Place, belonging and young adults in the Grorud Valley

This thesis is concerned with experiences of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2008) and the way young people strive for a change of situation through community work. The main research question revolves around personal efforts in re-defining one's neighbourhood, and the effects that this engagement have on individual life-choices, aspirations, identity, and possibilities for social mobility at the threshold of adulthood. Throughout the thesis, I analyse the interplay of structural constraints and agency, opportunities and the choices made, inspired by Barth's (1966) generative process analysis, which focuses on the ongoing flow of social life rather than fixed structural features.

The scene for the study is Furuset, a suburb in the eastern part of Oslo, where a majority of the inhabitants have minority background (mainly Pakistani, Turkish and Arab). The main method during thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork has been participant observation on different local arenas such as the youth club and the local sports club. In addition, I have conducted individual interviews and made maps of social networks in collaboration with people involved in formalized local activities. The group of informants include majority and minority Norwegians between the ages 18 to 35, young men and women with diverse future goals and aspirations.

The aim of the governmental initiative of the Grorud Valley Action Plan (2007-2016), and the area-based initiative at Furuset in particular, have been to improve local living conditions as well as to change the neighbourhood's external reputation as "deprived" in a socioeconomic sense. From the point of view of the local borough administration, the expected consequences of extensive youth work at Furuset during the same period of time have been prevention of criminal activity and of marginalization among local teenagers. Throughout the thesis I explore the unexpected and unintended consequences of this area-based initiative as a form of moral economy. I ask how enthusiastic young locals through their combination of voluntary work and wage labor are changing local conditions for social inclusion and dignity. Both this more collective and top-down governmentality (Foucault, 2009) and the more individual and ethical *working on the self* (Foucault, 1985) can be understood as part of social strategies

towards inclusion into and self-exclusion from different kinds of social groups and communities.

In the thesis, I argue that gendered differences in ambitions towards higher education in this local community can be related to *moral dualism* (Wilson, 1973), namely a *morality of reputation* among young men and a *morality of respectability* among young women. These moral logics can in turn be related to different strategies of coping collectively with territorial stigma and the individual stigma as an ethnic (and/or religious) minority person. The moral of reputation of the young men seems to enforce their identification as young *minority men from Furuset*, while their *female* friends tend to be less occupied with such a collective local identity. The result of this gendered moral dualism combined with different expectations from family members towards girls and boys could be that the young women get along better with their families and will end up as more successful students compared to their male friends of the same age. In the thesis I draw on Bateson theory of schismogenesis (1936) as a particular form of self-enforcing progressive change. I describe the external schismogenesis of territorial stigmatization in relation to identification processes of the young men, the internal schismogenetic over-specializing of "good girls" in relation to "bad boys", as well as the counter-forces correcting them.

In the thesis I have also drawn upon the typology of exit, voice and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970) when I describe how my informants strategically define themselves out of, try to speak up against, or stay loyal to collectives such as their own local community of youth, a community of Muslims, or for that matter, Norwegian society as such. Studies of young people of minority background in culturally and ethnically diverse urban areas often insist on cultural and social hybridity as essential traits of local peer groups and their particular youth culture (Back, 1996, Vestel, 2004). I argue that the cultural and social complexity of the eastern suburbs of Oslo also expresses itself through young people's continuous dichotomizing between "us" and "them" – between boys and girls, Muslim and non-Muslim, east side and west side, minority and majority and not the least between "good" and "bad" role models.