. Waters, together with fellow American sociologist Stanley Lieberson, concluded that ethnicity in America is too complex for a simple yes or no answer. To the question about whether or not there are ethnic groups in the U.S they write

“First of all, it makes a difference which groups are being considered. Differences between white groups are for the most part dwarfed by comparison with the gaps we observe between whites and other groups. On most attributes, the most important division is between whites and non-European groups. (...) As for the white groups, the answer to the melting pot question depends on the measure (...) the white groups retain very distinctive profiles which in some cases – such as residence and certain occupations – can be traced to their immigrant beginnings” (ibid. :247-8).

They argue that there on some occasions do exist ethnic diversities among the whites, but that the real boundary is between the non-European and the European immigrants. The differences between a person with Swedish, Norwegian or Czech heritage is difficult to point out at first, and will not be visible before they explicitly show it to others.

Problem as presented

In the light of the quote from Waters and Lieberman I will discuss ethnicity amongst white Americans in the U.S.; I realize however that this is a wide topic. Through empirical examples from my fieldwork with the Norwegian Americans in Seattle, I will show how there is a phenomenon we can call ethnic belonging amongst white Americans today. I will furthermore look at if there is any other factor than ethnicity that works as a criteria for participating in the Norwegian American community, or if other factors like creating a social arena, play the biggest role. Through ethnic organizations, such as the Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage Museum, I will show how voluntary work can create an arena where ethnic identity can be played out. It will also be important to show the institutions where the ethnic identity is an essential factor. The bottom line is: is ethnicity is the most important factor in these arenas, or can anyone who wants to join? What are the criteria for joining?

The paper will also discuss how the Nordic, and especially the Norwegian, values are emphasized as something better than other European values. How can one community be seen as better than others, by some, because it is built on “the good Norwegian values”? What are these values that Norwegian Americans see as truly Norwegian, or are they part of an image that is created about Norway? And what happens if the values are challenged?

A Reader’s Guide

The first chapter is used only for a brief introduction and a presentation of the problem as presented, and a guide to the rest of the thesis.

In chapter two, I introduce the theoretical perspectives that I use as a base for this thesis. I start with a definition of ethnicity and ethnic groups and then go over to the theoretical framework. The notions of symbolic ethnicity, the element of choice and a brief discussion of the salad bowl - meting pot theories are significant. It is important to notice that I am throughout the thesis, talking about ethnicity among the white

middle-class population, and how they experience ethnicity. Ethnicity among third and fourth generation immigrants will also be key issues in this chapter.

Chapter three is a mixed chapter consisting on methodological reflections and a short introduction of the field. I will describe the Norwegian American Community in Ballard, Seattle and give a short introduction to Sons of Norway (SoN). This is one of the main ethnic organizations within the Norwegian American community across the U.S. Although I am not focusing on Sons of Norway many of the organizations I write about have many connections to SoN. I will then go over to talk about my reflections over my role in the field and present some of the observations that helped frame my fieldwork.

The fourth chapter is the first of the three main chapters in my thesis. I start by presenting the three ethnic organizations that I chose to focus on: the Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage Museum. I will argue in this chapter how participation in these organizations creates what Robert Putnam (2001) present as social capital, and how this has an impact on the participation in the Norwegian American community.

This brings us over to the fifth chapter where my focus lies on the importance of age and family, and how these have an impact on participation. I continue with a brief discussion about voluntary work and participation and how the age difference in the Norwegian American community is very notable. One of my first observations when starting my fieldwork was the absence of the young adults and the people in the 20 – 40 age category. I here present some of the people who participate in the Norwegian American community, in order to present examples of who participate and who they are. In this chapter I also argue that the bond between the grandparent and the grandchild is one of the most important ethnic bond, and that this help to carry on the ethnic traditions.

In the last of the three main chapters I talk about the “good Scandinavian values” that the community is built on. Even though I announced that there would not be much focus on the history of the Norwegian immigration to America, it is necessary in this chapter to show how the Norwegians used the values that they brought with them to

the New Country to become good Americans. I will also show how, and in what way the values was created, maintained and used, and what happens when they are challenged by the incorporation of American customs in the Norwegian tradition.

In the very last chapter of the thesis I will tie up the loose ends and focus on the key issues in the thesis, symbolic ethnicity and how this is ascribed to the Norwegian American community in Ballard, Seattle. I will make some concluding remarks, and show why symbolic ethnicity best describe the third and fourth generation Norwegian American and their notion of ethnic belonging.

At the very end I have some remarks about some of the terms that I am using. First, I am aware that America is a continent, and technically not a country. However, term America is often used when talking about the Unites States of America, and not the continent. I am also using the terms U.S. or USA as synonyms to America. Second, I also know that there is a difference between the concept of Scandinavia and the concept of the Nordic countries. Scandinavia consists of the three countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark whereas the Nordic countries are Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland – and on some occasions the Faroe Islands are considered a part of the Nordic countries. This division is, however, not as well known in the U.S, and the term Scandinavia is often used when referring to the Nordic countries. Because of this it may seem that I am mixing these two terms, using them as synonyms, in these cases I am only referring to my field notes, and how my informants are using the term.

2. Theoretical perspectives

The term ethnicity has in the everyday language strong associations to ‘minority issues’ and ‘race relations’. Anthropologist Ronald Cohen remarked, more than thirty years ago, that even in the social sciences many who use the term ethnicity do not even bother to define it (Eriksen, 2010). The term itself is quite old and can be traced back to the Greek *ethnos*, which originally meant heathen or pagan. Though it was used before, ‘ethnicity’ came first to be used, in the United States, around the Second World War as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people who were considered inferior to the dominant WASP - White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Eriksen, 2010:4-5). I will go along with Thomas Hylland-Eriksen’s definition that “[e]thnicity is an aspect of social relationship between persons who consider themselves as essentially distinctive from members of other groups of whom they are aware and with whom they enter into relationship” (Eriksen, 2010:16-17). As this definition of ethnicity is very general, I will use Max Weber’s definition of ethnic groups as a supply to the understanding of ethnicity and ethnic groups in this thesis.

“[A]n ethnic group is one whose members entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration. (...) it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exist” (Weber et al., [1922] 1978:389).

Both of these definitions define ethnic groups as social groups where the members interact with each other on the presumed idea that they share a common history that sets them apart from another group¹.

The idea of ethnicity being voluntary among white Americans has reappeared as a topic in American social science again and again for the two three last decades. It can be traced back to the French historian and political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville (in Waters, 1990) who stated that individualism within the social milieu of friends and family, the freedom to be different and the strive to be an absolutely unique individual

¹ On other writings and definitions about ethnicity see among others Marcus Banks’ book *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* (1996) and Wsevolod W. Isajiw “Definitions and Dimensions of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Framework” (1993).

is essential in American life. Though Alexis de Tocqueville was published over a hundred years ago², some of his writings are surprisingly relevant in today's society. One can argue that ethnic identity in America is comparable with de Tocqueville's idea of the individual person. Tocqueville argued that there is a conflict between the values of individualism and conformity – self-reliance and cooperation. Individualism would lead people to find themselves independently, but at the same time they need to seek confirmation from others in the same situation. By participating in small groups like local government or communities they would find confirmation in the individual choices they have made. Having an ethnic identity help fulfill the need to be both special and at the same time a part of a group, or community. It is something that comes to you involuntarily through your ancestors, but it is also a choice you make as an individual. This do not make you stand out in a way that is different from other people, but at the same time helps you express an individuality because of the choices you have made (Waters, 1990:149-150). It was however the American sociologist Herbert Gans (1979) who first introduced the notion of symbolic ethnicity – the idea that ethnic belonging amongst white Americans was a situational use of “easily expressed and felt” cultural symbols (ibid.:436). Other sociologists such as Mary Waters and Richard Alba, who have done extensive research of identity among middle-class assimilated white ethnics, soon followed him.

Symbolic ethnicity

“Any mode of expressing ethnic identity is valid as long as it enhances the feeling of being ethnic, and any cultural pattern or organization which nourishes that feeling is therefore relevant, providing only that enough people make the same choice when identity expression is a group enterprise” (Gans, 1979:435)

The American sociologist Herbert J. Gans discusses in his article “Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and culture in America” (1979) how there exist among the third and fourth generation ethnics in America a new kind of ethnicity which he defines as symbolic ethnicity (ibid.:435). The idea here is that ethnicity in America is not what it used to be. Ethnicity has lost its practical everyday meaning, and has remained through the generations on a symbolic level. Symbolic ethnicity

² *Democracy in America* came out in two volumes: 1835 and 1840

now works as a way to identify people “who otherwise are acculturated and assimilated into a different, predominantly urban, American culture and society” (Isajiw, 1993:4).

Gans (1979) claims that ethnic identity has always existed in America, though it is different today than for the earlier generations. In the past ethnicity was for the most part taken for granted, it was attached to certain types of roles and groups and it was rarely a matter of choice. Most of the third and fourth generations have not grown up in a household where specific expectations according to ethnicity have existed, and so ethnicity can no longer be taken for granted. If they still want to continue to identify with their ethnic heritage they have to make it more explicit than it was in the past, and they must find new ways of expressing it. Ethnic identity can be communicated either as an action or feeling, or a combination of these two. People can join an ethnic organization, or take part in formal organizations provided mainly for fellow-ethnics; but they can also join informal abstract collectives which does not exist as an interacting group, but more in the ways of feelings. On the one hand an American Jew can express his identity through going to the Synagogue or join a consciousness-raising group that consist mostly for Jewish woman. On the other hand an American Jew can identify with the struggles that the Jews had to go through and the thought of Jewish people as a long-time suffering collectivity. Third generation Italians can identify through membership in Italian groups, or by strong feelings for various traditions from Italian, or Neapolitan or Sicilian culture (ibid.). According to Jenkins similarity and difference are the essential ingredients in human social identity. It makes sense that without similarity there would be no difference either. Jenkins argues that identity is “imagined, but not imaginary” (Jenkins, 2002, Jenkins, 2008). What he argues is that identity is a product of human imagination, but not, however, that they are imaginary in the sense of illusion or fantasy. We cannot see identity, but “identification affects everything from which side of the street we can walk on to what we can eat; from who we can mate with to how we understand our place in the cosmos; from how we live to how we die” (Jenkins, 2002:118)

As the quote I started this section with suggests, the functions of ethnicity are being modified for each generation, and identity is becoming the primary way of showing ethnicity. It becomes more of leisure–time activity, being an expressive rather than an

instrumental function in people's lives (Gans, 1979). Whereas ethnicity in this sense is not a choice but something that is an absolute part of people's life, if it is reduced to 'just a part of your identity' it is understood as something that you can express on some occasions, but under-communicate on other occasions. Expressive behavior often involves the use of symbols, and symbols as signs not myths. In the light of this Gans is to label the ethnic belonging that the third and fourth generation feel as a symbolic ethnicity instead of "real" ethnicity (Gans, 1979).

"Symbolic ethnicity can be expressed in a myriad of ways, but above all, I suspect it is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Gans, 1979:436).

The core argument in the article is how these symbols are presented. All the symbols are generated from cultural patterns from the "old country". They must be visible and clear and easy to express for third generation ethnics, and most important of all, they cannot have an effect on other aspects of the daily life. An example of this is the Jewish religious holiday *bar mitzvah* and *bas mitzvah*, the latter being the parallel ceremony for girls, which has actually been invented in the U.S. *Rites de passages* like this are ceremonial from the beginning, and thus symbolic; equally important, they do not take up much time in the daily routine from other important tasks such as jobs, voluntary work and spending time with the family (Gans, 1979).

By constructing definitions of others and definitions of one's own group, we create the classical "us" versus "them" terms. This has both an internal and external aspect that refers to the structure of that particular group and to its relations to other groups. Symbols of identifications, of inclusion and exclusion, symbolic labels attached to people, are the cultural substance of which the models of the world are created (Mach, 1993).

The element of choice

Mary Waters (1990) argues that symbolic ethnicity is so appealing to the Americans, because of the element of choice that can be compared with one of the most important

elements in the American way of thinking – the freedom of choice. The American anthropologist William O. Beeman (1986) did a study some years back of strategies of successful advertising campaigns devised by Madison Avenue firms. In the article “Freedom to Choose: Symbols and Values in American Advertising” Beeman describes how advertising campaigns relate to the two opposite values individuality and conformity. Another important theme in the article is the freedom of choice, which are, according to the advertisers, “close to being sacred for Americans” (Beeman, 1986:59). The important factor for people when choosing something is the belief that they are making choices that show their individuality and at the same time are giving them membership in a group – a group of people who have made the same individual choice.

[I]n the United States, through exercise of individual choice, people do not only demonstrate their uniqueness, they also recognize and actualize their integration with others. They do this by making acknowledging, and perpetuating social ties based solely on the affinity that arises through making the same choices (Beeman, 1986:59).

Beeman (1986) writes that there are hardly any nations with more organizations consisting of people who have joined solely based on personal decisions concerning hobbies, careers and even purchases. He continues, stating that in America people feel an instant affinity to others when having bought the same items (ibid.). This can easily be linked to the choosing of an ethnic identity. Being “ethnic” can make people feel special and unique, if one chooses it oneself, but at the same time it makes them a part of a group, a community that will not interfere with peoples’ individuality (Waters, 1990).

A dime store ethnicity

Howard Stein and Robert Hill (cited in Waters, 1990:6) argue that the ethnic identity among many white Americans can be categorized as a ‘dime store ethnicity’. They state that the ability to choose a grandparent to identify with, and in this was become a symbolical descendant of that group is much like shopping for a product in a dime store. Stein and Hill also argue that this type of ethnicity is not real, because people consciously choose one particular ethnicity, and parade this in public. On the other

hand is the “real” ethnicity: these are real because they are not chosen consciously - they are not aware of the influence it has on peoples’ daily lives (ibid.). Other writers³, point out that even though ethnicity is not as important as it once was in peoples’ lives, it is not an unreal phenomenon. Individuals can have a meaningful connection to a collective ethnicity for many reasons, and in many ways. Ethnicity, unreal or not “gives people a sense of heritage and roots to a highly mobile population” (Coleman and Rainwater in Waters, 1990:7). Coleman and Rainwater argue that as long as ethnic discrimination no longer is perceived as a threat to peoples’ individual lives, their ethnic identity will be used and discarded as long as the individual finds it necessary (ibid.). Waters (1990) agrees with Stein and Hill when she chooses to look at ethnic identity almost as something that one can purchase in the marketplace, and states that one can then see how symbolic ethnicity is an attractive product. Symbolic ethnicity is the answer to a dilemma that is deep rooted in the America culture because it at allows you to express both your individuality and the pursuit for a community at the same time. Being ethnic makes people feel special, not like everyone else, while at the same time it gives them a sense of belonging to a collectivity (Waters, 1990).

Ethnicity in the United States has often been viewed as primordial. It is something that is never changed, a personal, inherent characteristic, and it is hard to change it like race. As mentioned earlier in this chapter Lieberson and Waters (1988) argue that the most common assumption when talking about ethnicity is between the non-European and the European. One can argue that this is because of the obvious marks, like skin color. Amongst the Europeans, and especially the north European descendants the obvious marks are not visible. A person of Norwegian descent is often viewed as the blond haired, blue-eyed person, but can easily have black hair and brown eyes, or red hair and green eyes, though the skin color is light. Despite the common view that ethnicity is primordial, many social scientists, and especially sociologists, have started to research how people ascribe themselves to ones’ ethnicity, and often take the opposite view from what was previously described. The

³ See writers like Morton Weinfeld (1981) “Myth and Reality in a Canadian Mosaic: Affective Ethnicity” and Richard Coleman and Lee Rainwater (1978) *Social Standing in America: New Dimensions of Class*.

idea that membership in an ethnic group is not necessarily inherited, or directly related to a lineage, is a direct challenge to the previous notion (Waters, 1990).

During the 20th century, anthropologists and sociologists started to focus on the subjective, cognitive and perceptual notions of ethnicities (Waters, 1990). The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (Barth, 1966, Barth, 1994) was a pioneer in examining the ethnic groups' process of constructing and maintaining ethnic boundaries. The phenomena of self-ascription and ascription of others is for Barth the most important feature of ethnicity. The boundaries, in Barth's theory, are the ones that we have to give our attention to; they are the social boundaries that the actors within a group create. They ascribe themselves to distinct cultural features, and to a certain point the members of the group can choose which features they want to emphasize when they interact with others. They can, in this way, also choose to under-communicate the same features in other situations where they feel this is necessary (Barth, 1969). In this way we can say that the boundaries channels social life, they create a complex organization of behavior and social relations. To become a member of a group, you need the acceptance from the other members, and this implies a sharing of the same criteria for judgment and evaluation. They assume that they are fundamentally 'playing the same game' (ibid.:15). This implies that there is between them a potential for diversification and extension of their social relationship to cover any possible differences. On the other hand the exclusion of strangers as members of another ethnic group, involves recognition of the limitations that lies in the boundaries for the group (ibid.).

Even though the word ethnicity itself is not the most important in everyday speech anymore, it appeals to other terms like "identity", "culture" and "tradition". It is also used to gather external support, show a common history of violence or as a brick in the political game. For many though, ethnicity is not primarily connected to a history of violence and political game, but rather as an abstract source to a collective good provided by a "community" (Jenkins, 2002). The Irish sociologist Richard Jenkins uses an example from 1997 when the then young star of American Golf, Tiger Woods, visited the Opera Winfrey show. In a comment about his origins he claimed that he was neither "black" nor African American. "He was, he suggested, "Cablinasian", a mixture of *Caucasian*, *Black*, north American *Indian*, and *Asian*"

(ibid.:115). Even though it was obvious that he was not entirely serious, there was something serious in his rejection to the label “black”, and how origins in the American society really matter to people. (Jenkins, 2002)

The interaction between choice and constraint in creating ones own ethnic identity is most obvious when looking at children of mixed marriages (Waters, 1990). Children often learn the basics of their heritage at home, and this often starts the process of choosing which heritage to choose, or the choice of not choosing at all. But even the ethnic identification of people with a single ancestry involves many different choices. Even though their parents have the same heritage, they can choose to discard their heritage and just identify themselves with being an American, or try to pass as having another ancestry of their choice. This is what is implied when Waters (1990) argues that the option for choosing an ancestry is there for white Americans to a greater extent than people from another background. That is, it will be easier for a person with white skin color to state that he is German American than a person of another skin color, no matter if one of his ancestors is really German. At the same time, a person who identifies with more than one ethnic heritage does not necessarily have to use them all at the same time. A person has a father that is Welsh, and a mother who is half Norwegian and half Swedish, may use the different ethnic identities in different situations.

“Salad bowl” or “melting pot”?

In order to discuss an ethnic group in the United States, we have to understand how the country is ethnically diverse. In the book *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (Dinnerstein and Reimers, 1982) Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers state that “Never before – and in no other country – have as many varied ethnic groups congregated and amalgamated as they have in the United States” (ibid.:1). The “assimilation” and “pluralist” perspective on ethnicity in the United States has often the same arguments as the melting pot/salad bowl discussion, and often take them a bit further into the discussion. I will put them together in this section.

Traditionally the term “melting pot” has been the common way to describe the American society. This is a metaphor for a homogenous society where the different ethnic groups “melt” together to become one group – Americans. Anyone who enters the country will be thrown in the “pot” where a process of assimilation into the American belief system starts. Everything you bring into the pot will be melted together with the rest to form the new culture (Kawata, 2003). The assimilation theory argues that the further away from the original immigrants the generations are the ethnic group also becomes less important. The main argument for this view is that when the ethnic group goes through the structural assimilation – when the ethnic group is fully incorporated in to the American society – it will slowly lose its ethnic belonging. When the members of one particular ethnic group start to socialize with members from other ethnic groups – be it in marriage, friendship, or as neighbors the ethnic group will slowly start to disappear (Waters, 1990).

Others would compare the American society with a “salad bowl”, a metaphor for how the different ethnic groups live together, where newcomers to America bring with them different cultures, and where each part of these cultures is seen as an essential part to create a whole. Every culture or belief is seen as one of the tastes or ingredients and therefore its original shape and characteristics are maintained (Kawata, 2003). The pluralist argument, which one can use as a supplement to the salad bowl argument, is that ethnic assimilation is not to be expected. The main argument here is that even though the relationships described by the others do occur, there is strong evidence that ethnic identity is maintained, that the ethnic identity does not automatically disappear when people move away from the ethnic neighborhoods (Waters, 1990).

Imagined communities

Many communities are considered imagined mainly because the people within the community will never be able to meet all of their fellow-members. Benedict Anderson originally presented the theory of imagined communities as an answer to the nation state and the creation of this. He writes that the definition of a nation “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991:6). He later includes all communities, and not just the nation state, when he

states that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (ibid.:6). I will argue that the ethnic communities in the U.S are imagined communities where the members of the community often imagine the larger group, without ever meeting all of the members. I will also state that the imagination can be viewed on two different levels: first the local level, where an ethnic group exists within a certain area or city within the country, and secondly the national level, where a sense of connection between people of similar ethnic background exists throughout the entire country. Even though people with the same ethnic background do not know each other, and probably will never meet, there will always exist a sense of solidarity between them.

It is important to have common narratives and common features within these communities, so that if two strangers meet they will have a common from which to start. Anderson (1991) uses the religious community and Islam as an example. He describes a meeting between a Maguindano and a Berber who meet in Mecca. They will know nothing of each other, know nothing of the language of the other person, and they will be unable to communicate orally with each other. They will, however, understand each other’s ideographs because of the sacred text, and the sacred language within this text. I will argue that this is the same in ethnic communities. There will often be certain phrases or words from the country of origin that can connect people to each other.

Mary Waters (1990) notices that often the idea Americans have about communities is closely connected to ethnicity. Ethnicity is also sometimes defined as “family writ large” (ibid.:153). Oftentimes this also comes with the image that a community is based upon common interests and origin. Many of the respondents that Waters interviewed said that the idea of being an American does not give the feeling of one large family, or a national identity, like the French in France. This is also why many feel that ethnicity is an answer to what Waters calls “a problem that has deep root in American culture” (Waters, 1990:150), the need to belong to a larger family or community.

Concluding remarks

Ethnicity in America is a complex matter. I have chosen in my thesis to look at it from the point of symbolic ethnicity, that ethnic identity is something that people choose. Since there no longer exist many real ethnic neighborhoods, and since marriage within ones own ethnic group is a criteria, third and fourth generation ethnics have a variety of ethnicities to choose from. Most Americans have an extensive knowledge about where their ancestors came from, and have in this way the opportunity to choose which they most wish to identify with from all of these backgrounds. That being said, one can easily choose to express different ethnic identities at different times. An American with ancestors from Norway, Germany, Ireland and Italy can choose to be Norwegian when celebrating *Syttende Mai*, German during *Oktoberfest* and Irish during *St. Patrick Day*, and just identify as being an American the rest of the year. There is also the possibility to choose to identify with an ethnic identity where none of your ancestors came from. Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that possibility, as long as you get accepted into the group, presupposing that you share the same values and criteria for judgment and evaluation as the other members of the group.

3. Methodological reflections and introduction of the field

One of the most important reasons for choosing to study Norwegian Americans for my master thesis was the history that my own family had. My grandfather on my mother's side was born in America, and I had always heard stories about this. Seattle became the choice of location based on that, and the fact that this was where the fishermen, boat builders and people who had some sort of connection with the sea had located. As I wrote earlier, Rune Johansen's book was a great inspiration for my thesis. The pictures and the way that he portrayed Norwegian Americans in a straightforward way, without romanticizing their lives, fascinated me. How was it possible that people - who had never been to Norway and who, perhaps, never would - knew so much, and cared so much about Norway? Why did they care at all about this small, cold country on the top of the world? Why did they, of all people, cherish and maintain our old traditions that we Norwegians had almost forgotten? It was like there was something ridiculous about the whole image. This all changed as I went along with the research for my fieldwork and off course during my fieldwork.

I will in this chapter describe the Norwegian American community in Seattle to give an overview of how the community is built, and also give an introduction the biggest institution within the Norwegian American community, Sons of Norway (SoN). It will be only a short introduction since this is an important part of many of the Norwegian Americans ways of identifying with their Norwegian heritage. However in my thesis I will focus mainly on other institutions within the community who are not a part of the Sons of Norway organization, but who are connected with SoN in many other ways.

The Norwegian American community in Seattle

The people who settled in the Northwest of the U.S were usually people from the western or northern part of Norway. Many theories state that it was because the scenery reminded them of Norway. There were also many similarities in the way they lived their life and what work they were doing. One can almost say that the

Norwegians passed on the Norwegian coastal life to the Pacific Coast (Lovoll, 1999). The Seattle Times called the contemporary Norwegian community in Seattle one of the most vibrant Norwegian American communities in America. Even though changes occur, the traditions and the strength of the community remains: the 17th of May parade in Seattle is considered the third largest in the world (only Oslo's and Bergen's in Norway are bigger); the Leif Erikson Lodge of Sons of Norway has the most members in the world; there is an award winning reality television show about some Seattle-based Norwegian crab fishermen; the University of Washington offers Norwegian studies that attract students from all over the U.S; and Norwegian language classes are offered several times a week and are very popular (Leander, 2008b:115). The strength of the community comes directly from strong individuals who make sure that the traditions are kept alive. They make sure there is a place to meet, such as the Leif Erikson Lodge and the *Kaffe Stue*; that there is a place to retire such as the Norse Home; that the history is kept alive by the Nordic Heritage Museum; and that the 50-year old radio show, Scandinavian Hour, and a 110 year-old Norwegian newspaper is kept alive (ibid.). The Norwegian ambassador in 2008, Wegger Christian Strommen, stated that

“Here in Seattle you have the best of Norway and the best of America and the Norwegian-American community here has enormous vitality. You're different from other Norwegian-American communities across the country. You came later and in Seattle there's more focus on the maritime industry and business ... you have wonderful ties to the people in Norway, and I salute the Norwegian-American community in Seattle” (Leander, 2008b: 127).

A City Within a City – a short history of Ballard

“The Seattle neighborhood of Ballard is a 'city within a city' with a decidedly Scandinavian accent” (Crowley, 1999). Ballard, located in the northwest part of Seattle, is a maritime center linked to the Puget Sound with Shilshole and Salmon Bay. Water was, and still is, considered an important part of the community (ibid.). Ballard existed long before the first European settler came in 1852. A Duwamish community called the Xacho-absh, or Lake People had long populated the area. The area's first European settler was an Englishman, Ira Wilcox Utter, and by 1889 Ballard's population had grown to 10,000 (BCC, 2008). In the early days Ballard was given the title “Shingle Capital of the World”, because they produced more shingle

than any other town in Washington State, and it also produced large amounts of lumber. Attracted by Ballard's surroundings that reminded them of home, many Scandinavians chose to settle in the area. As the demand for fish grew, and especially salmon, there was no problem for Scandinavian fishermen to find jobs here. Boatbuilding was also a large industry, crafted largely by Scandinavian workers. On November 6, 1906 the city of Ballard was incorporated in the city of Seattle but continued to keep the old traditions and uniqueness (ibid.).

Today “Old Ballard” has become a center for a vibrant commercial district with local shops, restaurants and music venues. It still remains a “city within a city” with its own pace and many historical places. Although Scandinavians never constituted more than a third of Ballard's population, they imprinted their strong ethnic identity on the entire community (Crowley, 1999). Ballard is changing, and it is changing fast. Many of the old Scandinavian stores that used to dominate both the old shopping street, Ballard Avenue, and the new Market Street are now gone. Instead they have built massive office or apartment buildings. Not everyone is too happy about this and small shops in Ballard have started selling t-shirts that say “Ballard: a quaint drinking community with a condo problem” or “Ballard, a sleepy little drinking village with a condo problem”. This refers to how condominium buildings are being built all over the neighborhood. However, this is not always a negative development, because many of the elderly Norwegian Americans now have the opportunity to move to Ballard from their homes outside of Ballard and can be closer to the Leif Erikson Lodge and their network.

Seattle, and Ballard especially, still keep strong bonds to Norway. Bergen is one of Seattle's sister cities, and in Ballard today you can still find proof that the Norwegians have strong influence, such as The Nordic Heritage Museum, the Leif Erikson Lodge, the Statue of Leif Erikson and Bergen Place, a park that was dedicated to the Norwegian King Olav V (ibid.). There are two “real” Scandinavian stores left in Ballard today. A Scandinavian Specialties Store where they sell a limited range of Scandinavian goods, and a Danish bakery. Even though they are popular among the Norwegian Americans they too are struggling. The imports from the Scandinavian countries are really expensive, and that makes the goods in the shop expensive as well. As a sign that Ballard still has strong connections to Scandinavia, one of the

largest grocery stores in Seattle, in their Ballard branch, has an aisle with only Scandinavian food. In this way you can say that even though Ballard is changing, the influence of the Scandinavian community will still be there.

National and regional belonging

The Norwegian historian Odd Lovoll (1999) wrote that people who moved from rural to an industrial area have a need to be together in their new environment. When people leave their safe social and political environments they are more likely to create a social order with different volunteer groups and organizations in their new community. In that way many of the social and cultural needs will be covered. The European immigrants usually created a social order based on nationality and a regional belonging in the old country, but also the Lutheran church were a place where they could come together and meet other Norwegian Americans (Lovoll, 1999). There were many different regional groups that still had a strong influence in the Norwegian American community in Ballard to day. *Nordlandslaget* was one of them. This consisted of people from the three northern *fylker* in Norway: Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark. It started in 1909 in Minneapolis and the Seattle group started in 1913 and was given the name “Femboringen”. One of their main activities are to arrange annual *stevner* which is the annual member meeting where all members from the U.S and Canada can attend. They are categorized as *bygdelag* (Skjervold, 2010). *Bygdelag* are organizations that focus on regional identities and celebrate regional dialects, music, food and humor. Because of their regional focus they also attracted members from all over the political, religious and economic range (Schultz, 1994). *Bygdelagenes* most obvious function were to “define and give content to an intimate and respected Norwegian Identity (...) based on loyalty to a regional peasant cultural heritage” (Garvik, 2006). *Karmøyklubben* is another *bygdelag* who still have great influence in the Norwegian American community in Seattle. As the name tells us, the members in *Karmøyklubben* have their heritage from *Karmøy kommune* Southwest in Norway. They still have a lot of activities like *torskemiddag* (cod dinner), picnic at Norway Park, 17th of May celebration, Christmas parties, and member meetings (ibid.). These two groups still have great influence and are often represented at other events.

Sons of Norway

The largest national based organization outside the Lutheran church was, and still is, Sons of Norway (SoN). Sons of Norway have its name from the Norwegian song “*Sønner av Norge*” who was considered the national anthem before “*Ja, vi elsker*” was written. They had, in December 2009, 66 342 members in total. Of these 62 022 was from the U.S, 2 873 reside in Canada, and 1447 live in Norway. SoN was founded in North-Minneapolis in 1895, and was started as a insurance organization who had mutual aid as its main goal (Schultz, 1994: 26). Their main goal to day is “to promote and to preserve the heritage and culture of Norway, to celebrate our relationship with other Nordic Countries, and provide quality insurance and financial products to our members” (SoN, 2008). Members originally paid for unemployment benefits and funeral expenses. Unlike the *bygdelag*, Sons of Norway was made up of people from the lower-middle-class and laborers (Schultz, 1994: 26).

The Sons of Norway in Seattle is the Lodge with the most members. Every Sons of Norway Lodge is named after something Norwegian, and the Leif Erikson Lodge in Seattle is named after the Icelandic-Norwegian Viking Leif Erikson, who is considered the first European to ever travel to America. Sons of Norway have in the later years experienced, as many of the other Norwegian American organizations, a decrease in the number of members. They are however taking good care of their members with many small events during the week, and you get many benefits to being a member, such as access to the cabin site in Norway Park, language classes, children's camps as a heritage camp, in the membership meetings the members have a chance to be elected to serve a national and regional conferences, and one can join local groups within the Sons of Norway. They have a regular event that happens every month, for example, happy hour every second Saturday of the month, fitness classes, exercise classes, sports clubs with bowling, *leikaing* and Norna craft days. They also have the *Kaffe Stue*, a café that serve coffee and other Norwegian goods, and a library where members have access to Norwegian books, or books in English about Norway.

The Lodge is build like a traditional Norwegian house, and it stands out in the block where it is located, since the houses around it are square and grey office buildings or apartment buildings. On the one side of the Lodge there are a dragon's head, like the

ones that used to be on the Viking ships, as a figurehead under the ridge of the house. The main entrance is on the other side of the house. Outside the entrance stands a replica of the head of the Leif Erikson statue that is standing down at Shilshole Marina.

Reflections about my role in the field

Before I left Norway I contacted Doug Warne, who was the president of Sons of Norway in Seattle. I thought this would be a great arena to start my fieldwork. I had heard that this was the place where the Norwegian Americans used to meet. Doug was happy to meet with me, and welcoming me to the Norwegian American community. We met at Leif Erikson Lodge and had coffee *Kaffe Stuen*, where he introduced me to many people who had a great influence on how my fieldwork turned out in the end. I got access to quite a lot of information very early in my stay, which made me quite overwhelmed and somewhat unstructured in the beginning. I spent a lot of time at *Kaffe Stuen* talking to people, trying to get to know the Norwegian American way of life.

In his book *Metodisk Feltarbeid. Produksjon og tolkning av kvantitative Data* (Aase et al., 1997a) professor Tor Aase wrote that a successful participant observation is first based on that the researcher succeeds in establishing relationships with her informants, and secondly that she has a reflective relation to the status she is assigned and her own role in the field (Aase, 1997b:49). There is no doubt that my presence influenced the way that people behaved around me, at least in the beginning. My first meeting with the Norwegian American Community was in my view a little bit different than what I had pictured it to be. I met Doug Warne at *Kaffe Stuen* at the Leif Erikson Lodge. My first impression was that there were mostly people from the elderly generation who participated in the Norwegian American community. I soon discovered that I was one of the youngest in the group of Norwegian Americans, and that made me very visible. When I visited *Kaffe Stuen* the conversations were mainly about Norway, at least by the tables where I sat. I was so bold sometimes to ears drop on into others conversations, just to find out if it was the same everywhere, but they were talking about everyday things that people talk about when they meet, like things they have seen on the news, what they have been doing since the last time they were

at *Kaffe Stuen*, and where they are traveling. It was always with a lot of pride that people were talking about Norway, and their knowledge about Norway. In many occasions they even tried to challenge me about Norway's history. I always won! When working as a volunteer at the Nordic Heritage Museum, many of the visitors came by the souvenir shop, where I worked, just because they had heard that there were a Norwegian girl working there that day. Many actually bought small items 'just because I was such a nice Norwegian girl'.

"The fieldworker is always a marginal person, an outsider who, if he is successful, is permitted relatively free access to the backstage area of the local social scene" (Pelto and Pelto, 1978:248). I had different roles depending on the place I was, but the common feature in every setting was that I was Norwegian, exotic and interesting. I was the young Norwegian girl who came to listen to their stories, and because of this there were no problem for me to get access to their Norwegian American life.

An important part of fieldwork is what Erik Fossåskaret refers to as informal conversations with informants (*feltsamtale*). These informal conversations are important just because they can give answers to questions that the researcher had not asked, and did not know that he was going to ask. I had many of these moments when spending time at *Kaffe Stuen*, during the breaks in the choir and many other places. I also did some more structural interviews, where most of the questions were written in advance and where I used a recorder during the interviews. I chose the people that I interviewed from the various groups that I interacted with during my fieldwork. Only two of them were done over e-mail after the fieldwork was over, as an addition to the other interviews that I had already done. Except from the latter two, all of my interviews was done as an "open ended interview" where the interview always followed a general pattern (Briggs, 1986). However, flexibility is important, and some times the interview went in to a direction that I had not anticipated, and then after a while directed the conversation in to the interview path again.

There is no such thing as a typical Norwegian American

I decided to focus mainly on events that happened in the Norwegian American community, and not so much about the daily life of a typical Norwegian American. In

many ways with Ballard changing as fast as it does, the Norwegian Americans blend in more in the big city of Seattle. When they are together with other Norwegian Americans they are very “Norwegian”, but in their daily personal life they are just regular American citizens. They no longer have their businesses based in Ballard and they no longer live in Ballard, but they are still coming to Ballard for events at the Leif Erikson Lodge or the Nordic Heritage Museum.

Ethnic identity is often contextual and situational; to be a part of a group like this you need the others in the group to verify your identity as for example a Norwegian American. You will need for the others to acknowledge you as a part of the “ingroup”. Individuals will often, to promote this, use ethnological speech patterns and gestures to promote the authenticity of their claim (Trimble and Dickson, 2005). Fredrik Barth (1969) wrote that to become a member of a group you need the acceptance of the other members. The Norwegian American community in Ballard was very open and including, but at the same time a closed group. When I was invited to my first event at the Leif Ericson Lodge one woman told me that I could invite my friends if I wanted to. I just had to remember that the people that are not Norwegian American or Norwegian do not blend that well with people that are. With this she implied that many non-Norwegian Americans do not necessarily share the same values as the “real” Norwegian Americans, and that they often would not understand the behavior of the Norwegian Americans.

There were some people there who did not have Norwegian heritage, but still were included in the group. Many of them were, however, often married or had been married to a person with Norwegian heritage, and that was their “ticket” into the “ingroup”. One lady that had been an active member in the Norwegian American community, though not that much in SoN, was not from Norwegian heritage, and not married to a Norwegian American. She just had a special interest in Norway. The others acknowledged her as a full member of their group.

Roughly I decided to divide the Norwegian American community into two different arenas. I will call them the Norwegian American arena and the American Norwegian arena. This is because the people who fit into the arenas are very proud of their Norwegian heritage, but they show it in different ways. It is essential to say that these

two groups are not absolute. Many of the Norwegian Americans that I met fit perfectly in both categories, at the same time it is important to say that it is through my own observations that I talk about this, and not something the Norwegian Americans themselves talked about.

The Norwegian American arena and the American Norwegian arena

One of the arenas, which I choose to call the *Norwegian American* arena, consisted of people who spent a lot of time at the Leif Erikson Lodge - they were involved in a lot of happenings and events that went on in the Norwegian American community and they were members of the Sons of Norway organization. The Second arena, which I choose to call the *American Norwegian* arena, consisted of people who were more distant towards the Norwegian American community - they participated in some events like Norwegian Commercial Club, or they worked at the Nordic Heritage Museum, but many of them were not active members, or members at all, of Sons of Norway.

One of the former presidents of Sons of Norway, Dennis Storheim talked about “*sentrum*s” Norwegian Americans. This is a group of highly placed businessmen, who are aware of their high position within the American society, and thus tend to keep their distance from the Norwegian American community in general. They are still proud of their Norwegian heritage, however, they tend to limit their participation in the community to special events, like the 17th of May or other events that they can benefit from. It could be seen as a kind of privatizing ethnicity, which is separated from the social structure of ethnicity. An example of this rather exclusive relationship to ethnicity could be described when the Norwegian King and Queen held a banquet in Minneapolis in 1995. The invitations to the banquet were first given out to the people who were participating in the Norwegian American community and in events where the *sentrum*s Norwegian Americans did not participate. The result was that the *sentrum*s Norwegian Americans had to give a humble request for invitations to the banquet instead of being invited like the rest of the Norwegian Americans (Lovoll, 1999:128-9). None of the Norwegian Americans that I met were that extreme *sentrum*s Norwegian Americans. However some of the most extreme people in the American Norwegian arena could have a tendency to limit their participation only to

the events that they could benefit the most from. Many of these were members of the Norwegian Commercial Club, where they could create a network and benefit from that, and they were involved in the Nordic Heritage Museum. They had no problem donating money to charity and they participated in modern events at the Nordic Heritage Museum, like the Northern Lights Auction and the Arctic Summer Fashion Show. The majority of the people in the Norwegian American arena were people who were retired or in other ways had more time on their hands than usual. For many people their life situation had an impact on when they started to become interested in their heritage. Most of the people in the Norwegian American arena were members of Sons of Norway and spent much time at the Leif Erikson Lodge. For many of the people in this group that was their meeting place, and there was always some activity going on there.

Kaffe Stuen

During the day *Kaffe Stuen* is open. *Kaffe Stuen* is a café where you pay a \$4 donation and you can sit there the whole day drinking coffee, eating open faced sandwiches - or *smørbrød* - and other Norwegian treats. The people who work there are volunteers and they work every other week. *Kaffe Stuen* is just one room on the main floor; there are six round tables and an open kitchen where they make the food that they serve. On the tables there are flags from all the Nordic countries and always the American flag in the middle of this. On the walls there are big pictures of the Norwegian cities Trondheim, Bergen and Aalesund, a painting of Leif Erikson and other National Romantic Norwegian art. When you enter there is a guest book that you must sign, unless you are a regular guest: here every visitor has to write their name and where they are from. Often some of the regulars there read it, and come to talk to you, that's the icebreaker. You are a stranger and they are interested in talking to visitors.



A typical day at the Kaffe Stue accompanied by accordion music, coffee and Norwegian cookies. And for the occasion, the anthropologist in a conversation over a Norwegian map.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday they have live music there, mostly traditional Scandinavian music that people can sing along to. This is the place where many of the retired Norwegian Americans come to meet old friends. *Kaffe Stuen* is open from 10 to 2:30 and many of the guests sit there the whole day. Some live on the other side of Seattle and some of them didn't even live in Seattle, many had a regular day they visit *Kaffe Stuen* to chat and catch up on the latest gossip. For many of them this is the closest connection they have to Norway; either they don't have the money to go back or they feel that they are too old. This is the place they can come and meet old friends and have a good time.

The conversations at *Kaffe Stuen* were mainly about Norway, at least when I was there. Of course my presence had something of an impact on the choice of topic around the table where I sat, and sometimes it felt like it was more a competition about who knew most about Norway – them or me. But they were proud of the knowledge they had about Norway. One of them told me that one of the first things he

did in the morning was to turn on his computer and read the local news from Sør-Trøndelag and then the rest of Norway at NRK's webpage. He was originally from Trondheimsdistriktet and he felt it was more important to read that news first and then the local news from Seattle.

The people in the other arena; the American Norwegian arena will be presented in the next chapter and will be the arena that I concentrate about in this thesis. I will however mention the Norwegian American arena throughout the thesis.

4. Ethnicity as a criteria for participation

Participation in social groups such as Norwegian Commercial Club (NCC) and the Norwegian Ladies Chorus (NLC) and volunteering at the Nordic Heritage Museum is one way to show the Norwegian heritage. Even though these social groups in the beginning consisted of almost only Norwegian immigrants, I argue that they would not exist today if it were not for the feeling of ethnic belonging that made third and fourth generations join. The French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville noticed that individualism makes people isolate themselves from the society in order to create their own identity and beliefs. They need, however, confirmation from others on their identities and by participating in small groups – like communities – they get this confirmation from others of whom they share the same values and judgments (Waters, 1990). I will in this chapter argue how participating in the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, the Norwegian Commercial Club and volunteering at the Nordic Heritage Museum emphasize the ethnic belonging, and at the same time, as Herbert Gans remarked “without having to be incorporated in everyday life” (Gans, 1979:436). What's more, I will emphasize how social capital that is created in these social networks also can be a way of understanding why the third and fourth generation immigrants choose to participate in the Norwegian American Community.

Anne Charlotte Lindblom (2004) argues that donating your time can be a good definition of voluntary work. Though this is a very broad definition, this will also be my definition on voluntary work through this thesis. Moreover, based on this definition I will argue that by participating in these groups people are also working as a volunteer, and I will return to this later in this chapter.

Norwegian Commercial Club

The Norwegian Commercial Club (NCC) was founded in 1937, and has since then “provided Norwegians, Norwegian-Americans and others interested in the Norwegian culture with a place to meet and discuss business issues of the day” (NCC, 2010).

They call themselves “The largest Ethnic Business Club in Washington” (ibid.). In the beginning only men could join, and the two main attractions were the social hour before the meeting, and the poker game after the meeting. Women were not allowed to join the club until 1990. The original organization, the Odinian Society that was inspired by the Norwegian Masons⁴, was not growing and some of the members wanted to do something new. They also wanted to broaden the base of potential members (NCC, 2010), as there are often many and strict criteria for joining the Masons. This was also during the great depression in America, and they decided that the Norwegians should form a group where the members could help each other. Since the NCC grew from the strict and often secret mason movement they wished for a more open and including movement that welcomed everyone with connection to Norway. In other words the club is both a social club and a group that makes sure that the Norwegians can look out for each other.

The Norwegian Commercial Club meetings are held every second and fourth Thursday at the Leif Erikson Lodge in Ballard. Even though the meetings are held at the Sons of Norway Lodge, the club itself has no direct connection to Sons of Norway, besides sharing many of the members. These meetings are a perfect opportunity for many of the Norwegian American businessmen to mingle and create a network for themselves within the Norwegian American Community, and this is where they differ from, for example, the Norwegian American Chamber of Commerce (NACC)⁵. This is one of the few places where I have found many young Norwegian Americans as members. The program is still a social hour, a dinner, and a talk with a keynote speaker, but there is no longer an official poker game after every meeting. The Norwegian Commercial Club is also about encouraging new industries and new people to start their business. It is a goal for them to give back to the community in both money and time, as one of their main goals was when they started the club 79 years ago. This is why the local businesses, both in Ballard and also in the rest of the Seattle area, are very interested in speaking at the meetings or joining the club. With a network as powerful as that, the chances are greater that you will not fail

⁴ In Norway this would be known as a *Frimurerloge*.

⁵ Where the Norwegian Commercial Club are more oriented towards Norwegian American business within the greater Seattle Area, the Norwegian American Chamber of Commerce seek to “promote trade and goodwill and to foster business, financial and professional interest between Norway and the United States of America” (NACC 2011).

when starting a new business or if they have trouble in their existing business. There is a new president every year, and the president is elected among the rest of the members in the club. Often people are asked if they want to run as the president, and often the vice President is asked to run and becomes the President for the following year. Although the club allowed women to join in 1990 there have only been three women who have been President in the last twenty years.

At the meetings they always try to make the dinner as “Norwegian” as they can, and if they are not sure they consult with some of the Norwegians in the club. One of the members talked to me about some of the challenges they have when trying something new.

Just because we think that both fish and brown cheese are typical Norwegian food doesn't mean that they go well together. Usually we serve fish at the membership dinners. Once every now and then we serve meat, but then there are always complaints from some of the older members that there is not enough fish, mostly just as a joke but we can never know if they really mean it or not (interview with Jim McManus, NCC President 2010).

They try to keep the Norwegian food tradition alive, especially by serving fish for dinner, but also by serving *Mors Flatbrød* with every meal. Mary Waters (1990) argue that food is a very important part of the ethnic identity for many of her informants. The people that Waters talked to distinguished between different types of ethnic food. Some types of food are looked upon as more ethnic than others. Within the Norwegian American community in Seattle, fish is considered the most Norwegian food. The one time during my fieldwork when they did not serve fish at the NCC meeting, they served Norwegian sausage, mashed potatoes with butter, *surkål*, and salad. I was told that the meeting before this, they had served *lapskaus*, and many of the members were now commenting on the fact that they had not had fish in a while.

The meetings

The meetings are held in the auditorium of the Leif Erikson Lodge, though the club is

not formally connected to the Sons of Norway. This is a large room with a kitchen in one end of the room and a small stage in the other end where the lectern and two flags, one Norwegian and one American, are standing. The room is organized with a long table in the back of the room, where the board of the NCC is sitting, including the speaker of the day. The board includes the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership secretary and a Parliamentarian. Everyone else is sitting at long tables with about eight at each table. The dinner costs \$23 and \$10 for students. The meeting starts with a “social hour” that lasts about 45 minutes, where the members can get free drinks and mingle. They all wear buttons with their name, and what they do for a living. The buttons are white, with a Norwegian and an American flag. The first thing that I noticed when entering the room was the informal setting. People were dressed nicely, but not formal. Unlike in Norway, people often dress quite formally when going to work, and nice, but informally when going to settings like this. Some of the men wore suits, and some did not. The women were more elegantly dressed, but not too much. The President of NCC told me that “The most important thing is that people are dressed comfortably. This makes everyone feel welcome, and one feels that one can relax here”.

Before dinner starts and after everyone has sat down, the president welcomes everyone. He tells if someone has passed away since the last meeting, and informs about the program of the day, presenting the keynote speaker, and what they are going to talk about. When dinner starts, the bar closes, for dinner they only serve water, and coffee with the dessert. Between the main course and dessert, or sometimes during the dessert, they always present the guests, which are the people who are not members, but are there for dinner. One of the members at each table has to present the guest, then the guest has to stand up and say something about him/her self, who they are, what they are doing there, and what company they are from. Then they have to write their name in the guest book. Though the club has the policy of being open to everyone, most of the people who are there as guests have been invited by one of the members of the club. There are always different guest speakers, but everybody has something to do with the Norwegian American Community in one way or another. It is the Vice President of the NCC who chooses the speaker. They try to find something that is in the interest of both local and international news. One example of this was

when the late-2000 economical downturn happened; the keynote speaker was a professor from the University of Washington who was talking about consequences of the financial crises, both in the US and in Norway. There are also speakers who are from local businesses in Seattle. At one of the meetings that I went to the CEO of the Nordic Heritage Museum was there to speak about the new museum they were planning to build and especially about their plans for a maritime gallery at the new Museum. This was both because the NCC was interested in knowing about the new museum, but it was also beneficial for the Nordic Heritage Museum since they are dependent on donations to build the new museum. At another meeting they had no keynote speaker, but they showed the documentary "The Statue of Liberty – Mystery of the Copper Source". The film is about the mystery about the copper in the Statue of Liberty, and state that the copper came from Karmøy in Norway.

Everyone needs a network

I met *Daniel Nye* at my first meeting with the Norwegian Commercial Club. He is a Senior Attorney for Alaska Air/Horizon Air; a Seattle based Airline Company. Dan's family was originally from Skåne in Sweden, and he did not know exactly why the family decided to emigrate from Sweden. Daniel went to Mandal, Norway with AFS – American Field Service – for a high school exchange. He was there for one year before returning to the U.S. again. He kept his relationship with his “Norwegian family” and ended up going back to Norway several times to study. He ended up studying law at University of Oslo. After returning to the U.S for a couple of years he got a job offer from the University of Oslo as amanuensis in maritime law, which was one of his majors when studying. After five years in Norway he returned to the U.S again, and started working together with a Norwegian company who were financing fishing boats, and the like, up the West Coast. Daniel speaks Norwegian with a real *sørlandsdialekt*. The first part of my interview with him was in Norwegian and just the last few minutes were in English. He thought it was a good way to practice his Norwegian.

Dan joined the Norwegian Commercial Club in 1985. He heard about the club from one of the members, and since he was working with finance and many of the banks in

the area were interested in the Norwegian American market it was a perfect opportunity to create a new network and meet new friends. The first thing he did was bartending, serving drinks to the other members for the social hour. That was one of the best ways to get to know people. He was then secretary for a long time and was one of the lawyers who helped the NCC with legal questions and the expert of the rules in the club. The secretary job is now passed on to someone else, so the only thing he does now is show up, eat good food and have a good time with the people who are now his old friends. He was clearly very proud of his friendship with these people, and he felt like he was very much appreciated too. The atmosphere between the members of the club is, as Daniel puts it, “very Norwegian”. When asked what he meant about that he explained that there is an idea about sameness in the club that you cannot find other places in the American society.

Having a place where people meet each other and come together to have a good time, but continued as business people, it's a nice thing. What I like about the club is that there is no class distinction, this is not a Rotary (...) I have the impression that this is a club for working people and business owners and fishermen, and "everybody in between". I like that, it's very democratic and very open. It is very Norwegian, and maybe a little un-American? Here [in America] it is divided up more by class, and I have the impression that the Norwegian Commercial Club is not. There are many there that are well off, they have done well for themselves, but they come from the working class, in Norway so it makes it perhaps easier to mix with them and I like that (interview with Daniel Nye - my translation from the interview).

The whole basic idea about NCC is that it is a place where friends can meet and have a good time, but they are also business people. There are certain rules that you should know when you enter the club. These rules are more like norms, they are unspoken, but there will be consequences if you do not follow them. The people who do not follow the norms will unfortunately not last long in the club. There are no direct sanctions, and the ones who do not follow the norms will not be asked to leave, but there will be an understanding between the members of the club that this person is not trustworthy and does not hold the same values as the rest. To take advantage of the network in this way is not the way to do it. You are not supposed to promote yourself directly to the other members; this will not be viewed as the right way to do things. It will not be taken lightly, and people who do not understand that will probably not stay

as a member in the club for long.

The club is based on the feelings of friendship and that we have a good time together. And then, after a while, if I feel like it, I will call YOU and ask for your help, that is the right way to do it. But if you ask me directly if you can sell me something it will be taken badly. It is not the Norwegian way, and this is not how we do it here in Seattle either (interview with Dan Nye, my translation).

Even though the club is just as much about friendship as it is to create a network, to know that there are people out there with “the same quality” as you is getting more and more important. The fishing industry is still strong in Ballard and most of the maritime companies are still located in and near Ballard. Seattle Maritime Academy is also located in Ballard, and many of the graduates from there will probably be working in a business located in Ballard. As described in the previous chapter there have been great changes to Ballard in the last few decades. This means that many of the old Norwegian American businesses are disappearing. The old hardware stores are gone, the Old Norwegian cafés are gone and many of the Norwegian Americans who do not work in the maritime businesses, work and often live elsewhere than in Ballard.

The network put to use

There are many examples of how the networks that are created in Norwegian Commercial Club are put in use, without crossing the boundaries of the norms. I have given the people in the first example different names; primarily since this is something I observed rather than something someone told me. I was sitting opposite of them at a meeting, and as I later learned, this is often the way that people are recruited to NCC.

Eric is new to Sons of Norway, and new to Seattle. He had been to a couple of meetings, but he seemed like a quiet guy and had not really talked to many people yet. He was out of work at the time, but was an experienced mechanic, and had been working with cars almost all his life. Leif is an old member of SoN and also a long

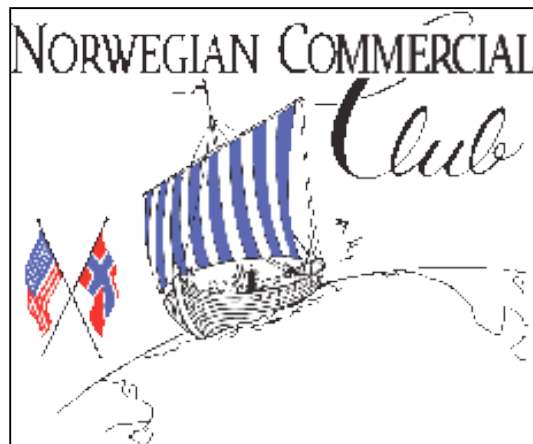
time member of NCC. They met over a cup of coffee at one of the membership meetings at SoN and started talking. Eric did not know anyone in the area, because he had just moved to Ballard. He mentioned to Leif that he did not have a job. Leif informed him about NCC, and gave Eric his card. He said that if Eric sent him an email the next day with a little information about himself, he could send it to some of his contacts at NCC and that he was sure that there was someone that could help him (From my field notes – May 2010).

Another example of how the network is put i to use, was when Daniel first started working for Alaska Air. He told me he then discovered that Alaska Air had no direct contact with the Norwegian American community. Even though they had sold many tickets to the Norwegian Americans in Seattle, they had never marketed directly to the Scandinavian population. He used his influence in the Norwegian Commercial Club to promote Alaska Air to the Norwegian American businessmen, “in a subtle and quiet way of course” (interview with Daniel Nye). Dan also arranged for someone from Alaska Air came to the NCC as the keynote speaker at one of the meetings. He brought a DVD with a film clip of one of the Alaskan Air planes which is landing, taking off, and landing again on Dutch Harbor, which is the main area for the fishing fleet in Alaska in the middle of the Aleutian Island⁶. Before showing the film clip he asked the audience if someone had landed there, and nearly 80 percent of the NCC members had landed there. The film clip showed a small plane in heavy crosswind, mist and rain, landing, taking off and landing again, which is very difficult. Most of the people present had been on such a plane ride, and there was applause and a really good atmosphere among the members after. Now the members of the NCC knew that they had ‘a friend’ on the inside of Alaska Air and they could come to him with questions. This has been good for business both for Alaska Air, but also for the Norwegian American businessmen who often travel to Alaska.

Everybody needs a job, and in that job, whether you are a mechanic or an attorney, you need a network to attract customers and just to meet new friends. The focus on

⁶ Aleutian Island is a chain of small islands that separate the Bering Sea (north) from the main portion of the Pacific Ocean (south). The archipelago consists of 14 large islands, some 55 smaller islands, and innumerable islets, nearly all of which are part of the U.S. state of Alaska.

Norway in NCC is more implicit than for example the Sons of Norway. Within the name - Norwegian Commercial Club, and that most of the members are Norwegian Americans lays a direct link to Norway, the most important aspect was to provide an arena where people with the ‘same values’ could “meet and discuss business issues of the day”. This is where the second group of the Norwegian Americans, or the American Norwegians, comes to show. There is a good balance between attracting new members and still respecting the old members. The old members always have something to say when decisions are made, but they still listen to what the young people say and mean.



The logos of the Norwegian Commercial Club and the Norwegian Ladies Chorus

The Norwegian Ladies Chorus

The Norwegian Ladies Chorus of Seattle (NLC) is a non-profit organization, founded in 1936 by Dr. August Werner, a professor of music at the University of Washington. The focus for the chorus, then, as now, is to “study and sing Norwegian music by Norwegian composers and to perform limited selections of appropriate music in English and various Scandinavian languages” (NLC, 2010). Their goal is to celebrate Norway's rich musical heritage through traditional and contemporary choral music

(ibid.). They have rehearsals once a week, at the Leif Erikson Lodge, and the rehearsals last for one and a half hours. Their uniform when they perform is the Norwegian *bunad* or black pants/skirt, black shoes, a white long sleeved shirt and a red shawl. When they wear the shawl uniform they use a *sølje* as a brooch with the shawl. This is to show connection to Norway even though they are not wearing their *bunad*. After all, they are the *Norwegian Ladies Chorus*.

The members of the chorus are a diverse group of women with different backgrounds. Many of them are descendants of Norwegian immigrants, some are *from* Norway and some of them are either married to a Norwegian American or have “a special interest in Norway”. This is very typical for these kinds of groups. Though I felt that I pulled down the average age in the group with about twenty years I was warmly welcomed to the group. I was told that they had people my age joining for a couple of years, but they soon dropped out. Mostly because they felt like they did not have the time to participate anymore. One girl I talked to, who had been in the chorus for a short period, explained that although she loved singing and loved Norway she felt almost like an outsider because of her age. She also felt bad because the University took so much of her time that she had not the opportunity to participate as much as she wished to, and so she quit. The one thing that everyone in the chorus has in common is that they all have a special interest in Norway in some way or another.

It's a gathering of women who are interested in their Norwegian roots, Norwegian background and they want to further that culture and that connection through song. You develop a camaraderie there and you have something in common with other people and, well, we also like music and we like to sing (Margaret Berg, President of the NLC).

Randi, another lady I interviewed, expressed her thoughts about the lack of young people in the chorus, and her feelings about the members of the chorus

Q: In the ladies chorus, there aren't that many young people, in age that is..

A: Right, that's kind of sad. But Ragnhild has her daughter Ellen, and then her daughter in law, they are younger, but they have got young kids, and they do not really live near here. But they have tried, but she just had another baby. I think for those who have little kids, it is harder for them. The other ladies have girls too, but you know they have got school and other

activities and it makes it hard for them. It is easier when you are all set, and you get a little older, than you can do those kinds of things. You have time to do that. But when you are raising a family, the kids are involved in something there is so much going on so I can see why they don't have the time to join. But it would be nice if they did. And we've had some who joined for a year or so, but then they are off to other things.

Q: Why did you stay, after the first rehearsal, why did you come back?

A: Like I said, the music was a little hard for me, but every one said that you would like it, you just have to hang in there, so I did, and I'm glad I did. And then I got to know everybody, and how could I leave then? It is a social event too, some times maybe too much so. We aren't that serious, and I think we like it that way (Interview with Randi Jacobs, NLC).

In the Norwegian Ladies Chorus they all have the interest in Norway as a common feature. Many of the ladies in the chorus were really good singers, and could easily have joined a more professional chorus if they wanted. Many of these had their ties to this chorus through family, and preferred this chorus because they considered the ladies in their chorus as friends; they meet outside the chorus as well, often through church or other events. However, some of the ladies in the chorus were there mostly because of the “interest in Norway” and not so much about the singing. One lady, who was not a member of the chorus, but a member of Sons of Norway, told me that she was asked to join the chorus. When she replied that she was not that much of a singer she got the answer that that was not the most important thing, the most important thing was that she was a nice person and that she would blend in well with the rest of the ladies (from my field notes). Jenkins (2008) pointed out that people need to have some things in common, no matter how vague it is, before they can feel that they are a part of a community. In this sense, as in the Norwegian Commercial Club it is the fascination about Norway, which is the common ground for people to meet.

Preserving the Old Norwegian music tradition

Most of the songs the Norwegian Ladies Chorus is singing in this chorus are old Norwegian folk tunes. Songs like *Barndomsminne fra Nordland* from 1896, *Falkvor Lommanson* from 1300, *Bruremarsj fra Hardanger*, and *Kom Mai Du Skjønne Milde* from 1700. It seemed to me like some of the ladies would have liked to sing more

English songs, but as one of the ladies puts it “... but if we don't sing them [the old Norwegian songs], who will? I mean, they will get lost, and that is kind of Julie's big thing to keep the tradition alive” (quote from my fieldnotes). They feel like they are honoring the old Norwegian traditions when they are singing these Norwegian songs. The same lady also told me she used to show the songs to her mother who was a Norwegian immigrant, and even she sometimes thought that the songs were old fashioned. The chorus has a Music Committee that selects the music, and it consists of the director, the accompanist, the president and two other members. These are the ones who select and decide what new songs the chorus is going to sing. Of course members can suggest songs that the chorus should sing, but in the end it is the director who decides on the songs.

The song tradition is old, and often associated with the Norwegian Community, and the Norwegians shared this with the Swedish *sångarföreningar* and the German *Gesangvereine*. The inspiration came from several different sources; church song, a rich variation of hymns, folk music in all its variations and different Norwegian composers. A journalist from the Chicago newspaper “Vinland” wrote in 1982 that the two first things the Norwegian immigrants did when they formed a new community was to build a church and form a male chorus. Then they built a home. *De Forenede Skandinaviske Sangere af Amerika*⁷ was founded in 1886 and it consisted of members from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. But this was dissolved again in 1892 because of the political conflicts between Norway and Sweden, and the Swedish members withdrew from the association. The ethnic restrictions that used to exist in the community are now reduced to include just about everyone with an interest in Scandinavian song, music and culture (Lovoll, 1997, 1999). Lovoll (1999) also pointed out that being a member of the chorus has become a family tradition and that illustrates how the cultural traditions are carried on in individual families. This can also be observed in NLC, though they have problems recruiting members some of the current members are daughters of previous or still active members in the chorus.

⁷ *The United Scandinavian Singers of America*

Rehearsing

My first meeting with the Norwegian Ladies Chorus was at the Swedish Cultural Center in a talent contest “Have Swedes Got Talent”. It was only a small group of them who performed, and they performed a Swedish song “*Vårvisa*”, in Swedish with Swedish flags around their necks. The show was a talent show for Swedes and their friends, and when I talked with some of the members after the show, they invited me to their next rehearsal. I was warmly welcomed when I joined their rehearsal the following Tuesday. The rehearsal took place in the Norna room at the third floor at the Leif Erikson Lodge. Here they had all the choruses’ belongings; on the walls hung pictures of the choruses from earlier years, and trips to Norway and a cupboard where there were plaques and trophies that the choir has received over the years. The Norwegian Ladies Chorus is not a subgroup in Sons of Norway, though they had their rehearsals and much of the chorus’ equipment there. Many of the ladies in the chorus were also a member of SoN and had worked with SoN for many years and some of them had no connection at all to Sons of Norway.

The rehearsals started at 7.30 p.m, and people were arriving about fifteen minutes before the rehearsal started, so that they could chat with the other women before the rehearsal started. The rehearsal started with a short warm up, and then we started rehearsing the songs. What songs they rehearsed depended on what they were rehearsing for, but it seemed to me that they had a lot of songs that they had been singing for a long time, and all the songs that they were singing were in Norwegian. Often, when they started rehearsing for a concert, someone would always give small comments on why this and this song had not been considered, but in general everyone was happy about the song selections that the Music Committee had selected. After the rehearsals some of them stayed a little longer to chat some more because there was no time for a break during the rehearsal itself. Even so, every time they stopped singing they started chatting, and some times they did not stop chatting until the pianist started playing again. The rehearsal lasted one and a half hours, and to some this was their only get together with this group of people the entire week. These rehearsals were just as much a social gathering as a choir rehearsal. Many of the women are close friends. Randi told me “To me they are very, very special. I didn't have any sisters, so they have become like sisters to me”. In several informal settings when the

members have talked to me about the relationship in the group, they talk about them like they are family. This also came to show in the way they talked to each other, and how they would lean on each other for help if there was a problem in their family or in their personal life. Many of these women had known each other for a very long time, and had no problems confiding in each other on a personal level.

Showing ethnicity through music

Social anthropologist Malcolm Chapman (1994) writes

“Firstly, there is often a great gulf between the real ‘ethnicity’ (the man and woman in the street, so to speak), and the self-conscious and enthusiastic exponents of the same ‘ethnicity’. This is manifest as much in musical as it is in other matters. Secondly, music provides an entry into practices and sentiments of ethnic belonging, for those whose commitment is small, and who require entertainment rather than effort” (ibid.:35-36)

Chapman (1994) writes about the Romanticism of the Celtic folk music, and this quote can be transferred to the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, as well as Gans’ notion about symbolic ethnicity. He noticed that symbolic ethnicity’s essential characteristic is the devotion to the culture of the immigrant generation and a love and pride of a certain tradition. Ethnicity becomes more of a leisure-time activity, like singing with the Norwegian Ladies Chorus.

From the Norwegian traditions that the immigrants brought with them, the musical tradition is perhaps the easiest to preserve. The music will always be easy to access through recordings or sheets of music. Music is also something that can be appreciated by everyone, both the performer and the listener. Those who do not speak or understand Norwegian can also enjoy the music. Those who do not speak Norwegian can also join the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, even though the songs that the Norwegian Ladies Chorus performs are almost always in Norwegian. Many see this as a good opportunity to learn some Norwegian; others see this as an opportunity to get in touch with their Norwegian heritage through the song tradition.

The Norwegian choruses have traditionally been rooted in the Norwegian National Romantic era, both in their repertoire and their outfit when performing. The choruses

often maintained a romantic, pre-industrial vision of Norway, and with this helped many immigrants to deal with their homesickness and also helped them preserve some memories from the old country (Lovoll, 1999). I noticed this also when the NLC was performing, and especially at the Fishcake and Meatball dinner that the chorus arranged as a fundraiser for their scholarship program. At the dinner they had a small concert in addition to an auction and a dinner – where the menu was either fishcakes or meatballs. One of the songs they performed was *Barndomsminne fra Nordland* (also known as *Å eg veit meg eit land*), written by the Norwegian theologian, politician and hymn writer Elias Blix in 1896. Many of the elderly people, especially those who were immigrants themselves, started crying and singing along to the song. I was told that this often happened when they sang that song, and that it was a favorite for many of the Norwegian immigrants in the community. There is an obvious connection, I argue, between the songs that the Norwegian Ladies Chorus sings, and the old Norwegian traditions that the Norwegian Americans are so proud of keeping. One of the ladies in the chorus I interviewed said that she became very proud when she had been watching an old Norwegian movie “*Kristine Valdresdatter*” and at the end they were playing *Sølv* by Edward Grieg. “You know we sing that all the time, and I have never thought that much about it, and then it had this very key part of this 1930’s film” (from my fieldnotes). As previously noted, many of the songs that the Norwegian Ladies Chorus had on their repertoire was old Norwegian songs that many Norwegians may never have heard about.

The Norwegian Ladies Chorus was often asked to sing at different events around Ballard. For the most part these were events tied to the Norwegian American community, but also other events tied to the different Nordic American communities. Examples of this is the Northern Lights Auction for the Nordic Heritage Museum, where they contributed with a concert that was auctioned away; performing at the “Swedes Got Talent” event at the Swedish Cultural Center and *Yulefest* at the Nordic Heritage Museum. Many, both the people in the audience, and the ladies in the chorus enjoyed the old Norwegian traditional songs, and this was a perfect opportunity for the chorus to try to recruit new members.

Nordic Heritage Museum

Together with the Leif Erikson Lodge, the Nordic Heritage museum is one of the most important meeting places for Norwegian Americans in the Seattle area, and also a good opportunity to meet people with a background from the other Nordic countries. It is different from “the Lodge” in the way that the museum includes all the five Nordic countries, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. Like the two other groups I have presented in this chapter, the Norwegian Commercial Club and the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, this is an arena where the American Norwegians will be found. It is a good way to celebrate their heritage without the activity taking up too much of their time. If one reflects on Herbert Gans’ (Gans, 1979) symbolic ethnicity going to concerts, taking language lessons and watching contemporary Nordic movies can all be considered a part of the symbolic ethnicity. To visit the museum and get to know the history of the Scandinavian immigration and with this reflect on the history of their ancestors helps one to identify with them. Just as Gans (1979) noticed, symbolic ethnicity can be expressed by a “nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation (...) that can be felt without having to be incorporated in the everyday behavior” (ibid.:436).

Unlike the Vesterheim museum in Decroa, Iowa⁸, The Nordic Heritage Museum (NHM) is focusing on all the five Nordic Countries. Their vision is that The Nordic Heritage Museum is to be “an internationally recognized museum and cultural center where people of all backgrounds are welcomed to be inspired by the values, traditions, art, and spirit of the Nordic Countries” (NHM, 2010) The building where the museum is located is the former Daniel Webster Elementary School in Ballard. It was built in 1907 and the Nordic Heritage Museum has been a tenant there since 1979. As the school is located in the middle of Ballard there were many Nordic-American kids who attended the school, and many of the volunteers at the museum went to school there. The Museum just recently purchased a two-block site by the main street in Ballard where they plan to build the new museum. The New Nordic Heritage Museum will be considerably bigger than the current building. In this way they are able to realize their vision about being “an internationally recognized

⁸ For more information see the museum’s home page <http://vesterheim.org/>

museum and cultural center” (NHM, 2010). Outside the museum there are five flags representing the five Nordic countries. During the end of my stay they had an exhibit about Åland⁹. And in that regard, they hung up the flag of Åland beneath the Finnish flag, which is blue with a yellow and red cross in the middle. This was a way to honor Åland as a region.

At the same time that people can have a very distant relationship to their heritage, the Nordic Heritage Museum is run on a voluntariness that is based on the volunteers’ ethnic heritage. Beside the management employed at the museum, no one else gets paid for working there. Everyone who works in the information stand, gift shop and admissions are volunteers. Because the opening hours for the museum are from 10am – 4pm on weekdays and Saturdays, and 12am – 4pm on Sundays, the volunteer staff consists mostly of people who have retired from work or work part time. They are the ones who have the opportunity to work at the museum during weekdays. Only on weekends and events during the afternoon could you find people in other age categories.

On a regular weekday there would be between three and five volunteers working at the museum. On Saturday and Sunday, if there are no events going on, there are two. Everyone has their own day that they work, so they get to know the people who work on the same day very well. When I worked as a volunteer at the museum I was put in the gift shop. I had my training on Wednesdays together with a nice Swedish lady. At the same floor as the Gift Shop were the Info Stand, where people could get their questions answered, and the volunteer at the info stand also answered phone calls and had the general view if the staff was in the office or out. The Info Stand was located in a way so that many people stopped and talked to the person there. Most of the people visiting the Museum had heritage from one of the Nordic Countries, and this was a good opportunity to get to know more about their ancestors.

During my training period we were working in the gift shop from 10am – 1pm and then someone else came and took over from 1pm – 4pm. These are the working hours

⁹ Åland is an autonomous, demilitarized, group of islands. The inhabitants are Swedish speaking, however Åland is considered within the Finnish region. It is located in the Baltic Sea between Finland and Sweden, and consists of over 6500 islands.

for the volunteers -- on Sundays they work “the whole day”. After I finished my training I started working mainly weekends. It was not the main season for visitors during the period that I was working there. On an average Saturday there would be about 10 people by the shop. On some occasions people would come in just because they had heard that there was a “real Norwegian girl” working there that day, other times when visitors heard that I was from Norway they would buy some of the small buttons or lip balms that were standing on the counter; “Just because I was from Norway”. In the gift shop visitors could buy souvenirs, including trolls, Norwegian chocolate, books, *lusekofter*, pictures and posters from the Nordic Countries, Nordic jewelry, cookbooks, postcards, baby clothing, and seasonal souvenirs for Christmas, Easter and Syttende Mai.

Exhibits and events at the museum

The exhibit *The Dream of America* is the largest exhibit in the museum. It is located on the first floor. This is a permanent exhibit where you can experience the history of the 19th century immigration period. It includes photographs, sound, artifacts, and physical examples of the houses and environment from the journey,. The exhibit starts on the Scandinavian countryside and takes the visitor through all events and difficulties encountered during the journey from Scandinavia to America. The second of the permanent exhibits is *The Promise of the North West* focusing on the immigrants who came to the North West and the impact they had in the logging and fishing industry in the area. The Folk Art Galleries shows artifacts that the immigrants brought with them to the new country, and one room for every of the five Nordic countries which displays the characteristics from each country and demonstrates the differences between the countries. In addition to this they have a large area on the second floor where they have temporary exhibits with more contemporary artists. The five months that I worked at the Museum they had an exhibit by the Danish sculptor Robert Jacobsen, and after that they had an exhibit named “*Sweden from Above*” by the Swedish photographer Lars Bygdemark. The last month I was there they opened an exhibit called “*Somebody's Grandma*” by Norwegian Sølvi Barber, the exhibit is about how Norwegian Americans feel about their heritage. These more modern exhibits are some of the things that I find interesting about the Museum, and they were very popular among the visitors. Unlike many of the other institutions and

groups that I was involved with in Ballard the Nordic Heritage museum also focused on the more modern aspects of the Nordic countries. When the president of the Norwegian ladies Chorus of Seattle explained why they were only singing old traditionally Norwegian songs she said that it was a nice way to honor their heritage by preserving the songs that the Norwegians no longer remembers. In my view the Nordic Heritage Museum honor the heritage both by showing the old traditions and struggles through the permanent exhibits, and in addition they also honor the modernization process that the Nordic countries have gone through since WWII, by showing the more modern aspects of the countries.

In addition to the opening hours during the day the Museum offers a variety of classes during the afternoon such as Nordic Woodcarving, *Rosemaling*, language classes together with the Scandinavian Language Institute, knitting classes, and Nordic Cooking classes. This is something that the Sons of Norway in Seattle do not offer, and it makes the Museum a more natural meeting point for those who wish to learn Norwegian or some of the other Nordic languages. They also have a lot of other cultural events, the Mostly Nordic Chamber Music Series and *Smörgårbord*, lectures and movies. In this way the Nordic Heritage Museum creates a meeting place for people with many different cultural backgrounds who have the fascination for the Nordic countries in common. The atmosphere between the volunteers and the staff are friendly. Many of the volunteers have been working with the museum for a long time, and possess a unique knowledge about the museum, their heritage and how everything works.

Volunteering in ethnic organizations

In a society where many different ethnic groups meet and interact in almost every aspect of the daily life, voluntary organizations based on ethnicity can be a perfectly good way of getting to know ones heritage. Organizations who are founded primarily for ethnic reasons are groups where people who identify with an ethnic group can come together, to socialize with fellow ethnics, to discuss matters of common concerns and to introduce the next generation to the ethnic community which one is a part of (Alba, 1990). Yet Alba (1990) and his team found that ethnic organizations such as Sons of Italy, German-American Club and Sons of Norway only represented

about two per cent of the people in their respective communities. However, over half of the respondents Alba talked to when doing research for *Ethnic Identity: the transformation of white America* (1990) reported that they were active in ethnic friendship circles and groups instead of formal organizations. Also, most of the respondents who reported to be members of ethnic organizations were first or second generation immigrants. Third and fourth generation ethnics were more likely to be members of friendship circles or groups (ibid.). This is consistent with Gans' (1979) symbolic ethnicity. As the generations gets further away from the original immigrant the ways of showing your ethnicity changes. What's more, the need for a formal ethnic organization was bigger when the immigrants were new to the country. Many could not speak the language and were strangers to the ways of life in their new home country. An ethnic organization would take care of many of the needs that the immigrants had (Lovoll, 1999).

The social networks that are created within, for example, an ethnic group or organizations, such as the ones just described, are for many one of the most valuable forms for social interaction there is. These social networks have a great value in the social life. "Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" (Putnam, 2001:19). Both physical and human capital is here described as tools that can help individual productivity. Putnam (2001) argue that the best tool created by social capital is social networks. The notion about social capital is linked closely to the idea about social networks and here I argue that social capital and the social networks that are created within the ethnic groups are of great value in the Norwegian American community. Also, the concept of social capital can be applied as a way of understanding why so many of the third and fourth generation Norwegian Americans participate in ethnic groups such as Norwegian Commercial Club, Norwegian Ladies Chorus and volunteering at the Nordic Heritage Museum.

Social capital

The concept of social capital shares many similarities with the concept of ethnicity. They are often being used by the broad public without being defined, and they are both based on social aspects as opposed to individual and autonomous aspects, the term has little or no meaning outside a social group (Goulbourne and Solomos, 2003). Although social capital can be referred to as a rather “powerful public idea” (De Souza Briggs, 1997:1), the American sociologist Xavier de Souza Briggs states that it is a highly useful notion and “one very important for thinking through both the promise and peril of community building efforts around the world” (De Souza Briggs, 1997:1)

In the book *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (2001) sociologist Robert Putnam introduces the theory about social capital as a crucial part of social networks, and that both notions have a great value in the society. In the term social capital, trust, or mutual trust between the individuals in the society, plays an important part. Social capital refers to the connections between individuals that could be recognized as the social networks, the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from these connections. In other words it is not a resource or a quality in humans, but a social phenomenon and a quality in the relations that tie people together (Putnam, 1995, Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006). It refers to the “resources stored in human relationships” (De Souza Briggs, 1997:2) whether they are casual or close. In many situations social capital is achieved by participating in formal organizations or informal social settings. There are different forms of social capital, and Putnam distinguishes between what he calls bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive). Some networks that are more outward looking are encompassing people across diverse social cleavages. Other forms of social capital are, by necessity or by choice, very inward looking and have a tendency to emphasize exclusive identities and homogenous groups. Bonding social capital is good in order to reinforce specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. Solid networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial social and psychological support for less unfortunate members of the community, while furnishing start-up financing, markets, and reliable labor for local entrepreneurs (Putnam, 2001).

Men and woman who spend much of their time in formal organizations could be looked upon as *machers*, in contrast to people who do not, who are called *schmoozers*. According to Putnam the distinction mirrors an important one in the American social life. (Putnam, 2001: 92-95). *Machers* follow current events, follow politics, volunteer, give to charity, attend church and club meetings and participate frequently in local meetings. Statistically speaking doing one of those things, will automatically lead to another. *Schmoozers* on the other hand, also have a great social life but their engagements are less organizational and purposeful. They throw barbeques, hang out with friends, go to sports night in bars and act more spontaneously and flexibly than the *machers*. Of course the two overlap to some extent. Some of the first-class *schmoozers* are often major *machers* as well, and vice versa. Some early sociologists argued that informal contact between people would decrease in the urban settings. Often in the more urban settings the families do not live so close together, the rate of divorces is higher and smaller families have reduced the important ties that relatives in less urban settings create. Visiting with friends or coming together with acquaintances has long been one of the most important social practices in America (ibid.).

One of the main questions when discussing the term social capital is how it is linked to the term “trust”. The Danish political scientists Gert Tinggaard Svendsen and Gunnar Lind Haase (2006: 16) define trust as the expectation that 1) a person you know, 2) a stranger or 3) an institution will follow certain norms. The two first; that a person you know or a stranger will follow certain norms when they interact with you, is important in social capital. The community creates norms like this. It is not illegal to not follow these norms but most people do, when the sanctions are to be excluded from the rest of the group.

Is ethnic belonging, a criterion for participating?

Lindblom (2004) argues that donating your time to help others is one way to define voluntary work, and this is the situation for all the three institutions that have been mentioned above. What they all have in common as a criterion for participation is a “general interest in Norway”. I will go so far as to argue that if the interest in Norway were not present, there would be little or no reason for participating in these groups.

The common feature in the two first groups – and to some extent at the Nordic Heritage Museum – is the word Norway. As this draws the conclusion that the club has some connection to Norway, many who do not know, or care, about Norway will automatically exclude themselves from these groups. In addition, to know about these groups, one will have to know someone in the Norwegian American community, or have knowledge about it. Especially the Norwegian Commercial Club, who, do not, unlike the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, promote themselves out to the broader public. The Norwegian Ladies Chorus tries to promote themselves to the broader public, but as they sing in Norwegian and have that clear connection to Norwegian culture as they do, there are many other choruses' people can join instead if they have no interest in Norway. There are a variety of volunteer groups like these in the American society, and because of this a person can pick and choose between varieties of other groups, based on ones personal interest. This is why I argue that there is little, or no, reason to participate in these groups without the special interest in Norway.

I will, as well, argue that if it were not for voluntary work, none of these institutions would exist. Voluntary work seems to be an important criterion to make the American society go about. For many Americans it is natural to donate money and time in order to make things happen. This mirrors the American ideology that if they sit around waiting for the state to fix everything, nothing will be done (Lindblom, 2004:158). As Lindblom (2004) shows in her thesis, *Norsk på Amerikansk – Amerikansk på Norsk. Et studie av Norskamerikanere i Minot, North Dakota, USA*, voluntary work can be categorized as the cornerstone in the Norwegian American community in Minot. Through the work the volunteers are doing for *Norsk Høstfest*, her informants state they feel like they are contributing both on the individual level, in the way that they have something to do during the day, and they felt like they made a difference in the community. There is also the collective level where they, by working on *Norsk Høstfest*, felt they were helping promoting the city and the Norwegian culture in a broader way (ibid.). *Norsk Høstfest* is North America's largest Scandinavian festival, and each year over ten thousand people visit this festival. Despite the name, *Norsk Høstfest*, they feature cultural elements from all the five Nordic countries. In addition to this it also includes elements from Greenland, Åland, the Faroe Islands Estonia, the German-speaking Europe and the Netherlands, with the main emphasis, however, on the Nordic countries (Lindblom, 2004). A big event like this will be more

commercialized than many other smaller events. *Norsk Høstfest* is widely known in the Norwegian American communities in North America but also in other ethnic communities. This is shown with the cultural element from the other countries, but also with who is working as a volunteer. Lindblom gives an example of a woman with German heritage who is one of the eldest volunteers in the organization. She does not care so much about the heritage of the other people she works with, but only that this is a good thing for the city and it helps put Minot on the map (ibid.).

In the Norwegian American community in Seattle all the organizations are run by volunteers who donate time and money to make things happen. The Nordic Heritage Museum is, as stated, run almost only by volunteers working there, both on a daily basis in the museum, and in addition at different events that are held at the museum. At the Nordic Heritage Museum just as *Norsk Høstfest* there are people working there who do not have any heritage from any of the Nordic countries, but just a special interest in the events that are taking place in Ballard. Since Ballard no longer has the main part of the Norwegian American population living there, many events are now dependent on help from other people living in the area. In addition, with the University of Washington which offers Norwegian Studies and where you can get a Bachelor degree in Scandinavian Studies this is where many students first get introduced to the Nordic American community, and then also to the Norwegian American community.

What brings the people together in the Norwegian American groups where I conducted my fieldwork was, as mentioned several times before, a special interest in Norway. The Norwegian Commercial Club calls themselves “the biggest ethnic business club in Washington”. In this and in the name “Norwegian Commercial Club” they automatically exclude the people who are not interested in Norway. The Nordic Heritage Museum on the other hand are not exclusively Norwegian, though they have a large exhibit about Norway, and there are still many people with Norwegian heritage that works there. Lindblom (2004) writes that for many of the people working as a volunteer at *Norsk Høstfest* the most important thing is not their ethnic identity, but the fact that they are able to work with people that they enjoy spending time with.

Social capital and participation

Some of the members in the Norwegian Commercial Club go under the category Robert Putnam (2001) defines as *schmoozers*, as Putnam puts it, many of the first? class *schmoozers* are big time *machers*. They are dependent on both the network, and the social life that comes with the club. In addition it gives them comfort to know that there is someone they can call if they need anything. They take care of each other and this is also where the ethnicity plays a role: they assume that because they are all of Norwegian heritage, or that they at least have a special interest in Norway, they can trust the next person. They can trust each other because they are in the same club, and they are in the same club because they feel a connection to Norway. Though they are an open group where anyone can join, there are certain norms that one should follow, or “you would not last long in the club”. These norms are connected to the Norwegian values of not making so much out of oneself - to many this is strongly linked up to Norwegian traditions and the Norwegian immigrant farmer who worked hard and did not show off about it. The norms in Norwegian Commercial Club are simple; do not broadcast yourself too much, and you can stay. Though you join the club and many know what you do for a living you cannot go around broadcasting yourself and your business. If people want your help, they will come to you. If this norm were not respected people would not last long in the club. For many, Norwegian Commercial Club is the only tie they have to the Norwegian American Community, and like Daniel they have “done their duty” in the club and are now just showing up, eating good food and having a good time with old friends. Here, as in any other volunteer group, there is an expectation that the members have some sort of position, or do some kind of job, within the group when they are members. As Margaret Berg, the President of The Norwegian Ladies Chorus, said to me “You know, if you belong to a volunteer group, you have to contribute, you can’t just show up. Though I’d love to sometimes”.

Social Capital and ethnicity

In his research for his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2001) measured social capital and civic engagement across all the fifty states in America. He and his team used fourteen indicators of formal and informal community networks under the

headlines of “Measures of community organizational life; Measures of engagement in public affairs; Measures of community volunteerism; Measures of informal sociability; and Measures of social trust” (ibid.:291). The analysis showed that North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington scored overall very high in every category. However the southern states scored low, or very low on many of the categories. Putnam notes that these differences may often be the result of which people live in the different parts of America, and that the patterns of immigration and slavery can provide an explanation to the difference (Putnam, 2001:292-294). Political scientists Tom W. Rice and Jan L. Feldman (1997) notice in their article “Civic Culture and Democracy from Europe to America”

“[t]he civic attitudes of contemporary Americans bear a strong resemblance to the civic attitudes of contemporary citizens of the European nations with whom they share common ancestors. The Americans who descend from nations with highly civic populations tend to hold relatively civic attitude, while those who descend from nations with less civic populations hold relatively less civic attitudes” (Rice and Feldman, 1997:1143).

Putnam (2001) remarks “one surprisingly strong indicator of the degree of social capital in any state in the 1990s is, for example, the fraction of its population that is of Scandinavian stock” (ibid.:294). Putnam argues here that the Americans who have Scandinavian heritage tend to have a higher degree of social capital than other ethnic groups. Whether or not immigration and slavery is the only explanation for the differences between the states is a bigger question that I do not have the opportunity to discuss in this thesis. However, as Putnam (2001) argues through *Bowling Alone*, the social networks where people participate create a high degree of social capital, and social capital creates a higher degree of participation in every aspect of life. Many Norwegian Americans achieve a high degree of social capital through participating in the Norwegian American community, and I argue that this could be one of the reasons for Putnam’s findings. Putnam (2001) also notice that social capital and civic engagement have declined in America over the last decades, at the same time I have shown how many of the Norwegian American groups have trouble recruiting new people, and especially young adults. Nonetheless, Rice and Feldman (1997) write that areas with a strong Scandinavian – and thus Norwegian – population have a higher degree of social capital than many others. I argue that ethnicity in itself does not

create social capital, but participating in ethnic communities will create social capital. This could be everything from formal ethnic organizations to groups, to just meeting at *Kaffe Stuen* and the membership dinners at the Leif Erikson Lodge.

Individuals often use social capital for at least two purposes; the first one is for social support, or to get by, to cope with the difficulties that life brings on a daily basis. When a person confides in a friend, or is confided in by a friend, social capital is at work. The relationship that is established already, will in time be used by both the speaker and the listener, and the people that we confide in are often – but not always – people that are like us, in class, values and other terms (De Souza Briggs, 1997). An individual can also use the social capital as a method to get ahead, to improve, or change the life situation by approaching people in the network in order to get help with things. This could be asking to get a reference before a job interview, or to get someone to put in a good word for them in a hiring situation, just as I have shown in this thesis. As Daniel Nye answered “everybody needs a job, and everybody needs a network”, when asked about why he thought there were so many in the middle generation joining the Norwegian Commercial Club, as opposed to the rest of the community. In the next chapter I will discuss the role that age and with that family plays when people decide to join the Norwegian American Community.

5. The importance of age and family

One of the first things I noticed when starting my fieldwork was the age of the people who participate in the Norwegian American community. When I visited the *Kaffe Stue* at the Leif Erikson Lodge, participated at the Sons of Norway meetings and sang with the Norwegian Ladies Chorus, I noticed people between 21-29 were missing. My role as a fieldworker became very visible because I was in an age group that was barely present in these institutions. Herbert Gans (1979) noticed that the third and fourth generation has a different view on ethnicity, and how to express it, than the earlier generations. Gans wrote in 1995 an Epilogue to “Symbolic Ethnicity”. Here he states that the future of the research lies in the research about the symbolic ethnicity amongst the fourth generation (Gans, 1995). This would however be difficult since these generations are barely visible in the American society. In this chapter I will discuss this statement with a special focus on how age and family is an important factor for participating in the community, despite the distance from the immigrant generation. Additionally I will continue from the last chapter on how voluntary work could be a variable that shows in what way the third and fourth generation to some extent participate in ethnic groups and organizations.

I will start by presenting the findings of James E. Curtis, Edward G. Grabb and Douglas E Baer in their article “Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis” (1992), where, among other findings, they concluded that age plays a huge role when it comes to participating in voluntary organizations. After that I will give a presentation of some of the members that I met during my fieldwork to give a picture of who participates in the community. I will then go on to discuss the connections between voluntary work and age, and the importance of family when deciding how to participate in the groups that I presented in the previous chapter: The Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage Museum. Most of the activities that happen in the Norwegian American community are driven by voluntary work, and one can argue that it is the older generation that have the ability to engage in voluntary work simply because they have more time on their hands than the younger generations.

Voluntary work and age in the Norwegian American Community

In their article “Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis” Curtis et al. (1992) argue that age plays a huge role when people are volunteering in different organizations. In their paper they used the World Value Survey from 1983 and used the survey question “Which, if any, of the following [organizations] do you belong to?” (Curtis et al., 1992:142). The respondent was then given a list of ten association categories where many of them were consistent with the ones that were mentioned earlier in the previous chapter. The age categories they used were divided into four: 21-29, 30-45, 46-59, and 60 or older. They excluded the category 0-20, though many of these volunteer in sports games and other after school activities. They decided to focus on people within the legal age in the U.S. (ibid.).

They found in their study that age had a substantial impact on voluntary work. If all members of an organization are included, the people in the category of 60 or older had the highest participation, while the middle-aged came second, and last the people in the category with the people aged 21-29. When they excluded church and union membership the respondents in the 60 or older category had a slightly lower membership rate than middle-aged respondents. Curtis et al. (1992) explained this with the fact that many of the middle-aged respondents, having a short amount of time on their hands, would be more likely to join many voluntary organizations, but not be active in them. Whereas the people in the 60 or more category, especially those with much time due to retirement, were more likely to be involved in few organizations, but be very active when joining them. This also appears in Lindblom’s thesis, *Norsk på Amerikansk – Amerikansk på Norsk. Et studie av Norskamerikanere i Minot, North Dakota, USA* (2004), where she found that many people were involved in volunteer work so that they had a place to go to and in this way would not have to stay home alone.

I will argue, based on my own fieldwork, that in the Norwegian American community this is very dependent on what kind of group is considered. As I have done

previously, I will also here use the Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage museum as empirical examples.

Who participates in the community

I will start with giving a short presentation of some of the people that I met during my fieldwork. Then I will link this up to the two groups of Norwegian Americans that I described earlier in the paper. This will also show the diversity of people who participate in the community and how they participate.

Laila Olsen Sharpe is originally from *Tromsø* – or to be precise an island outside of *Tromsø* called *Sandøya*. She and her family emigrated when she was just a little girl. They were, as many others, part of the post WWII wave. When she started school she could not speak a word of English, but it only took her about a month before she could speak English fluently. She told me that because she was not able to practice her Norwegian that much in Seattle, she had almost forgotten the language. Whenever she goes back to Norway, she starts to remember. However when she speaks Norwegian in Norway she still speaks the old dialect. People tell her “you sound like the old men who went to America and then came back”. Her kids do not speak Norwegian, but they do understand when people speak Norwegian to them. This is mainly because their *bestemor* did not speak English very well, and so it was often easier for her to speak Norwegian to them. They have, however, grown up immersed in the Norwegian heritage, and have, since they were born, taken part in the 17th of May celebration. First to honor their *bestemor* and then slowly it became a part of their identity. I mostly met Laila at the Nordic Heritage Museum and as a part of the Syttende Mai Committee, where she is the chair, but never at the Leif Erikson Lodge.

Haldis and *Knut Einarsen* were also “real” Norwegians. Knut was born in *Skarstad, Nordland* and Haldis was born in *Kjøpvik* also in *Nordland*. They emigrated from Norway to Seattle in 1948, and they both still speak a little Norwegian. Despite this they spoke English to each other, and also between themselves. Just as with Laila, their Norwegian dialect had not changed since they left Norway, so they still spoke the “old” North Norwegian dialect. Before they emigrated from Norway they both

were very active in the Norwegian resistance during WWII and they eventually had to flee to Sweden. They emigrated to the U.S after a short stay back in Norway after the war was over. Knut helped to build the Sons of Norway Leif Erikson Lodge and both he and Haldis have been active members of Sons of Norway for over 50 years, helping out with different events. Despite their age, they still are active members and I often met them at different events at the Leif Erikson Lodge.. And I also often met them when I visited the *Kaffe Stue* and other Sons of Norway events (Chambers, 2011, and my field notes).

Julie Svendsen is the director of the Norwegian Ladies Chorus. Her grandparents came from Norway, but both she and her parents were born in the U.S. She spent one year in Norway at *Hardanger Folkehøgskule* and she has been back a couple of times since then. She knew a little Norwegian through her parents, though her mother never learned to speak “real” Norwegian. When her father was a young boy he spoke only Norwegian, and it was not until he started school that he learned English. After Julie spent a year in Norway she took Norwegian at the University of Washington in Seattle. She is an active member in the Norwegian American Community, not just with Sons of Norway but with other events as well. The youngest of her daughters, Kari, is also an active member of the Norwegian American community, but not as much as Julie.

Kari Schmidt is Julie’s daughter. She is of half Norwegian descent and half German descent, but she has most contact with the Norwegian heritage. This is how it has been since she was born, and she is very interested in her Norwegian heritage. She has also been to Norway several times. She spent one year at *Voss folkehøgskule*, and speaks a little Norwegian. Kari is one of the youngest members that I met at Sons of Norway, where she was the youth director, and I met her a couple of times at the Lodge, helping out in different events. She also worked in the Scandinavian Specialty Store and is in general very active in the Norwegian American community.

Randi Jacobs was just a little girl when her parents decided they would emigrate from Norway to the U.S. I met Randi when I sang with the Norwegian Ladies Chorus. She was born in Oslo, but her family was originally from the North of Norway. In addition to singing with the NLC she is a member of Sons of Norway. She was, however, a

relatively new member - she had only just been a member of SoN for three years when I met her. Even though she was born in Norway Randi had never been too active in any Norwegian American communities before this, and she wanted to learn more about her heritage and learn more Norwegian by being more active in the community.

The people that I have presented here are just a few of many people that participate in the groups that I have focused on in my fieldwork, but they represent the greater part of the people, both in age and in generation. As Curtis et al. (Curtis et al., 1992) stated, people in the middle-aged category would be more inclined to be members in many groups, but only participate at some of them. People in the elderly category would be members in fewer groups, but participate more in these groups. I will, however, note that there is a difference between the real immigrants and the people in the later generations. There is also a difference in how long the “real” Norwegians have been in the U.S and what age they were when they came. People like Haldis and Knut for instance, who were in their twenties when they emigrated to America, will have another view on their ethnic belonging than for example Kari, who is a fourth generation Norwegian. Laila and Randi could be defined as Norwegians since they both were born in Norway, but they both define themselves as Americans. I will argue that this is because they have both lived in America longer than they have lived in Norway and have stronger ties to the American customs than the Norwegian customs. Nonetheless, both of them have strong ties to Norway and are active in the Norwegian American community, but in different ways. Julie and Kari are third and fourth generation, which Herbert Gans (1979) described as having more of a symbolic ethnicity. They have both spent a year at *folkehøgskole* and they both speak Norwegian to some extent, still they both define themselves as Americans and not Norwegians. Knut and Haldis are the only ones who I will argue fit perfectly in the Norwegian American group, and the rest I will argue could be defined as American Norwegian.

The age category that I will describe as middle aged is highly representative both in the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Norwegian Commercial Club. This could be explained with the findings of Curtis et al. (1992), where the middle aged group (aged 46-59) is highly represented but not so active, and the elderly generation have fewer

memberships but are active in all of them. Kari falls in under the category where other events take up more time in life, and she has to prioritize other things. Age, however, is an important variable when studying who is active in the community.

Age; an important variable

Both the Sons of Norway and Norwegian Ladies Chorus had trouble recruiting young people. Curtis et al. (1992) found the same results in their studies. They explained that the middle aged respondents in their research felt they had little time on their hands and were more inclined to join many voluntary groups, but not be as active in them as the people in the 60 or older category. In my research both Randi and Laila stated that they thought it was too bad that there were not that many young people joining, but that they understood that they had much to do between work and kids and their personal life. Randi, Laila, and Julie, are however in the middle aged category, and have chosen to spend time working with the Norwegian American groups. This could be explained by the fact that they all have grown children, and so the time they would have spent earlier on their kids' activities they can now spend on other things. It should, however, be noticed that many chose to spend time on these kinds of groups even when their kids were little, but perhaps not as much time as they can now.

In the Norwegian Commercial Club it is slightly different than the rest of the groups. I argue that since there is so much to gain by joining and being active in the NCC, people of all age categories are more likely to be active. The reason why we find so many of the younger generation here is because of the unique business network that one gains when joining the club, and not only the social network. In addition, joining the Norwegian Ladies Chorus requires that you like singing and that there is an interest in Norwegian music, also, there is a requirement that you take the time to join concerts and other events. When working as a volunteer at the Nordic Heritage Museum it requires that you do just that, work as a volunteer. At the Norwegian Commercial Club one can potentially just show up and eat dinner. I will however state that many of the members in the club have joined different subgroups and there is an expectation that you do your share of the work. Dan Nye, one of the members of the club, explains that "everyone needs a job, and everyone needs a network, and we

take good care of each other” (from the interview with Daniel Nye). But why is the network that one gets in the Norwegian Commercial Club so much more valuable than the one from the Norwegian Ladies Chorus or the Nordic Heritage Museum? I will again argue that it is because of the age of the members in the club, and what you can gain from joining.

The importance of family

Several of the third and fourth generation Norwegian Americans that I talked to gave their grandparents the honor for introducing them to their heritage. Many of those who participate in different events do it to honor their parents and their grandparents, and after a while it becomes their arena too. One Norwegian American I talked to said he did all this just so that he could spend time with his dad and grandmother, who both were very active at the Leif Ericson Lodge. He himself was not a member of the Sons of Norway but he was there for many of the events helping or participating, just because his father was there. Kari, as described before, was a member of Sons of Norway and involved in some of the work that they were doing. Although she had been to Norway several times, and even spent one year at *folkehøgskole* in Norway, she was involved in Sons of Norway mainly because her mother wanted her to and because she wanted to honor her Norwegian side of the family. Both of them, as many other young Americans, have other ethnic backgrounds as well, but many of them chose only to show their Norwegian heritage just because this has been the strongest influence in their lives. In many of the events that are taking place in the Norwegian American community, it is the grandparents who bring their grandchildren, and in this way introduce them to the community and the events that are happening there. Many young Norwegian Americans, and especially those whose parents or grandparents are involved in the community, have also been to Norwegian Children Camps during the summer, and are introduced to the milieu in that way as well.

There are two reasons that psychologist Maria P.P. Root (1992) identified as why a person with several ethnic heritages choose to identify with one group. This choice can often be made regardless of what ethnicity others ascribe them. The first reason is the influence from their grandparents. The second reason depends on how close the

relationship between the parent and the child is. I will also add here that for some of the Norwegian Americans their spouses will have been an influence when they chose to identify with the Norwegian American community. The American anthropologist Susan Emley Keefe (1992) writes that the family is the first ethnic group that you are incorporated into, and that it is the family and not the outside environment that have the most influence when you choose to be a part of an ethnic group. Many of the young Norwegian Americans that I talked to, had only one parent that was Norwegian American, and most of them stated that it was the Norwegian part of the family that had the strongest influences in their childhood. Waters (1990) found that when people have to choose between which heritage they want to identify with, over half chose their paternal heritage. However, I will argue that there are many other variables that influence that choice people make. The key argument for many is how involved their respective parents have been in their heritage, and also their access to information about their ancestors. The Norwegian American community in Seattle is very vibrant and to some extent more visible than many other European communities in the area. Because of this it is easier to get access to information about the community and also to join some events, but not get too much involved. Many of the older Norwegian Americans that I talked to, especially those who were second or third generation Norwegian Americans also stated that their parents and their ethnic background had a great significance for their involvement in the Norwegian American community.

Other young Norwegian Americans that I met only had a relationship with Norway through food and the Christmas dinner with typical Norwegian *kransekake*, *lutefisk* and *rømmegrøt*¹⁰. Though they had no knowledge about Norway they still were proud of being part Norwegian. I met Peter Runkel, a 28 year old; he was working at a grocery store around the corner from where I lived. We started talking because he recognized my name as Norwegian, and he told me that he was Norwegian on his mother's side. He was also part German American, part Native American and several others that he did not take into consideration, though he mostly considered himself American. He proudly showed me a tattoo on his arm with the Norwegian national coat of arms, as well as a castle where his family was from in Germany. The Norwegian national coat of arms was the only thing that he could show as a

¹⁰ These are the words used in the Norwegian American context. I never heard any translation from Norwegian to English of these words.

Norwegian American - that and the fact that they, in honoring his grandmother, used to eat *kransekake* for Christmas and other festive occasions. He also knew that his family came from Lena, Toten. He had never been there, but he planned to visit some day. He had, however, been to Germany on several occasions, and had some contact with his family in Germany. "It is easier to travel to Germany, you see, and cheaper", was the explanation he gave me. The family still had the German surname that pointed to the place their family was from in Germany. He did not, however, know the surname his Norwegian ancestors had when they came to the U.S.

Waters (1990) noticed that while Americans trace their ancestors on both sides of the family, they often chose to use the surname from the paternal side of the family. Often, with American traditions, the woman takes her husband's name when they marry. The surname of the family has a great influence when choosing an ethnicity and knowledge about the family history. It is especially significant when recognizing others ethnic ancestry (ibid.). Walking downtown in Ballard there is a great chance that one will meet others like Peter. They are of Norwegian heritage, but it only comes to show on the 17th of May, or maybe for Christmas, and often they eat *kransekake* and some Norwegian Christmas cookies.

As mentioned earlier, there is an understanding in Sons of Norway that the younger generation does not have the time to get much involved in the organization. They think that it is sad, but they do understand. Laila Sharpe, the chair of the "*Syttende Mai Committee*" in Ballard said that she got involved in the whole thing when she was young to honor her mother. Now she thinks that her kids are involved with it all just to honor her. Laila works at the Seattle Pacific University and her kids also attended there. Her eldest daughter was involved in starting the Nordic Club at the Seattle Pacific University, and all of her kids have been involved in this club when attending University. She likes the thought of her kids being involved in the Norwegian community to honor her, but she does not know if the next generation is ready for all the work that lies ahead. She has faith that they will continue the love and continue the tradition.

During the end of my fieldwork the Nordic Heritage Museum arranged an exhibit named "*Somebody's Grandma*", where a broad specter of Nordic Americans were

interviewed about their ties to their heritage, and many of those who were interviewed gave their grandparents the honor for them knowing about their heritage. As shown in this chapter there is a time period in people's life when they feel like there is not enough time. The Americans take great pride in their work, and many of them identify with work more than anything else. There are often other activities after work, or the kids take up most of the time when one is not working. When a person retires, or before he or she starts working there is more time to spend on thinking about the roots, and this is why many felt like they can thank their grandparents for teaching them about their heritage, and not their parents. Often, as the grandparents are closer to the immigrant relative, they also have more knowledge about their heritage.

Language

Language is often one of the first things that disappear between generations within the ethnic family, but also one of the things that link the families closer together. The third and later generations especially have little or no knowledge about their ancestral language. Many remember small words or phrases that their family members spoke, like their grandparents, an uncle or an aunt of their parents (Waters, 1990). However, as noted in the introduction, in 1990 nearly 30 million people reported that they spoke a language other than English at home. More than half of these had Spanish as their other language in addition to English (Eriksen, 2010). I will therefore argue that most of these are immigrants who came after the major European immigrant waves at the turn of the 20th century, and many of them are not of North European descent, but from Latin America or Asia. Many of Mary Waters' informants remembered being able to understand the language when they were young, but they could not speak it. And she argues "rather than functioning as a link between themselves and co-ethnics, the ethnic language was experienced as a private affair-spoken with grandparents and parents only in the home (Waters, 1990:116)". Rather than being a link between fellow ethnics the ancestral language became more a link to the past, and a secret language which they only shared with their parents or grandparents at home (ibid.).

Many of the Norwegian Americans that I met had the same experience with the

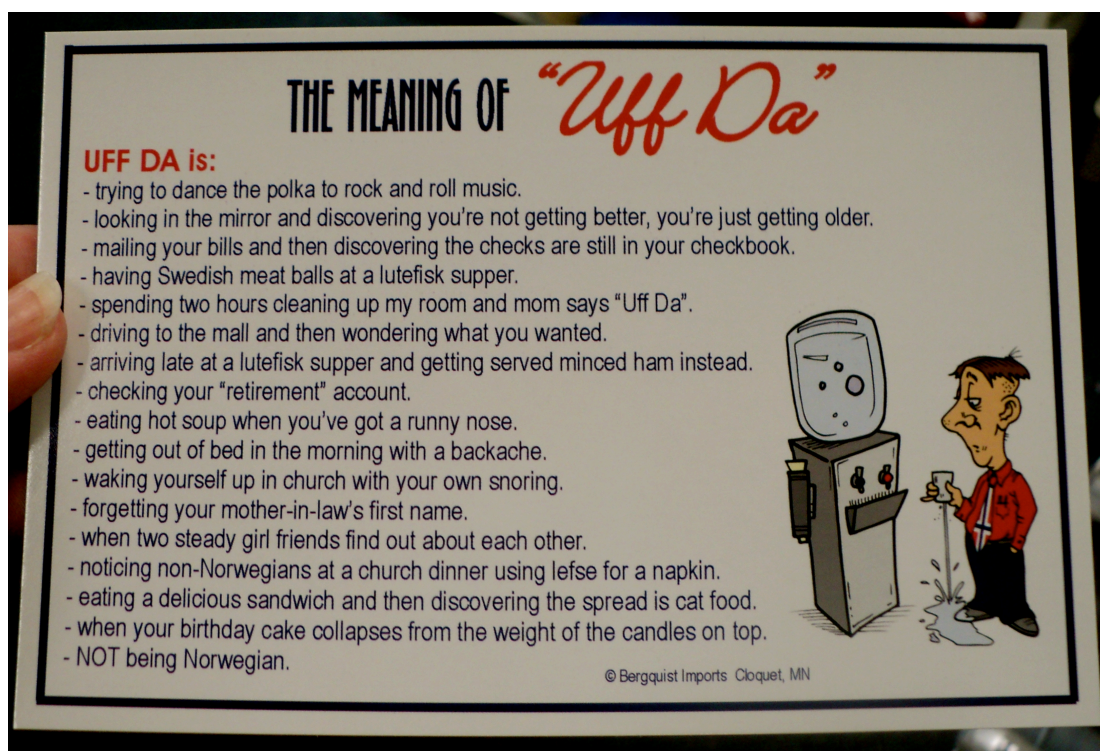
Norwegian language. One of the third generation Norwegian Americans remembered thinking about Norwegian as a secret language that his parents and his grandparents shared. They would often turn to Norwegian when they were talking about something they did not want him and his siblings to know about. Others learned Norwegian at a children's camp but forgot about it after a while. However, both the University of Washington and the Nordic Heritage Museum are offering Norwegian language classes, and they are very popular. Professor Marcus L. Hansen, a Norwegian-descended historian came up with what is later known as "Hansen's Law" where he stated "[t]he theory is derived from the almost universal phenomenon that what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember" (Hansen, 1938:206). He continues, saying that the third generation has nothing to loose from focusing on the past. They are American born and are well assimilated into the American society. The third generation is therefore seeking to regain the lost culture of their immigrant grandparents and learning the language was cited as part of that (Hansen, 1938, Waters, 1990). Although many scholars¹¹ have questioned the validity of this 'law', using the American Jews as the core argument for disproving Hansen's argument. I will not discuss whether or not 'Hansen's Law' is valid, however, in this particular example it is evident that language is something that the second immigrants chose not to pass on to the next generations.

As shown earlier in this chapter, many of the people who participate in the Norwegian American community did not speak Norwegian in their daily life. For the people who have lived most of their life in the United States it will gradually become more and more natural for them to speak English, also between themselves. One thing that I noticed especially, when talking to the Norwegian Americans who had learned the language from their parents, was that there was no influence from the "modern" Norwegian language. It was still the old dialect from the place their ancestors came from. As Laila Sharpe said "you sound like the old men who went to America and then came back" or another man I talked to who said that whenever he was in Norway he would get comments about how old his dialect sounded when he was talking. There are, however, also some third and fourth generations that for some reason speak

¹¹ See for example Margaret Mead: *And Keep Your Powder Dry, an Anthropologist Looks on America* (1943); John Higham: "Social Discrimination Against the Jews in America 1830-1930" (1957); and John J. Appel: "Hansen's Third-Generation "Law" and the Origins of the American Jewish Historical Society" (1961).

Norwegian in a very good way. As mentioned earlier, also in this chapter, Julie Svendsen had spent a year in Norway at *folkehøgskole*. Her daughter Kari had done the same, as well as some other of Julie's friends. I attended a dinner party with some of the ladies in the chorus, and among them Julie. Some of the ladies and I spent the last part of the evening speaking Norwegian. They all had different reasons for speaking Norwegian, but attending *folkehøgskole* in Norway was one of the main reasons.

Another revealing thing was the small words and phrases that the Norwegian Americans used, some on purpose, others not. A good example of this is "Uff da". The expression comes from the Norwegian *Uff* or *Huff*, which is an expression, used in negative terms. The expression *Uff da* is often used in the Norwegian language when hearing about some thing bad that has happened to others (Kunnskapsforlaget). Within the Norwegian American community in general, and with this, also in Seattle, the term *Uff Da* has almost become a description of the Norwegian Americans. In the gift shop at the Nordic Heritage Museum they sell post cards with the title "The meaning of *Uff Da*", and then a list of incidents are printed when people are likely to say *uff da*:



a postcard with "the meaning of 'Uff Da'" and a description of what Uff Da is.

Many of the incidents listed on the postcard are self-ironic, and focuses on how doing things in a non-Norwegian way are *Uff Da*. This is how the Norwegian Americans also sees the term *Uff Da*. Several asked me if it really was an expression in Norway as well, and when I started working at the gift shop I was shown a list of potential meanings in Norwegian, translated back to English. This expression has in the later years been associated with the Norwegian American community, and even the 17th of May parade in Wanamingo, Minnesota is known as the *Uffda* parade (Lovoll, 2000). Mary Waters (1990) argues that it should not be surprising that the language is lost to the later generations. The foreign language that the ancestors once spoke is often just maintained in bits and pieces, words and phrases that are treasured mainly because it reminds the Norwegian Americans of family memories and stories that have been told. Language has become a voluntary part of the ethnic identity, and not a crucial part of it (ibid.).

Genealogy and the ties to the “Old Country”

Many of the members of the Norwegian American community are very interested in genealogy and “finding their roots”. Both at the Leif Erikson Lodge and Swedish Cultural Center one can find genealogy classes, and in the library at the Leif Erikson Lodge there was a large section of *bygdeøker* where one could read about families back in Norway. In the gift shop in the Nordic Heritage Museum they sold cookbooks like “Authentic Norwegian Cooking”, which people could buy.

Several of the people who participated in the genealogy classes did it because they wanted to go to Norway and get to know their family there. And for many who went back to visit, this was their first trip to Norway. It is important for many Americans to know where their roots are from. As mentioned before, Americans often have an extended knowledge about not only the country, but also the city or village where each of their ancestors comes from. Often, especially when I was working in the gift shop at the Museum, people could tell me in detail where their grandparents came from in Norway. For the most part I had never heard of the village; they, however,

knew everything about it. They take pride in knowing as much as they can about the area where their family originates.

Family stories, family events, traditions of many kinds, some old, others constructed in recent times, show that there are many similarities in the perception of Norwegian-American descent. However, it is not the symbols, but the ethnic values that deserve to be passed on to American-born generations. The symbols become an expression that these good ethnic characteristics exist and are thus a great symbolic force. And of course, ethnicity needs not to be expressed publicly but might as well be kept for private without too much fuss around it. There is no doubt that for people who identify with the historical memories of a Norwegian-American presence ethnicity is an important defining element of their perception of who they are (Lovoll, 2000).

I will in the next chapter discuss what the good Norwegian values are, and what happens if some of what the Norwegian Americans view as the good Norwegian values and traditions are being challenge by American traditions.

6. The community built on the “good Scandinavian values”

In this chapter I will discuss the Norwegian values and what many Norwegian Americans associate with the Norwegian values. I will show how Norwegian immigrants adapted to the New Country, and especially during the Americanization movement at the end of the 19th, and the beginning of the 20th century. The questions that matter are how can a community be better than others just because it is built on “the good Norwegian values”? Are the values that Norwegian Americans see as truly Norwegian really Norwegian, or are they part of an image that is created about Norway? And what happens if the values are challenged? In the introduction to the thesis I stated that there was no room for historical considerations, however in this chapter a brief historical overview is necessary to understand how the values are created, and what they mean for the Norwegian Americans today. I will start by using historians April Schultz and Orm Øverland to highlight the first question on how the immigrants adapted to the new country, and to understand the need for creating this Norwegian ethnic identity. I will then go on to discuss what happens when the Norwegian values are being challenged.

Using the Norwegian values to be the best Americans

In many situations it can be observed how people romanticize their past so that they can create a respectable identity for themselves. Eriksen (2010) uses the example of how descendants of English immigrants in the U.S find nobility among their ancestors and highlight this, but at the same time hide the prostitutes and the criminals among their ancestors. The same can be said about the Viking culture, which I will discuss later in this chapter. For many the Vikings represent a proud heritage of brave men and woman, and egalitarian society. The more “shady” side of the old Norse culture – such as the raids, the raping and killing – are chosen not to focus on, but rather turned into something positive as brave explorers and a proud people.

The Norwegian Americans who came to the U.S were primarily younger sons or daughters of farmers and low-wage workers and were not wealthy. This is in the

Norwegian American community often highlighted as something heroic; the way many of them built themselves up from the ground. These strong ancestors are still highlighted as the Norwegian ideal, and the values that they are associated with are the values that the Norwegian Americans also want to be associated with. However, as I will show later in this chapter these values can be considered equal to the values from the Viking area in the Nordic countries and how they have influenced the Norwegian American thinking over the years.

The Americanization movement is traditionally defined as the process many immigrants had to go through in order to call themselves Americans¹². The notion is often talked about in connection to the Melting Pot concept, where the goal was that all cultural traditions from the Old Country had to be wiped out and the idea that there existed an American culture where everyone who came to the United States should fit in. The history of Americanization and nativism is long and complicated, and many immigrants experienced this more as being forced upon them, rather than as voluntarily. In the years between the Civil War and World War I the acceptance was divided between a temperate acceptance and direct hatred towards immigrants. Even though many Norwegian immigrants never did adapt completely to the American society they did, however, make some changes to ease the relationship to the English-speaking majority. An example of this was to adapt their surnames to the English-speaking. Surnames were often names of the farm or the areas the immigrants came from, and the name *Seim* became Sime, *Ris* became Reese and *Strøm* became Strum. Others just translated their surnames directly from Norwegian to English. Examples of this are how the Norwegian name *Bjørkehaugen* became Birchill and *Brarik* became Goodrich (Bryn, 1992, Lovoll, 1997:234, Schultz, 1994). The Americanization movement was, however, not the only way to include the immigrants in the American society. The other, as mentioned in chapter 2, was the pluralist or the salad bowl notion. This was, nonetheless, not as strong at the turn of the 20th century as it is today. I argue that this is one of the reasons why many of the descendants of the Norwegian immigrants who came at that time period do not speak Norwegian or have an extended knowledge about their Norwegian heritage.

¹² To day the notion Americanization is understood as the process a country go through in order to become more like the American society. The notion is however a problematic one, since it not based on serious research, but rather how people sees the American society from the outside BRYN, S. 1992. *Norske Amerika-bilete : om amerikanisering av norsk kultur*, Oslo, Det Norske Samlaget..

In order to see how the Norwegian Americans use the Norwegian values, we have to look at the history of the Norwegian Americans. When many of the immigrants first came to America the immigrant leaders, such as priests and other intellectuals, had a big impact in establishing this way of thinking. For them the past glory and excellence of the group was not separate from the present group. Whether you look at the private expressions or public speeches they all expressed that all European ethnic identities in the United States were in complete harmony with the American identity. “The greatest praise given by immigrant leaders of the excellence of Poles, Czechs, Finns or Norwegians as American ethnic groups was that they, each group individually, were the best Americans” (Øverland, 2005: 70).

Homemaking myths

The Norwegian professor of American literature and civilization Orm Øverland (2005) came across a rather “chauvinistic expression of ethnic pride” (ibid.:70) when working on a project of literary expressions among Norwegian immigrants: “Norwegians were, if not the best, then among the best people in the world because of their excellent qualities and proud history. The claim was also that these qualities made Norwegian Americans the best Americans” (Øverland, 2005:70-71). He also found that this was not a typical thing for the Norwegian Americans, other historians, looking at filiopietist texts from other ethnic groups, had found similar observations (ibid.). Historical events and persons are important tools to create an ethnic identity for the group. The feeling of community we get, as a result of ‘speaking the same language’, when talking about where we come from and how we got here is an important part of the ethnic identity (Blau, 1997). Orm Øverland refers to the “homemaking myths”, which are “the stories that a particular immigrant group had a special right to a home in the United States” (Øverland, 2005:71). There are three distinct groups of homemaking myths; ‘myths of foundation’, arguments like ‘we were here first’ belong under this category; ‘myths of sacrifice’ such as ‘we have given our blood for this country’; and the last one is ‘myths of a close ideological relationship’ – these are stories that demonstrate that a certain group were the “real” Americans from the beginning (Øverland, 2005:71). These stories, or homemaking myths were important for immigrants in the decades before and after the turn of the

19th century to argue that they had a special right to a home in the United States. The most common arguments used by all the ethnic groups are how they were the best Americans because of their early arrival, their sacrifices in the Civil War and the excellence of their traditions; all this based solely on their ethnic background (ibid.:72).

An example of this in the Norwegian American Community is the Nordic Viking Leif Erikson who, according to the saga, was the first European to ever travel to America around year 1000. There are several references to Leif Erikson in the Norwegian American community in Seattle, like Sons of Norway, Leif Erikson Lodge and the Statue of Leif Erikson down at Shilshole Marina in Ballard. I argue here, based on Øverland's notion of homemaking myths that Leif Erikson is under the first category – myths of foundation. There are also many stories about how Norwegian immigrants and Norwegian Americans distinguished themselves during the Civil War that were used as arguments in the second category of homemaking arguments¹³.

The Leif Ericson Statue

“He was tossed about a long time out at sea, and lighted upon lands of which before he had no expectation. There were fields of wild wheat, and the vine-tree in full growth. There were also the trees which were called maples; and they gathered of all this certain tokens; some trunks so large that they were used in house-building” (Anonymous, 1880).

The Leif Erikson Statue, down at Shilshole Marina, is a meeting place for people with heritage from all the five Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. The Viking Leif Erikson is considered by many as the symbol of the Nordic immigration to America, and according to the saga Leif Erikson, son of Erik the Red, was the first European to ever travel to America. He sailed from Norway around year 1000, and as the quote above suggests, he landed on unknown ground. He discovered a land with fields of wheat and vine-trees in full growth. He named it Vinland (Anonymous, 1880). The Archeologists believe that the area where Leif Erikson stayed after hitting a storm, is what today is known as L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern part of the island of Newfoundland, in the Canadian province of

¹³ See for example April Schultz *Ethnicity on Parade* (1994) chapter 1, and Odd Lovoll *The Promise of America : a History of the Norwegian-American people* (1997) chapter 5.

Newfoundland and Labrador (SNL). Ethnic groups were often characterized by their homeland's history, and this was often one of the conditions for being well received in the new country. The Viking Period became the ideal characteristic historical period because of the heroic ways of living. The Vikings were already considered as brave and with a good spirit, and these were qualities that already were respectable; to be connected with the Vikings helped a long way for the Norwegian immigrants. At the end of the 19th century American historians started to divide between immigrants who arrived before and after 1776, the first ones being the "real Americans" and the latter ones not. With this statement the work on getting Leif Erikson accepted as the first European to arrive to America began. This would give the Norwegian, and the rest of the Nordic immigrants status as the first to historically arrive to America, and thus the status as "real Americans" (Lovoll, 1997).

October 9 is the Leif Erikson Day in the U.S. However, the date was chosen not because of any event in the life of Leif Erikson, but because this is the day when the ship *Restauration* arrived in New York from Stavanger in 1825 (TimeDate, 2011). Rather than recognizing that Leif Erikson was the first to America, the day celebrates the anniversary of what is seen as the official start of the Norwegian immigration to the U.S.

There are many different statues of Leif Erickson in the U.S. The statue which is located at the Shilshole Marina was a gift from the Leif Erikson League for the 1962 World Fair (Leander, 2005). Standing around the statue, there are thirteen rune stones with 1, 767 names on them, every one of them Nordic immigrants. Their years of immigration range from 1844 to 2004. The majority came to the Northwest and most of the names listed are Norwegian-born, with smaller groups of Danes, Finns, Icelanders and Swedes (Leander, 2008a).

The statue as a symbol on Norwegian values

In addition to being a symbol of the Vikings and the Old Norse traditions, the statue of Leif Erikson also represent the Nordic values that the Nordic Americans are very proud of. In a promotion movie for the new Nordic Heritage Museum, the Museum Planner Ralph Appelbaum said

“One of the amazing things about the Scandinavian culture is that it brings with it an amazing sensitivity to being socially responsible, to caring and thinking about human rights, to thinking about good government, to thinking about the environment, to thinking about expanding the role of women” (Ralph Appelbaum in NordicMuseum, 2009: 2.41-3.00).

The “good Scandinavian values” that the Norwegian Americans often referred to in different settings, derive from the Old Viking traditions where egalitarian society and collective thinking became a way to survive. The Vikings who settled on Iceland founded one of the first democratic assemblies, the *Althing*, in 930. They had an egalitarian society where men and women were equal in the household, and also on ships when they were at sea, the egalitarian thinking ruled. If they could not work together, nothing would happen (Robinowitz and Carr, 2001). The Scandinavian people have carried these values with them since the Viking area. These were also the values that the immigrants took with them to America; “an attitude of individual integrity combined with willingness to work for a common goal” (ibid.:6). At the time when the waves of emigration began, the Norwegian society could be characterized as a farmer’s society. The majority of the people lived in the countryside working on farms or in the fishing industry, and the differences between the upper class and the working class was big (Lovoll, 1997). The values as hard working and honest are also something that the Nordics have brought with them from their old countries. Many employers both in the fishing industry and the logging industry favored Norwegians and other Nordics because of their reputation (Kennedy, [1964] 2008). In addition to these more or less traditional values, in the later years the Norwegian values have been supplemented by more “modern” values. The Norwegian focus on peace processes – through the Nobel Peace Prize and the Oslo agreement, and the focus on environmental issues and climate changes are internationally recognized as being part of the Norwegian values. As the quote from Mr. Appelbaum states, these values are recognized within the Norwegian American community as well as the old Norwegian values.

Leif Erikson as a key symbol

The Leif Erikson statue could be viewed as a key symbol (Ortner, 2002) in the Norwegian American community. These could be seen in relation to what David Schneider calls 'core symbols' in his study of American kinship and Victor Turner calls 'dominant symbols' in his study of Ndembu ritual and Sherry B. Ortner calls 'key symbols' in her study of Sherpa social relations (ibid.:159). In order to be considered a key symbol, it would have to be signaled by more than one indicator

- “(1) The natives tell us that X is culturally important
- (2) The natives seem positively or negatively aroused about X, rather than indifferent
- (3) X comes up in many different contexts. These contexts may be behavioral or systemic: X comes up in many different kinds of action situation or conversation, or X comes up in many different symbolic domains (myth, ritual, art, formal rhetoric etc.)
- (4) There is greater cultural elaboration surrounding X, e.g., elaboration of vocabulary, or elaboration of details of X's nature, compared with similar phenomena in the culture
- (5) There are greater cultural restrictions surrounding X, either in sheer number of rules, or severity of sanctions regarding its misuse” (Ortner, 2002:160).

The narrative about Leif Erikson and what he represents for the Norwegian American community fits into at least three of the five indicators. There are numerous statues of Leif Erikson around the U.S, representing the Viking culture, and the Nordic immigration to America. This could be an indicator of the fact that Leif Erikson and the statue of him is something that is considered culturally important. People in the U.S are taught from a young age that it was Christopher Columbus who discovered America. The Norwegian Americans' narrative about Leif Erikson discovering America about 400 years before Columbus help to create a sort of boundary between the Norwegian Americans and the people who do not know. Leif Erikson can be seen as culturally important in the way that it gave the Norwegians a good reputation and rights as one of the first immigrants. The work to get Leif Erikson accepted as the first to discover America started already in the 19th century, and in this way gives the Nordic Americans the right to consider themselves “Americans” at the same level as the English settlers and the other pioneers from the first colonies in America (Lovoll, 1997). This is consistent with indicator 4., though there to my knowledge is no characteristic vocabulary connected to Leif Erikson; there are many references to him

as the explorer and his nature. References to Leif Erikson and the Viking area exist in many settings in the Norwegian American community. Sons of Norway Leif Erikson Lodge, the statue of Leif Erikson at Shilshole Marina, a replica of the head of Leif Erikson statue in front of Leif Erikson Lodge and the Viking days at the Nordic Heritage Museum, are all part of maintaining the historic aspects of the Nordic emigration. In addition, many dress up like Vikings or Leif Erikson in the 17th of May parade, and the names Leif and Eric are popular names. This shows that Leif Erikson as a symbol often comes up in many different contexts, both in myth, art and education. However, there are to my knowledge no cultural restrictions or rules regarding Leif Erikson. I will nevertheless notice that many Norwegian Americans are rather indifferent about Leif Erikson. These are also the people who do not participate in the community, and that the symbolism of Leif Erikson is often only used by the people who participate in the Norwegian American community.

Ortner (2002) defines two types of key symbols: “summarizing” and “elaborating” (ibid.:161). She stresses that there is a continuum between the two symbols, but that there also exist ideal types in both ends. Elaborating symbols are the more analytical of the two. They function as a tool to help people break down and “sort out” a complex existence. In this sense a person can communicate the idea of the symbol more effectively. She continues saying that symbols can have elaborating influence in two ways. The first is that they are valued as a source of categories to form a concept to the order of the world. On the other hand they can help to imply mechanisms for successful social action. Ortner adds that these two types of elaborating symbols can help a culture to “provide for its members ‘orientations’, i.e., cognitive and affective categories; and ‘strategies,’ i.e., programs for orderly social action in relation to culturally defined goals” (Ortner, 2002:161). Summarizing symbols combine a number of symbols into one symbol or sign. Ortner uses the American flag as an example. How the flag for many Americans stands for “the American Way” and the ideas of democracy, freedom and hard work – all at once. It stands for the system as a whole (Ortner, 2002). I argue that Leif Erikson can be viewed as such a symbol with a dual meaning. First he represents the first Scandinavian to ever go to America, and from this the “natural” right for Norwegian Americans to settle in America arose. Second, Leif Erikson represents the Norwegian values, or the Viking values that

everyone can agree on as good and honorable values: hard working, braveness and full of spirit.

Identity has often a clear manifestation in the form of a wide use of symbols. Within all religious and secular communities, institutions and organizations there exist multiple symbols with different meanings (Biedermann, 1992). Symbolic thinking is one of the most fundamental functions of human consciousness and constitutes the basis of language, religion, myth, science and art (Mach, 1993). The theories from the school of symbolic anthropology assume that culture does not exist beyond individuals. Rather, the culture lies within the individual's interpretations of things around them. People shape the patterns of their behavior and give meaning to their experiences with a reference to socially established signs and symbols (Warms and McGee, 2000). Accordingly, this is how people give meaning to their reality by expressing their reality through cultural symbols.

With the focus on values there also follow some norms on how to behave within different contexts. The question will then be, what happens if the norms and values are being tested? One of the major events in the Norwegian American community, and one event that both the two groups of Norwegian Americans can agree on is the 17th of May, or the Norwegian Constitution day, which is known as *Syttende Mai*. This is the day where "everyone is a Norwegian American". There are some strict rules about what is and is not allowed in the Syttende Mai parade, and the debate is about how similar to the Norwegian celebration this should be.

Military in the Syttende Mai parade

17th of May in the Norwegian American community in Seattle may be one of the most important celebrations of the Norwegian heritage there is. Just the Syttende Mai itself is considered the third biggest in the world, behind Oslo and Bergen in Norway. It is something that the people in the community are very proud of. There are Norwegian Americans from all over the U.S. and some parts of southwestern Canada who join the celebration in Seattle, making it bigger every year. This day is the one day in the

year when most people claim Norwegian heritage and want to be a part of the Norwegian American community.

The general public does not know why there is a parade in Ballard on the 17th of May; they just know it is happening. The Syttende Mai Committee always invite local Ballard elementary schools to march in the parade with them, often they don't know what the day is about. Laila Sharpe, the chair of the Syttende Mai Committee, told me

some of the local schools sign up to be in the parade, and they don't really know what it is all about, so they will dress up like trolls or whatever, even though it had nothing to do with *17. mai*, they just think it is Norwegian. But at least you know they are identifying with it, they have their own take on it, and they are having fun, so we say it is ok for them to join (interview with Laila Sharpe, chair of the Syttende Mai Committee)

Sometimes they are lucky and one of the teachers knows what the day is about. The big thing the year I was there was the Vikings and single-wheeled cycles. In Seattle the whole concept of 17th of May is known as *Syttende Mai*. This of course reflects one of the old Norwegian dialects, and refers to the date May 17. However, this could be a problem for many who do not know the concept and the history behind it, and who do not understand Norwegian. At one of the dinners I attended arranged by Sons of Norway a man stated loudly “this year, Syttende Mai will be held at the 17th of May”. Many people laughed, including me. I learned later that there had been a discussion to arrange the parade and the celebration on May 16, since that was a Sunday, and May 17 was on a Monday this year. In that way more people would have the opportunity to participate, and they did not have to take the day off from work. The Syttende Mai Committee did not, however, take the debate seriously, and the celebration was held on May 17. This shows how even within the community not everyone knew the history of May 17, and this could lead to some misunderstandings regarding the celebration and the day itself.

Because 17th of May is such an extensive day and could just as easily have been a master thesis in itself, I decided not to focus on the day itself in this thesis. There was, however, one controversial element in the parade this year that made people react. One of the last elements in the parade this year was the military and several military

vehicles. According to the The official Homepage of the United States Army the soldiers drove an: “Army-branded Humvee, a Heavy, Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck carrying a combat engineer bridging boat, and a Small Emplacement Excavator, a specially-adapted truck that incorporates a backhoe, bucket loader and other specialized engineer equipment” (Bigelow, 2010). Earlier in the parade both the police and the fire department were present, still it was the military vehicles that caused many reactions. In Norway the constitution day represents the Norwegian independence from Denmark, and the creation of the constitution. The celebration of the day differs from many other constitution- or national days with the absence of military, a part from the Royal Guard and occasionally some military marching bands. For many in the Norwegian American community *Syttende Mai* is generally about celebrating the rich Norwegian heritage, looking at the parade and spending time with the family, not many know about the historical concept with the day. The *Syttende Mai* celebration is associated with the Norwegian children’s parade and the Norwegian children in bunads waving Norwegian flags. In these parades, the military is not present.



Military vehicles in the Syttende Mai parade, driving down 24th Ave NE in Ballard.

In addition, this example shows how the members of the Norwegian-American community split in two during this discussion. On the one hand there are those who strongly react to this. For the most part these were people who were born in Norway and came to the U.S in their youth, or it was members of my second group of Norwegian Americans. They knew how the celebration in Norway was arranged and they also used the Norwegian history as an argument for why there should be no military in the celebration. On the other hand there were those who did not object to this. Laila Sharpe, the chair of the Syttende Mai Committee, argued that this is not in Norway: “it all comes down to, we are Americans in America and Norwegians in America – we are not in Norway so we can’t do it entirely like Norway”. She did, however, understand why people got so upset, but at the same time it is a compromise, and the military is usually present at many parades all over.

April Schultz (1994) writes that “celebrations and public events are significant sites where meaning is reaffirmed and/or constructed” (ibid.:19), and when the military entered the 17th of May parade the whole meaning of the 17th of May parade was challenged. Though one can argue that the 17th of May parades in the U.S have become more and more a community festival that has little to do with “the end of the 400 year night” (*slutten på 400års natten*) as Hernirk Wergeland described the Danish period of Norwegian history (Lovoll, 2000). Examples of this are in Wanamingo, Minnesota, where the 17th of May parade is renamed "Uffda parade". *Uffda*, as mentioned before, is one of the ethnic slogans used in all conditions and occasions and is for most people synonymous with the Norwegian American culture. Another example is in Spring Grove, also in Minnesota, where the 17th of May celebration lasts for several days, in the best American small-town tradition. This is mostly to draw shoppers to the town, and it is a marketing of ethnicity amid the celebrating, if you will. Women in Sons of Norway-suits and Norwegian flags disappear compared to the fire trucks, local high school marching band, gymnastics associations and local organizations without a Norwegian association involved (Lovoll, 2000).

Eric Hobsbawm (1983) writes that people invent traditions that make ritualized connections to the past, and promote group identity and solidarity by including ‘appropriate’ values and behavior. Ethnic festivals with all the symbolism, such as

17th of May are part of common American culture patterns. One can argue that there exists a kind of ‘mainstreaming’ in these Norwegian cultural symbols, and not just the 17th of May celebration. Also in the rose painting arts, in the annual competitions organized by the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, it is not rare that it is the Japanese who takes the first prize, and not the Norwegian Americans (Lovoll, 2000). Lovoll (1999) suggests that it is not unreasonable to assume that in many Norwegian American areas the 17th of May celebration can be included in the range of other feasts in the U.S, perhaps in the same way as the Irish St. Patrick’s Day. The celebration includes everyone, regardless of national origin: on St. Patrick’s Day everyone is Irish. The same can be argued about the 17th of May celebration in Ballard, though it originally was a celebration for the ones with ethnic belonging to Norway, it has over the years become a Ballard festival; a festival in the local neighborhood of Ballard with strong ties to Norway.

The Norwegian values in the American society

In the struggle to be accepted in the New Country, the Norwegian immigrants used the Norwegian values to become the best Americans (Øverland, 2005). There could be many reasons for this rather strong expression of ethnic pride. Because the Norwegian values were considered somewhat better than other nationalities' values, the Norwegians would become the best Americans. Nonetheless, if one takes into consideration the time when this expression was made it can be clear that it was important to emphasize the necessity to express the wish of being the best Americans. At the end of the 19th century a focus emerged on who had the rights to be Americans, and who could be seen as just immigrants, and at the same time this was the start of the Americanization process. It became necessary for the Norwegian immigrants to express the wish to become Americans, but at the same time prove that they were rightful settlers in America, and to create a homemaking myth that would give them the proof of this (Lovoll, 1997, Øverland, 2005). The old Viking values of a brave, hard working and egalitarian society became the core in the early arguments of ethnicity. It was never really about showing that Norway was the best, but showing instead that the values could be used for something good.

Most of the third and fourth generation Norwegian Americans do not consider themselves to be Norwegian, but American with a proud Norwegian heritage. It could often be the excuse however if someone became really mad or stubborn others would say “it is the Norwegian in you” or “it is because you have Norwegian blood in you”, referring to the Norwegian tradition of hard working stubborn people. Many of the rather “modern” Norwegian – or Scandinavian – values, as those Ralph Appelbaum (NordicMuseum, 2009) mentioned in the promotion video build upon the old Norse values. The Norwegians today are known for being a peaceful nation and an egalitarian society. As Herbert Gans (1979) noted in his article about symbolic ethnicity, the need for a more explicit expression of ethnicity becomes more important the farther away from the original immigrant the generations are. For the Norwegian immigrants, the values were something that already was within them, and it was not something they had to learn. As noted by Tocqueville already in 1835, the American society is often characterized by a strong sense of individualism and the realization of the individual person. This view has been confirmed by many social scientists over the years, and this is often why many Americans feel the need to join a community, to feel the presence of a supporting group around them, and to get conformity for the choices they have made as individuals (Waters, 1990).

Creating an identity in an American context

It is important to have in mind that the discussion is about a certain community’s position in the American society – everything else will be secondary to their integration strategy. The community seeks to be accepted and to assert itself among other nationalities. Norwegian American identity and ethnicity have to be regarded in an American context, where Norway’s tendency towards modernization will not be considered when reviewing the Norwegian American culture. A Norwegian culture developed in a mono ethnic national state, and a Norwegian American culture developed in a multicultural society with competitive nationalities, has to be understood in context as two different and independent historical processes (Lovoll, 2000).

The situation described earlier in the chapter, when military vehicles appeared, as some of the last elements in the Syttende Mai parade, could be a good way of seeing what happens when norms and values are being challenged, or the expectations of the norms are challenged. I argue that the difference in opinion to what the 17th of May celebration should be lies in the knowledge about Norwegian history, but also in the expectation to what the day is all about.

It is important to notice that the parade has gradually been transformed from a Norwegian parade to be a mix between a Norwegian and an American parade. The first part of the parade is always dedicated to Norwegian traditions. Some time before the big day, the Syttende Mai Committee advertised for Norwegian girls with *bunads* who could walk in the front of the parade carrying Norwegian Flags. Then the grand marshal, the guests of honor, the Syttende Mai Committee, and the groups with obvious connections to Norway would follow. Gradually the authentic connection to Norway would fade and other elements would be present, and this is where the core of the disagreement lies, as I see it. On the one hand there is an expectation from the Norwegian Americans that this is an ethnic parade and should then follow the norms of the Norwegian way of celebrating the day. On the other hand, the parade gradually has become an American parade with a hint of Norway. Many of the people living in Ballard without Norwegian heritage, are also included, and consider it a Ballard festival. As noticed earlier in this chapter Norway is viewed as a country that promotes peace and diplomacy, and it is important to show this, among other things thorough the 17th of May parade. Norwegians are celebrating peace and freedom, and the absence of military is an important part of this, and it reflects the Norwegian society in many ways. However, as Lovoll (2000) argues, one has to take into consideration how the Norwegian culture in Norway has been developed through the years, and the degree of influence the American society as a whole has had on the Norwegian American thinking.

Richard Alba (1990) argues that only one of every six white Americans attends an ethnic festival of their heritage. Nonetheless, he later writes, thus agreeing with Waters (1990) and Lovoll (2000), most of the ethnic festivals in today's America include a variety of contradictory ethnicities, and with this attract audiences beyond the ethnic boundaries of the current group. Italian food at the German Oktoberfest,

and Swedish and American elements at the Syttende Mai parade are good examples of these contradictions, also statements like “on May 17, everybody in Ballard is Norwegian” or “on St. Patrick’s Day everyone is Irish” helps to expand the boundaries and create the impression that this day is for everyone who wants to join.

7. Summing up

Mary Waters writes in her Preface “ethnicity in America is an endlessly fascinating and constantly changing phenomenon” (Waters, 1990:xiii). Today many descendants of the European immigrants are well integrated in the American society, and have by sociologist Andrew Greeley been called “The Ethnic Miracle” (ibid.:3), because of the success and the mobility of these descendants. Despite what the politicians behind the Americanization movement and the theories of the American Melting Pot had hoped for, many of these Americans have not entirely given up on their ethnic heritage (Waters, 1990).

In this last chapter of the thesis I will tie up the loose ends between the theory that I presented in chapter 2, and my ethnographic observations. Many of the Norwegian Americans state that their main reason for participating and being involved in the community is the need to be “special” or to belong somewhere. However, they do not consider themselves Norwegian, but rather Americans with a special bond to their ethnic heritage. The problem that I started this thesis with, stated that often when ethnicity is discussed in America the focus is primarily on race, i.e. the non-European groups versus the white population. The American society is in a special situation that cannot be compared to many other countries, and especially in Europe, where the white populations have their origin. As a relatively new country, the U.S does not have the same long history as many other countries, and it is hard to create an American culture that people can agree upon. In the book *Symbolizing America* (Varenne, 1986) the contributors try to show how there on some levels exist something that we can call an American culture, or as George and Louise Sindler (1986) calls it “an American dialogue” and they continue “[t]hough the dialogue is not the whole culture, it is both a representation and a determination of it. The dialogue is more than talk, for it influences behavior in countless situations and settings” (Sindler and Sindler, 1986:x).

Tocqueville noted already in the mid 19th hundreds that individuality was highly regarded in the American society. He argued that people go within them selves to create an identity, but need a confirmation from others after the identity has been

carefully created, and ethnic groups are a perfect way of getting this confirmation (Waters, 1990). Cultural anthropologist Hervé Varenne argues in the book *Symbolizing America* (1986), and especially through Beeman's (1986) contribution, that one of the most important things is the freedom of choice. Which Beeman argue is "close to being sacred for Americans" (ibid.:59). The focus on individual thinking in America is very strong and this is closely linked to the freedom of choice. Choice is often the basis of the formation of groups, and in the commercial America simply the fact that a person has purchased the same car, or boat gives them the opportunity to enter into a sort of imagined community. People with the same type of car honk at each other when they meet, people who have bought the same brand of food processor are able to get into a discussion about how best use it, and so on. Beeman continues saying "[o]ne could almost claim that people are what they choose in life – profession, household goods and all" (Beeman, 1986:59). What ethnicity in this sense can offer is a confirmation of some part of people's identity: the ethnic part of their identity.

As the generations move farther and farther away from the real immigrants the chance of people having more than one ethnic heritage will increase. Also, one has to take into consideration the effect on having mixed heritage and being in an intermarriage – married with someone with a ethnic heritage other than ones' own (Waters, 1990). Lieberman and Waters (1988) noted, "a homogeneous nuclear family, along with a homogeneous extended family, is more able and likely to pass on to offspring the ethnic feelings, identification, culture, and values that will help perpetuate the group" (ibid.:165). However, they later stress that there are of course other forces that also affect the ethnic identity, such as residential areas, peers and attitudes towards outsiders. In addition, Waters (1990) noticed that in her findings it was often the paternal side that the heritage the family often focused on. Surnames, and identity and ethnic belonging through that was important according to Waters (ibid.) Nevertheless, in my experience the strength of the ethnic group on the parents' side was a stronger variable than surnames. In Seattle, and particularly Ballard, the Norwegian American community was so strong, and visible that it could in many ways be easier to identify with that than another community. I argue that since Ballard and Seattle have the strong influence of other ethnic groups as well the numbers of intermarriages will potentially be higher than in other areas where the Norwegian influence areas are

larger. The interest of ones heritage would then potentially have to be divided between more ethnic groups, and this could lead to more ethnic groups to participate in, and less participation in every group. However, many of the Norwegian Americans I met, had more than one heritage, but often they chose to focus on the Norwegian heritage more than the other ethnic heritages. Several of the elderly generations had heritage from Sweden and Norway or Denmark and Norway, indicating that people often married within the Scandinavian group if they were not able to marry a Norwegian immigrant. The third and fourth generations more often had parents with heritage from outside Scandinavia or the Nordic countries. This indicates that as further away from the immigrants the generations are, the need to save ones heritage through marriage become less and less important, and that choosing which ethnicity to focus on will become more and more important.

Howard Stein and Robert Hill state that ethnic identity among white Americans can be categorized as a “dime store ethnicity” (Waters, 1990:6), that one can almost look at ethnicity as something that can be bought at the market place. That people can choose an ancestor to identify with and with this become a descendant of that particular ethnic group (ibid.). Many of the members of the three ethnic institutions that I describe in chapter 4 - the Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage Museum - are good examples of this. Although most of the members of these groups did have a Norwegian heritage, or in the case of Nordic Heritage Museum - a Nordic heritage, there were also some members who did not, but participated fully in these groups all the same. Many of these, nonetheless, were married to a Norwegian American and through this fully becoming members of the community.

Whenever talking about who could participate the Norwegian Americans always included those who “had a special interest in Norway” and not just the ones with a “real” Norwegian heritage. This can be connected to the ‘dime store’ analysis and argue that these people are the real shoppers of an ethnicity. They do not have the heritage they for some reason feel closest to, but they are fully members of groups in another ethnic group they do feel a connection to. Both in the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Norwegian Commercial Club they accepted members from outside the Norwegian American community. There has never been anyone who has not been

accepted in to these clubs, however, if they do not follow the norms within the groups they will not last long. These groups exist only because of the Norwegian American community, even though they include everyone. I argue that if the interest in Norway is not there, ‘outsiders’ will not wish to participate in these groups. This mutual trust between the members of these groups, that everyone has the same value and understanding of the norms within these social networks can be described as social capital (Putnam, 2001).

A hierarchy of identities

Eugeen Roosens (in Lovoll, 1999) states that there exists a hierarchy of a persons’ identity. A person often belongs to different social entities; a nation, a family, a profession, an ethnic group and a religious group, and these identities could easily be altered depending on the situation the person is in. A person could be first American, have Norwegian heritage, and be an engineer, then democrat and then Lutheran. In other situations it is the Lutheran identity a person needs to emphasize and in others the political identity (Lovoll, 1999:60). With the Norwegian Commercial Club’s strong ties to a variety of businesses, work and heritage can be considered to be more closely linked than in other ethnic groups. Here people show their work and their ethnic heritage at the same time, as a permit into NCC, and they will meet and connect based on this. Their religion and family status are secondary to the two others.

This is, I argue, one of the big differences between the two imaginary arenas of Norwegian Americans comes into play, or can be seen. The first, which I called, the arena, consists mostly of elderly people. These are the people who often have the time to spend at the Leif Erikson Lodge, and a lot have the time to maintain their ethnic heritage. For them the Norwegian heritage will for the most part be one of the two highest levels on the hierarchy. Most of the people that they interact with on a day-to-day basis are other Norwegian Americans, by spending time at the *Kaffe Stue*; The majority of them belong to the Lutheran church which is closely linked to the Norwegian American community; Many are, or have been fishermen, or other types of jobs that are closely linked to the maritime industry; Considering the age of many

of them are from the elderly generation and the generation who have the closest links to the immigrants, or actually are immigrants themselves.

The other, and this is also the arena that I focus the most on in my thesis I called the American Norwegian arena. These also care deeply about their Norwegian heritage, but they show it in another way, these also tend to be in a middle-aged category. They do not participate in the extent as the people in the Norwegian American arena. These will not always put their Norwegian heritage at the same high level as the people in the Norwegian American arena, but rather show it in another way.

Herbert Gans' (1979) theory about symbolic ethnicity can also help explain these differences. Although I stressed that the division was strictly based on my observations. Who, and in what way people participated in the community I argue later that the division has everything to do with age and that this is why the differences are so clear. Gans notes in his article "Symbolic ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and culture in America" (1979) that the further away the generations are from the original immigrants, the more different the expression of ethnic identity will become. However, I will also argue that one aspect of this is how old people were when they immigrated to America. Some of the people involved in Sons of Norway are immigrants themselves who arrived with the post World War II wave, as relatively grown up people. Several of these are active members of both SoN and other groups. Others then again, who came to the U.S later, and are of a younger age, I will put in the category of American Norwegians, if they participate in the community at all. I have in my thesis chose not to focus on the Norwegians who came 10-20 years ago to the U.S. These people often have different reasons for moving, such as work or education, and would often still consider themselves Norwegians. As Curtis et al. (1992) notice, people in the middle aged category tend to have memberships in many different voluntary organizations and tend to only participate to some extent. Whereas people in the category from the age of 60 and up often are members of fewer groups and tend to participate a great deal in the organizations where they are members. The theory from Curtis et al. (1992) also helps explain the difference in age in the arenas that I focus on in this thesis.

As noted earlier it is important to have in mind that the Norwegian American communities' development has to be regarded in an American context, and separate to the Norwegian development. Considering this, there is much of the Norwegian American culture that often can be experienced as different for real ethnic Norwegians. The way many Norwegian Americans use symbols such as the Viking era, the 17th of May - or Syttende Mai, views on food and language and what is considered as "typical Norwegian symbols" such as *bunad* and *sølje*, has to be understood as a way of preserving traditions that many never have experienced first hand.

The future of symbolic ethnicity and concluding remarks

In this thesis I have chosen to focus on the notion of symbolic ethnicity as in the way they have been presented by different sociologists, mainly Herbert Gans (1979), Mary Waters (1990), and Richard Alba (1990). In short, symbolic ethnicity is developed with the third generation ethnics and their distance to the immigrant generation. As Waters (1990) noticed ethnicity in America is continuously changing all the time, and the notion of ethnicity is changing with it. I find, based on my fieldwork that the theory about symbolic ethnicity, and with this the element of choice, and the dime store ethnicity describe the path that ethnicity among white Americans are taking. These are the group in USA who are integrated the most, and also being the first to establish colonies in the New Country historically. Because of this, the white Americans are often, from the outside, viewed as one group with insignificant differences within. For many, like Peter Runkel, this could be true, more and more white Americans describe themselves only as Americans, without any other ethnic belonging. However, there still exist a large group of people who also identify themselves with a second ethnic identity, such as Norwegian. It should be noticed that the people in this thesis, and also in the research that I have based my theoretical framework on, is mainly socially mobile, middle-class whites, and for them ethnicity can be fit into their social situation. At the same time ethnicity in the U.S. are still looked upon as almost primordial. Although many enjoy the choices themselves, they still ascribe identities to others, especially when they can be identified by skin color. A person with black skin who have some Irish ancestors will have to work harder than a person with white skin color to present himself as Irish (Waters, 1990). In this way

we see that it is often easier for the white population to enjoy the element of choice, than others.

I argue that symbolic ethnicity persists because it helps to deal with a need the white American population has for a sense of belonging to a community, without losing the individual's ability to choose (Waters, 1990). Ethnicity has over the years lost its practical everyday meaning, and has remained through the generations on a symbolic level. Symbolic ethnicity now works as a way to identify people "who otherwise are acculturated and assimilated into a different, predominantly urban, American culture and society" (Isajiw, 1993:4). Many of the white Americans have a need to belong somewhere and as many of my informants – and this is confirmed also by what Waters (1990) found – state that it is the need to feel special. And at the same time to give people a sense of who they are, and a history which the American society would not be able to give them. This kind of ethnic identification gives people a chance to choose when to express their ethnicity, and when not to express their ethnicity. I have used the Norwegian Commercial Club, the Norwegian Ladies Chorus and the Nordic Heritage Museum to show how the Norwegian Americans express their heritage through participation. As Herbert Gans (1979) and Wsevolod Isajiw (1993) noticed, ethnicity in its traditional form has lost its meaning within the white community in America. Of course there can now be talked about an American ethnicity since almost all of the people within the Norwegian American community are born and raised in the U.S and most of them consider themselves "Americans with a special interest in their Norwegian heritage". However, that is where the core argument in symbolic ethnicity lies, that the heritage they identify with is a symbolic ethnicity, it will not interfere with their day-to-day life, filled with other chores, but rather be a social aspect of a person's life that makes them special but at the same time belongs to a community that is giving them the confirmation the individual need.

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