

# A School in the Forest

*From boys to men in a rural community in Hedmark, Norway*

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Dedicated to all the boys, men and women connected to the Forest School.



## **Abstract**

Why do young rural men chose to stay in their home county in district Norway in order to become forest workers? This thesis is a case study among 35 boys from the age 16 to 19, under education to become forestry workers at a forestry school nearby Finnskogen in Hedmark, Norway. The study was conducted through fieldwork at the vocational school, the school dormitory and the local forestry community, from May to July 2015. By studying livelihood and the social dynamics among boys and men living in a forestry community in a Norwegian district, this thesis seeks to explore the motives behind choosing a rural life and the way boys and men make rural life meaningful through male identity constructions.

By exploring socialization aspects within a forestry school and exploring concrete social situations and relations, such as relations with fellow students and teachers, events, and feedback from their environment I try to find out what produces the sense of identity as men, a sense of community, and a sense of difference from main Norwegian society.

Young rural men are frequently presented as “the new losers of today’s society” (Bye, 2010). The media discourse on rural men present *those who are not leaving home* as marginalized failures, because of what is considered to be their lack of opportunities to have an urban and modern lifestyle (Bye, 2010). Researchers that have studied district culture and its representation in Norway, have argued that young rural men living in the districts are highly stigmatized in Norway (Krange & Skogen, 2003). The thesis adds value by challenging the established idea of young rural men as passive actors who have little say in choosing their own destiny. By contrast, I found that many of my formants actively choose life in the rural community based on childhood dreams, prosperity and realization of the good life, and do not merely navigate their lives based on lack of opportunities.

This thesis is situated in visual cultural studies, rural and gender studies. The project builds on a qualitative study of a forestry community situated around a forestry school in eastern Norway. The data are collected through video observation, participant observation, and interviews conducted over three months among rural boys and men living in the area.



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## **1.0 Introduction: Background, motivation and representations of rural young men**

### **1.1 Entering the field: The first encounter with Kviståsen forestry school.**

I was working as a lecturer for the UN Association three years ago when I received a request from a school called Kviståsen to visit the school and lecture about international trade. Linda, the teacher who contacted me had moved to Flisa in Åsnes commune from Oslo, and she warned me that the students at the school could be a bit different from the students I normally lectured. During the preparations for my lecture, Linda warned me about the boys. At first, in a humoristic way, after a while in a more serious way. It was a class with only boys that sometimes could show a bit of a rough attitude, she said. However, she encouraged me to be aware that they were also nice boys although they could be a bit more “wild” than other pupils their age.

I had never heard about Kviståsen and Flisa before Linda contacted me. Linda told me it was a big class with almost 40 students, only boys. Most of them were students at the forestry class, but some of them studied environmental management, or landscape gardening. She also wrote that they were real district boys with a distinctive skepticism against everything from the city and also that they could be quite silent types.

Linda wrote that she was from Oslo, and described herself as a female with liberal values. In this environment, she had every odds against her, but it had gone surprisingly well, she said. Linda wrote that it felt like a privilege to have the opportunity to debunk myths about “forest people” and at the same time open these boys a bit more to the outside world. They needed it, she said.

It was after reading that mail that my interest started to bloom. I was nervous when I traveled to the school for the first time. Having an Iranian name and a foreign look, with Oslo dialect and being a female, were all elements that I thought could make the lecture difficult. after Linda’s warning I was quite curious about the environment and who these boys were.

I went to the school for the first time in May 2013. I took the train to Kongsvinger and then the buss to Flisa. At Flisa bus station, I was picked up by a teacher together with one of the students. We drove to a school in the middle of the forest. Outside of the school I saw a statue of a lumberjack, proudly standing in front of the school. Inside the school, I saw only male teachers and boys, they were all a bit quiet and reserved, and I sat together with the teachers while they were having lunch. On the walls around me were pictures of boys hunting, boys with weapons, as well as stuffed animals.

Linda came to pick me up, and I met the class I was going to lecture. We played something called “the trade game” and it all went very well, even though they started to argue and fight during the game. However, it was a good thing, because then we were able to discuss why trade and conflicts related to trade can lead to war between states. After my lecture, Linda drove me to the bus stop. While we were driving to the bus stop, we drove next to Finnskogen. Linda told me about the forest and the people traditionally living there.

## **1.2 Motivation behind choice of project**

I started Visual Cultural studies in 2014, and we were supposed to pick a theme for our master thesis. I started to think about the school and envisioned that my project would be about the boys that attended the school. I wanted to investigate a place very different from the places and social environments that I knew from Oslo and from my own youth experience and social background. I also thought about it as an interesting contrast to the traditional way of doing anthropology, where the anthropologist has often been a man, going from the Western world to study “exotic cultures” in faraway places, often with a particular white and male gaze (Behar and Gordon 1996). What would happen if a young woman from the city with Iranian origin went to the districts of Norway, in order to study a male culture she knew nothing about?

I made contact again with Linda, who seemed interested in my idea, and told me that she would discuss my idea with the headmaster. During fall 2014, I started to make contact with the headmaster. I went back to visit the school in January, and had a longer conversation with the headmaster. He was a bit skeptic in the beginning since he was afraid that it would be what he called “some kind of reality show”, in the sense that I would portray the boys in a stereotypical way that could make outsiders see them in a bad light.

## **1.3 Myths, prejudices and stereotypes and moving beyond them**

After the meeting with the headmaster, I started to think about myths and prejudices towards rural boys. First, I thought about Linda’s experience and her idea that her presence at the school was important in order to confront the myths and prejudices that she considered the boys to have against people in the city. Secondly, I pondered the headmaster’s uneasiness about the risk that I might represent the boys in a way that confirmed the prejudices that the headmaster thought that city people had about boys and life in the district. Nevertheless, the headmaster talked with the rest of the administration, and helped me start the project.

However, the real door opener was the teacher who made it possible for me to make contact with the boys, and who later took me to Elmia Woods and to Estonia, to follow a forestry competition that the boys competed in.

The teacher Linda, from Oslo, told me prior to my fieldwork that she considered her job important because she could teach the boys something about the “outside world”. She described the boys as “rural boys” with strong and incorrect ideas about city people and the “world outside Kviståsen”. On the other hand was the perspective about prejudices that the headmaster worried about. The headmaster was from Kviståsen and he told me that people from the city had many prejudices against the culture and people from his district. He was afraid that I would not be able to understand the local culture, and therefore contribute to the already established stereotypes that the headmaster felt were wrong and which simplified what it means to be “rural boys”.

### **1.3.1 Countering media representations: How young men represent themselves**

Against the background of media representations of young rural men as “the new losers of today’s society” (Bye, 2010) and descriptions of *those who are not leaving home* as marginalized failures, because of what is considered to be their lack of opportunities to have an urban and modern life (Bye, 2010), I decided to examine how these men themselves experience rural life and how their life trajectories and stories point in other directions. Researchers studying the district culture and its representation in Norway confirm the skepticism of the headmaster and have argued that young rural men living in the districts are highly stigmatized in Norway (Krange and Skogen, 2003). Yet, what has received less attention is how they represent themselves and form their own identities vis-à-vis the surrounding society as well as in relation to each other and older rural generations.

## **1.4 Research questions and purpose of the thesis**

The purpose of this thesis therefore is to explore the motives for staying in the countryside and establishing a rural life in Norway and how young rural men make sense of this choice and the life they live in relation to other life styles and identities in Norwegian society. The thesis investigates life in a rural community in Norway, in particular the social dynamics among boys living at a boarding school, wanting to become forestry workers. I direct the attention to the challenges and processes the boys are facing in this crucial part of their life, concerning the identification process and transition *from being boys to becoming young men*.

In particular, I study how the social environment at the boarding school influences this process, through interaction with school peers and teachers of the older generation, practicing traditions, and how they are impacted by the “outside world”. The question is what generates *meaning and agency* among rural boys and men in a forestry community that is challenged by structural changes in work opportunities, such as the decline in rural industries, the “loser” discourse in the media, and environmental activism in the big cities, sometimes posing rural communities as problematic.

While the majority of Norwegian men are portrayed as important contributors to what is often described as the most gender equal country in the world, the media discourse on the masculinity of rural men depicts these men as a threat against women and gender equality because they seem to express traditional gender roles, and thus a problem for the rest of the Norwegian society (Bye 2010). Because I study an environment in which the practiced forms of masculinity are seen by the national media as problematic, or even a threat to modern ideals of Norwegian society, masculinity serves as the analytical starting point in this thesis. This focus, however, is also motivated by the fact that manhood, and the transition from boyhood to manhood was a recurring issue among my young informants, troubled by the challenges of becoming “real men” and living up to ideals of masculinity in rural areas, through education, work and finding a partner.

Using a personal account of my own experience of being a female researcher with a foreign background, conducting a study in a male dominated environment, I also explore the gendered challenges of fieldwork and how the personal can be used as a source of new knowledge *about masculinity in the districts* and how the close connection to and building of trust among informants became an epistemological turning point in my analysis. Besides drawing on theories of masculinity and rural life styles, I also draw on David MacDougall’s framework of *social aesthetics* presented in his work *The Corporal Image* (2006), by focusing on the aesthetic features and patterns of the forestry school Kviståsen. MacDougall (2006, 95) holds that *social aesthetics* is *social environments*, and uses the term *social landscapes* to describe social environments, such as student life at a boarding school in India, where he did fieldwork. According to MacDougall (2006), social landscapes are in the same way as actual landscapes “conjunctions of the cultural and the natural”. The field of social aesthetics is fruitful for the field of anthropology because communities, seen through anthropological lenses, “exhibits physical attributes and patterns of behavior that, taken as a composite, are specific to itself and instantly recognizable to its inhabitants” (MacDougall, 2006, 95). By

studying the social landscape of the forestry school, I seek to understand the importance of the school's social aesthetics of the community life. MacDougall (2006, 96) holds that aesthetic considerations play a part in the life of all communities. However, the framework of social aesthetics is particularly useful for understanding "small constructed communities", such as schools since schools often appear systematically ordered (Ibid.).

Furthermore, I use the concept of cultural resistance to understand opposition to and ways of navigating the relationship to urban Norwegian life styles. The construction of identity among these young men is not merely as question of practicing or living up to certain ideals of masculinity or notions of tradition exhibited by older generations of rural men. The identity of young rural men is also to some degree formed in opposition to the surrounding society, particularly in opposition to a life style that is otherwise described as "modern or urban Norway", and which is practiced in the bigger cities. Krange and Skogen (2003) argue that cultural resistance is part of the choice that rural men make. Everything from clothes, taste, social conventions, values and opinions are according to Krange and Skogen (2003) cultural entities<sup>1</sup> that are based on the social context, and which changes according to social position. Therefore, many actions and decisions that "rural men" make depend on their social position within the society and that parts of their choice of living and identity formation is tied closely to a resistance and opposition to urban Norway. Krange and Skogen (2003) describe the Norwegian society as a society where the "definition power" has a strong standing, in the sense that certain segments of society, more precisely the well-educated and cultural elites of the cities have more power to define the ideal way of being Norwegian. This also implies, that in Norway, the debate about who has the right to define *what way of living is the most valuable*, stands strong. I consider this argument about definition power to be valid also when it comes to expression of gender, and notably, masculinity. The debate about the normatively correct *ways of expressing* masculinity seems to be a battlefield for the construction of hierarchies of manhood, rural and "traditional" forms of manhood being less valued than modern urban forms.

The issues about "the power to define" create contradictions between social classes, income and education groups, gender and generations. According to Krange and Skogen (2003), cultural resistance does not necessarily involve long-term goals such as fundamental social changes. Cultural resistance might as well be a means *to conquer a space where you are not reached by the power of others, where you can be the master of your own life* (Krange

and Skogen, 2003). In their discussion about cultural resistance, Krange and Skogen (2003) refer to the wolf-debate between people in the districts and the central state administration in Norway. Rural communities defend their right to shoot wolves, when for example wolves are posing a threat to its inhabitants or to their animals and farms. They argue that the wolf-debate concerns something more for rural men than whether or not they are allowed to shoot wolves. To rural communities the Norwegian criminalization of shooting wolves represents the bureaucracy, the “hierarchical power” from the central administration towards the districts, unable to understand and accept the lives and challenges in the districts. Skogen, Krange and Figary (2013, 9) argue that there is a controversy of what is considered to be valid knowledge in Norway, in connection to dealing with wolves as well as a range of other issues. The dispute is between the knowledge produced by researchers and environmentalists and expressed by the government, and the knowledge that ordinary people develop through daily life experiences. The conflict is ongoing and valid for a range of policy areas, not limited to the wolf debate or discussions about nature conservation. However, these scholars argue, the dispute is about power, and how different groups in society perceive and interpret the world (Ibid.).

The main analytical research question of this thesis is: How can the social aesthetics of the forestry school Kviståsen provide insights into the way the boys at the forestry school see and construct themselves as forestry workers, and which practices and ideals of masculinity and forms of cultural resistance unfold as they find their place today’s Norwegian society?

This analytical research question arises from a theoretical framework based on masculinity and socialization research, and research on the social aesthetics of constructions of identity and social landscapes in rural settings. The analytical focus is a way of operationalizing my initial curiosity about the way young men are motivated to *stay in their home county* instead of seeking opportunities elsewhere. Besides shedding light on this question I also intend to demonstrate how Visual Anthropology and the uses of visual documentation can be applied to provide useful insight into the experience and practice of groups of people, perceived as “others” by main society.

## **2.0 Geographical setting and history of the forestry industry**

The school Kviståsen is located in Flisa, a small “town” in southeastern Norway. Flisa is the administrative center of Åsnes Municipality in Hedmark County. Åsnes is a part of the region

of Solør. Flisa is the largest town in Åsnes with around 2,100 people (Bjerkelund, Hedmark.no). The county of Hedmark covers an area of 27 397 square kilometers and has 195 408 inhabitants (July 2015). The county is situated in the eastern part of Norway, bordering on the counties of Sør-Trøndelag, Oppland and Akershus. Hedmark also borders to Sweden. The county administration is in Hamar, situated 120 kilometers from the Norwegian capital of Oslo.

Hamar, Kongsvinger, Elverum, Brumunddal and Moelv are the main towns of Hedmark. Hedmark is one of the largest regions in Norway and features a wide-ranging array of beautiful nature and rural areas, interspersed with charming towns. The largest lakes are Femunden and Mjøsa, and the river Glomma runs through the county. Geographically, Hedmark is in the traditional sense divided in the following areas: Hedmarken, east of Mjøsa, Østerdalen, north of Elverum, and Glåmdalen, south of Elverum. Hedmark and Oppland are the only Norwegian counties with no coastline (Bjerkelund, Hedmark.no).

This forest in Hedmark is called Finnskogen ("Forest of the Finns") and this is an area of Norway situated in the county of Hedmark, named so because of Finnish immigration in the 17th century, the so-called *Skogfinner/Forest Finns*. The core area of Finnskogen lies in the eastern part of a small region known as Solør, on the border to Sweden. It consists of a forested belt of land about 32 km wide. It is next to the Swedish region with a similar history of Finnish immigration, named Finnskogarna.

## **2.1 Forestry in Norway: Education and industrial history**

From ancient times, the forest has been an important part of the industrial base in Norway. Already in the 1300s, Norway exported timber, initially to Germany, England and the Netherlands. In the 1500s, Norway also exported timber to Spain (**Hoen & Svendsrud snl.no**). In the 1900s, industrialization bloomed in Norway. Forestry and rural industries continued to be key economic activities (**Hoen & Svendsrud , snl.no**). In 1948, the forestry education at Kviståsen was established as the first of its kind in the country, and the government sent important ministers to attend the opening of the school<sup>2</sup>.

### **2.1.1 Forestry in the post-war period**

The forest sector played an important role during the reconstruction of Norway after World

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with a teacher in the movie *Boys from the Forest*



War 2. In addition to being an important supplier of materials for the reconstruction, it also became a source of earnings of foreign currency, which economically was very necessary at that time. Approximately 30% of incomes from merchandise exports came from the forestry sector. Prices for forest products was high. Increase of production was considered necessary in both a short and long-term perspective. The state introduced a number of actions in order rationalize forestry and increase production. Control Services were strengthened, and state-owned forestry schools such as Kviståsen were founded. Private operators that invested in forest roads and technology such as machines, were given favorable terms and direct governmental grants. This led to a situation where employment in forestry declined rapidly, and by the end of the 1900s, it was only 10% of what it had been in 1950<sup>3</sup>.

After World War 2, the Norwegian state also made grants to replant new forests. However, from the 1970s and onwards, nature activists began to establish a resistance to this development. The resistance was initiated by a conflict between forestry and recreational interests (the preservation of Marka).

Especially after the Rio conference on the conservation of biodiversity in 1992, the production of timber was seen in a broader perspective. Biodiversity and the value of non-market elements such as recreation, mushrooms, berries and so on, were protected. This perspective had a great practical effect of operating methods and costs of timber production. The role of the forest stands central in issues about climate change as well, since growing forests bind the greenhouse gas CO<sub>2</sub>, while the use of wood for fuel and materials do not add new greenhouse gases into the climate system (Hoen & Svendsrud, snl.no).

At the same time, the high prices of timber had decreased since the post-war period. This was because the world trade of wood had increased, in particular because of cheaper transports. Forest plantations in other parts of the world had created a basis for both local industries and exports of timber. In addition, the opening towards Eastern Europe led to increased availability of production. The market prices in the forestry sector have therefore changed significantly since the late 1900s. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 2000s forestry and wood based industry were one of Norway's most important land-based industries, with an employment of around 30,000 full-time equivalents (Hoen & Svendsrud, snl.no).

Building a career in the forestry industry today is very different from the post-war period. The change is mainly due to the modernization of forestry and mechanization of

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<sup>3</sup> [https://snl.no/Skogbruk\\_i\\_Norge](https://snl.no/Skogbruk_i_Norge)

manual labor. Since World War 2 the chainsaw was introduced in forestry, as well as customized protection, which prevented some of the most serious injuries that were risked earlier. The first forest machines made their entry into the forest beyond the 1950s and '60s. In the beginning, the horse was replaced with agricultural tractors. Eventually, custom-made tractors and other machines for pruning and harvesting were introduced. Mechanization led to the rationalization of labor, which in turn led to fewer workers. The forest huts (koier) were less used, since forest workers could drive home from work instead of staying over in the forest. The timber was also transported more quickly by trucks than on water. As a consequence, the river was less and less used for transport of timber (Rudi, Kildenett.no), In Norway, the farmers traditionally own the forest. This continued throughout the 1900s as an important addition to agriculture. Although there are companies that own the forest today, there are still large areas of forest owned by farmers. This is called «combination use».

The thesis presents my effort to study the living conditions among boys and men working in the forest sector in Hedmark County. In order to study their living conditions and choice of profession, I have not only concentrated on gaining information about my study subject's daily life. My fieldwork also aimed at providing knowledge about "the lumberjack culture" and how it has developed since the post war period and until today. The main subjects in my study are men and boys that are a part of the lumberjack environment in Hedmark. My fieldwork consisted of a study of their daily life, approaching the lumberjack culture, and comparing both it with the older generations.

The school Kviståsen is located near Finnskogen<sup>4</sup> at Flisa<sup>5</sup> in Hedmark. The school is known for its forestry education, the first in the country that was established after World War 2. Before Kviståsen was established, there was no formal education center for lumberjacks in Norway. In order to become a lumberjack, the nature was the classroom. Although the lumberjack profession has undergone major changes since the postwar period, nature has to a large extent continued to be the students' classroom at Kviståsen although some teaching is also practiced in class rooms at the school. In addition to the theoretical education, a lot of the training happens in the forest at Finnskogen.

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<sup>4</sup> Finnskogen is located on both sides of the Norwegian-Swedish border, in Hedmark and Värmland.

<sup>5</sup> Description of place is given under point 2.0 Geographical area

### **3.0 Theoretical framework: Social aesthetics, masculinities and cultural resistance**

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and concepts to be applied in the analysis, outlining and defining concepts of social aesthetics by MacDougall, Connell's theory on a hierarchy of masculinities and Krange and Skogen's concept of cultural resistance among rural men and communities in Norway.

#### **3.1 David MacDougall's Social aesthetics: Objects, gestures and sensing the field**

By approaching the social world of the forest school Kviståsen through the lenses of social aesthetics, I seek to get a broader understanding of identity constructions than the one reviled by verbal conversations and words. Every community has physical objects, gestures and behavior patterns that are known for those within a specific community (MacDougall, 2006, 94-95). These features can be both social and physical, but what they share is that they are highly recognizable to its inhabitants. In the analysis I identify and discuss the meaning of objects such as forestry machines, chainsaws and social concepts such as *being Solung*, *being a bloke and Solid Wood*, and I try to give a tick description of how the boys dominate the nature by working in the forest.

This project is inspired by the visual anthropologist David MacDougall's notion of social aesthetics. MacDougall (2006, 95) holds that social aesthetics is social environments and developed the concept of social aesthetics while making fieldwork at an Indian elite boarding school. Although social aesthetics has not received noticeable attention in social science, MacDougall (2006, 105) argue that social and physical traits within a community effects people's actions and decisions. Studying features, such as buildings, clothing, and human interaction can therefore provide useful insights on what generates meaning, actions and identity construction among people in a society.

I consider social aesthetics to be an interpretative notion that helps me see and derive meaning from the world I seek to understand. The way we see is not objective, and what we chose to see, or how we interpret, cannot be separated "from who we are" since "our emotional, sensory and corporeal as well as our ideological or political proclivities are shaped by social aesthetics" (Fahey, Prosser & Shaw, 2015, 11).<sup>6</sup>

In my effort to offer an insight into the daily life of the forestry community

surrounding the vocational school Kviståsen, I refer to social aesthetics as the idea that our senses can help us understand unfamiliar environments. MacDougall (2006, 2) argues that the way we direct our seeing is predetermined and highly organized. Therefore, the different features of the society, such as the tempo of life, behavior in the forest, style of clothing and relations to the forest machines and traditional saws, is a body of evidence that gives access to broader understanding of how my study objects see and construct themselves in the world.

I use the concept of social aesthetics as a tool for exploring the different features of the field. I seek to define and understand the particular character of the community by studying both the social and natural features of the forest school Sønserud. In the film, cultural traits of Kviståsen and the forestry environment are presented by showing the everyday life of the school. Building on MacDougall's work in *the Doon School Project*, I seek to have an eye on both still shots of helmets and uniforms, statues, saws and machines, in addition to the moving images of interaction among the boys, and between the boys and the teachers, and their physical/natural surroundings, such as the school and the forest.

### **3.2 Masculinity as an analytical tool**

The way the boys negotiate and construct themselves as becoming men makes masculinity a central identity marker in my fieldwork. The analysis of this thesis concentrates on what it is that create a male community and attempt to explain practices among men who live in rural areas in Norway. Since there is not just "one masculinity" but rather a range of ways to express masculinities, masculinity will function as an analytical tool and starting point for addressing the complexity and diversity of identity construction among rural young men.

Although manliness or masculinity is not something fixed, and a range of competing masculinities can be said to exist, it can still function as an analytical tool for analyzing identity constructions. In the same way as femininity, the term masculinity is a subject of much scholarly debate. Research on men understands men as *gendered creatures* as a part of a cultural decided gendered system (Lorentzen, 2006, 121).

The gender researcher Lorentzen (2006, 121) holds that research on masculinities are based on two central premises or conditions. One of these conditions is that research on masculinities stands as a direct extension of research on women. Therefore, the point of departure of research on men blooms from the same methodological considerations, theories and research questions as research on females and femininity.

The second premise, according to Lorentzen (2006, 121) is that male studies has a critical and problem-oriented view on men and masculinity. Research on men and masculinity divide itself from many hundreds of years with traditional research where male behavior has been seen as the normal or the neutral. Male research can therefore, according to Lorentzen (Ibid) be described as critical research of men.

Developments during the last three generations in Norway show significant changes in the general expression of masculinity. Gullvåg Holter (1989, 85) describes changes in the male role in Norway, and uses fatherhood as an example. Expectant dads before the 70s would seldom enter the delivery room, while today it is almost impossible to keep them out of the delivery room. This example shows that what is considered to be normal male behavior, is not something fixed, but something that changes and develops, also in Norway.

### **3.2.1 Hegemonic rural masculinity**

The gender researcher Connell (1987) has created a model that identifies four different types or categories of masculinities within a gendered power field: Hegemonic, complicit, marginalized and subordinate masculinities. Connell's (1987) theory on masculinity highlights a hierarchy of masculinities. Through this theory, Connell shows that certain types of masculinities are more dominant and idealized than others. This assumption, according to Connell, is not only relevant for some societies, but for all societies and sectors within a society, although there may exist different ideals side by side in any one society.

Hegemonic masculinity is described as the dominant form of masculinity that is expected in a certain society. It may not be the most prevalent kind of masculinity, but it is based on expressions of manliness that are most valued, culturally and socially. Qualities or performances that can be associated with hegemonic masculinities include heterosexuality, being white, physical strength and suppression of weakness and emotions. Complicit masculinity is a masculinity that does not necessarily fit into the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity but that does not challenge it, often accepting or benefitting from the privileges of the existing system of gender and hegemonic masculinities. Marginalized masculinity points to the masculinity of men that do not live up to ideals of or do not have the qualities of hegemonic masculinity. However, men who have a marginalized masculinity may still subscribe to norms of the hegemonic masculinity. This could encompass qualities such as aggression, suppressing emotions and physical strength. Finally, men who are seen as having a subordinate masculinity tend to perform qualities that are opposite to those that are valued in hegemonic masculinity.

Traditionally, forestry has been “one of the most masculine rural work activities” and “an arena where hegemonic rural masculinity is expressed” (Branth & Haugen, 148,2013). Branth & Haugen (148, 2013) argues that “to understand the cultural diversity and transformations of rural life, it is important to identify and understand rural men as gendered persons and to unpack stereotypes”. They further note that, “In the past years, research on masculinity has come on stronger in rural studies. The studies on rural masculinity have produced insight into the processes by which farming and the land are constructed as masculine spheres of activity and how transformation of rural industries have consequences for men and masculinities”. Among the rural young men in this study all four of Connell’s forms of masculinity seemed to be present to some degree and in different situations. However, I will mostly apply hegemonic and complicit masculinities as concepts in the analysis of the internal dynamics of the group of boys and men at Kviståsen and in the district, while the concept of marginalized or subordinate masculinities to a larger extent become relevant in a broader national context, when looking at how the boys identify in opposition to more well-educated middle-class boys and girls of the city, with no knowledge or respect for them as rural people of the forest. As gender scholars have emphasized masculinity is always to be seen as situational, since any male individual may perform different kinds of masculinity and receive different forms of acknowledgement depending on where, when and with whom he interacts or relates to. For example, in relation to some women in a particular situation in the community men and boys may seem to be exerting hegemonic or complicit masculinities by reducing the women to an object through a sexualized language, whereas in relation to city people their expressions of or performance of sexuality can be seen as part of a marginalized or subordinate masculinity that resists the norms of “respectful” men in the capital of Oslo.

Some gender scholars argue that when young men’s status is undermined due to lack of opportunities or vis-à-vis more respected forms of masculinity among men of the urban middle class, they tend to increasingly base their authority in relation to other men and women on bodily powers, understood as abilities and physique of the male body, often through an explicit sexual language and corporeal performance (Groes-Green 2009).

The scholars Campbell and Bell (2000) differentiate between “the masculine in the rural” and “the rural in the masculine”. While *the masculine in the rural* describes different ways in which masculinity is constructed within rural environments, the *rural in the masculine* is the way ideas of rurality contribute to establish ideas of masculinity (Campbell and Bell 2000, 540). This is based on the recognition that rural themes are commonly used in

notions of masculinity independent of a rural setting. The rural masculine therefore enables us to deal with masculinities in both rural and urban space (Campbell and Bell 2000a). Branth and Haugen (2013, 149) notes that masculinity may be transformed as a result of challenges of other types work-based masculinities. Focusing on competition between masculinities in farming, one of the early studies on this topic used tractor advertisements as study material (Brandth, 1995). The studies showed how men and masculinities are associated with different tools and activities, and how hegemonic masculinity processes many qualities characteristic of farming most central tool—tractors—that of being strong, big powerful, and controlling. It also pointed to the mutual construction of masculinity and technology and argued that hegemonic masculinity in farming may be altered as the technology changes, and tractor become more computerized and comfortable as a working place (Branth and Haugen, 2013, 149).

### **3.3 Cultural resistance among rural young men**

Forestry and agriculture are industries that are closely associated with men and masculinity (Brandth and Haugen (2013, 149). The previous chapter of this thesis discussed historical and structural changes in forestry since the Second World War. In the same way as with other rural industries, forestry has undergone processes that influence the meaning of masculinity (Ibid.). Researchers that have studied communities among rural men in Norway, such as Krangle and Skogen (2003) and Linda Bye (2010) holds that the rural living conditions and the discourse on rural men in Norway contains highly stigmatizing representations. In their research, Krangle and Skogen (2003) found that rural men to a large extent construct their identity in a contrast to the masculinity discourse represented by men in the city. This construction of an oppositional culture and resistance to city people and media representations is what Krangle and Skogen (2003) call cultural resistance.

However, Krangle and Skogen (2003) argue that rural men do not only construct rural masculinity around the idea of the difference between them and city people. In addition, they argue, rural identities are also formed around ideas of threat. Here, the wolf debate becomes one of many expressions of threats city men represents against rural males. The wolf debate is a city/district dispute in Norway about whether or not the wolf should be in the Norwegian nature. Many of the district men are against the free movement of wolves, in particular because they consider cut in the wolf population to be crucial to protect cheeps and dogs from the wolf. However, environmental idealists, politicians and many people in the city want to save the wolf from being exterminated. For the rural men, Krangle and Skogen (2003) argue,

city men represent the system, the state and bureaucracy, and they have the power to make decisions in the wolf debate. Although lacking what the rural men consider as “real knowledge,” city men still holds the power to limit life in the district.

Linda Bye (2010) argues that, “The ways in which the young rural men negotiate and construct rural masculinities revolves around the idea of *difference*”. Thus, identity is not only constructed through the way we see us self. Identity is also constructed tin contrast to what *we are not*. Jenkins (2008, 3) argue that “who we are *seen* to be” have a huge effect. Jenkins describes identity as the human capacity –rooted in language – to know who is who (and hence ‘what’s what’) (ibid, 2008. 5). Identity is therefore a process that “involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are” (ibid, 2008, 5). Thus, young rural men construct their masculine identity and pride as a contrast to urban men and city life (Bye, 2010). Krange and Skogen (2003) describe the Norwegian society as a society where the “definition power” pertains to certain segments of society, more precisely the well-educated and cultural elites of the cities who has more power to define the ideal way of being Norwegian.

In research about young men living in rural areas, it is argued that “there is hardly anyone who is so stigmatized for their style and way of living as the “rural man” (Krange and Skogen, 2003). In the dissertation “Young Rural Men” (2010), Linda Marie Bye discusses the discourse on young rural men in Norway. Pointing to a number of newspaper articles, Bye (2010) argues that females from rural areas are described as seeking a modern and gender-equal society, and are therefore moving away from the rural communities. Increasing numbers of women in higher education and gender differences in dropout rates in secondary education has been interpreted as the result of a “masculinity crisis” (Vogt, 2008). Brandth and Haugen (2013, 149) argue that “the decline of rural industries has been regarded as a problem, especially for young men who cannot expect to practice their masculinity locally in the image of their fathers and grandfathers, and so they need to find new ways of being rural men in a late modern age” (Brandth and Haugen, 2013, 149)”.

According to Bye (2010), the media portrays young men as no longer attractive to the young women, as these women are described as being self-financed and taking higher education. While young females from rural areas are described as agents that are changing their social status by moving to the city, the young rural men are portrayed as their contrasting Other, who hold on tightly to their traditional ways of life and masculine rural values (Bye, 2010, 1). Bye (2010) also notes that researchers have been concerned about “brain drain” from the villages, arguing that ambitious girls and boys are moving away from the districts in



order to establish a life in the bigger cities (Bye, 2010, 2).

While Bye (2010) and Krangle and Skogen (2003) hold that rural men construct their masculinity in contrast to modern masculinity, they also point out that traditional expressions of masculinity in rural communities are changing, since the young rural men are both traditional and modern. Bye (2010) argues, “that their choice of resistance is best understood as a lifestyle choice”. Young rural men are “upgrading the idea of staying behind” by emphasizing on a need to “be close to nature”. Krangle & Skogen (2003) argue that work life is no longer the only representation of masculine identity. It means that although rural men that no longer work within traditional male-dominated sectors, still can express their masculinity through the identity as hunters or fishers, and therefore living in the rural becomes an investment in “the good life” (Bye 2010,iv). Byes (2010) argument is supported by Krangle & Skogen (2003) who argue that differences in the work sphere makes female dominated type of work, such as nursing or working in a children's garden, acceptable for men, since they can express themselves through hobbies, rather than profession.

Liepens (1998) holds that in agricultural contexts, two main discourses or practices of hegemonic masculinity exist side by side: what has been termed “tough men farm” and “powerful men lead” (Liepens 1998). Yet, Brandth and Haugen (2000) has in their research problematized the difference between “tough” and “the powerful” and argue that the tough man is constructed in practical logging activities, while the powerful man is based on the managerial man organized work. Instead of looking at these categories as mutually exclusive, they are concerned with “how masculinity is linked, contested and mutually constructed” (Brandth and Haugen, 150,2013). I will use this approach to address how different kinds of rural masculinity and cultural resistance are expressed in the empirical material, through local concepts, practices and representations as well as how these can be analyzed through the theoretical framework and analytical concepts presented above.

#### **4.0 Methods: Access, camera use, participant observation and “being the Other”**

“No ethnographic film is merely a record of another society; it is always a record of the meeting between a filmmaker and that society” (MacDougall, 1998, 134).

The fieldwork was conducted from the beginning of May to the end of June. My main goal

was to learn about forestry and the lumberjack culture in Hedmark. I lived together with 35 boys between the ages of 16 to 21. Besides my fieldwork in Hedmark, I also traveled with a group of boys from the school, to Estonia, in order to follow them while they participated in the European Championship in forestry skills.

Together with teachers and students, I also went to Elmia Wood<sup>7</sup> in Sweden. Elmia Wood is an arrangement where forest owners, entrepreneurs, forest workers and machine and service suppliers meet in order to share opinions and try out new equipment, make investment decisions, and network. However, my fieldwork was mostly concentrated at the forest school Kviståsen, where I lived at the boarding school together with the boys, and spent much time interacting socially with students, teachers and retired forest workers.

During fieldwork, I got to know three generations of forest workers; the young boys who were about to complete their degree as forest workers, the teachers, who were trained forest workers, and the retired forest workers, who had experience with manual work. Except for the lumberjack profession, what they all had in common was the forestry school Kviståsen. All three generations were students, or had been students, or had been teachers at the school.

#### **4.1 Visual methods and their contribution to culture studies**

The last chapter presented MacDougal's theoretical framework of "social aesthetics". The method of this thesis blooms from the notion that visual methods offer a way to explore the social aesthetics of a "constructed" community (MacDougall, 1995, 5).

The framework of social aesthetics is fruitful for the field of anthropology because a community, seen through anthropological lenses, "exhibits physical attributes and patterns of behavior that, taken as a composite, are specific to itself and instantly recognizable to its inhabitants" (MacDougall, 2006, 95). MacDougall (2006, 96) holds that aesthetic considerations play a part in the life of all communities. However, the framework of social aesthetics is in particular useful for understanding "small constructed communities", such as schools, since schools often have a systematic order (MacDougall, 2006, 96).

Visual tools and methods contribute in all the different stages of research production. In observation, the process of filming or taking photography, and in the process of understanding and interpret the material, visual tools are a benefit (Waage, 2013). Visual material can open up for new dialogue between the researchers and informants and help

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<sup>7</sup> Elmia Wood 2015 took place at Bratteborgs gård about 30 km South of Jönköping, South Central Sweden.

researchers get a deeper understanding of social situations in their fieldwork.

Bateson and Mead (1974) have discussed the benefits of visual material and its contribution to new knowledge, and argue that visual material in social research contributes by providing precise observations. Not only does visual material function as evidence on culture, it also contributes to material that can be reanalyzed through discussions between the informants and the researchers.

Although visual material can function as evidence it is important to remember that all data, visual or not, is constructed (Harper, 2012,8). The validity and reliability of the visual material must be tested; does the material correlate the interpreting of the researcher and how the informants see themselves? Although a picture is not manipulated, or a film is not directed with the purpose of misrepresenting informants, it is still the researcher that chooses her frame and focus (Harper, 2012,8). It is a challenge to see what the informants see. While in the analysis I will discuss how the social aesthetics of the forestry school Kviståsen provide insights on male identity constructions, the following sections will discuss the methodological steps by which the knowledge of this thesis was obtained and collected.

#### **4.2 Entering and accessing the field**

During fieldwork, I seldom used structured interviews. It was difficult to ask questions or start a conversation with the boys in the beginning. At the afternoon at the dormitory, when the teachers had finished their lectures, it was only the students and I alone at the dormitory. There were 35 students, all boys from the age 16 to 21. Although I had moved in at the dormitory house with the boys, they did not show much interest in talking or spending time with me at the beginning.

Gradually during fieldwork, I learned how to establish contact with my informants. I used in-depth interviews to interview forest workers in the community. The teachers in particular gave me long answers with a lot of information about the motivation for working in the forestry section, questions about the practical work, about teaching, and historical aspect. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time in the cantina, or walking in the corridors of the school. I spent time observing different setting and rooms and arenas inside and outside of the school.

It was in particular at the cantina that I could observe the boys and spent time with them. At the first weeks of the fieldwork, the cantina was my possibility to observe the boys without a teacher. During meals, I sat together with the boys at their tables, rather than with teachers in the teacher room, or with the females working in the cantina. I got the opportunity

to observe the boys through breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper.

In the beginning, almost none of the boys talked to me. I felt that it was very difficult to find a way to make contact without “trying too much” or crossing what I considered be the lines of their private sphere. I tried to establish my role at the school. I was not a teacher, I was not one of the females making food or cooking, and I was not a student at the school.

### **4.3 The camera as door opener**

The camera was a very helpful method in the fieldwork because the boys seemed to like that I was filming them while they worked in the forest, and they liked to see what I had footage. The boys were also interested in advising me about what and who to film.

The camera was a door opener that made it easier to obtain access to my informants. Since the boys in a great degree was interested in gears and machines, my equipment made me somewhat more accepted. The following section will present some examples from my field where the camera helped me obtain access.

After the first days in fieldwork, I started to go to the cantina with my camera and computer in order to watch through the clips that I had taken during the day. The boys new that I was there, and after a while, a small group of boys, the youngest, started to come and sit with me to watch my footage. The small group of boys who spent time with me in the cantina after dinner, started to tell me about things that I could film, or wanted to talk about what I had filmed, or they did not talk to me in particular, just hanging around me. It felt like the camera made me less a stranger, now they could talk to me, or spend time with me, because they were interested in the camera, rather than me.

The camera also helped me get a closer contact with my informants in the forest. For instance, everybody thought it was important that I got footage of trees falling down when they used the chain saw. They helped me find the right angle, and place where I could be as close as possible to threes falling down without being hurt. They also seemed to enjoy the fact that I was filming them while they were working. They were proud to show the camera their technique and the big machines that they were driving.

### **4.4 Participant observation**

Participant observation is often described as the central method of anthropology and studies of cultural settings. Participant observation is carried out through fieldwork in which the researcher attempts to enter into and understand a social and cultural community or place,

with very specific meanings that can be understood within a local, national or global context (Spradley 1980, DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). It requires an openness to listening to and interpreting what people say as well as what they do, but the focus is always on practice, interaction, events and attention to what happens in the encounter between the fieldworker and the informants. As Geertz (1973) noted, understanding and describing what happens in the field can be compared to the reading of a text, in the sense that cultures can be read and interpreted as if they were texts. The meaning must be produced by the fieldworker in the encounter with certain events, actions, people, places and landscapes, by making sense of what is observed in a way that is meaningful to people and read against the background of the local context in which cultures and actions unfold.

Geertz (1973) called this way of interpretive description of cultures “thick description” because the fieldworker needs to pay attention to the minute and often ignored parts of everyday life, which are in fact the elements that enable us to grasp the complexity of cultural dramas. Thus, I tried to apply participant observation and “thick description” to depict how young rural men practice and construct their identities in a local setting with a myriad of performances of identity and masculinity and to convey the everyday life of young men deciding to stay in rural forest communities.

#### **4.5 Fieldwork with a camera**

Entering a field in which one is seen as an outsider becoming accepted is always a challenge to the fieldworker. Yet, I realized that my presence with a camera and filming what I observed had a range of advantages, both because I could use the footage to understand and review what had happened in retrospect and compare it with my field notes, but also because my use of the camera ended up giving me a certain degree of respect among my male informants.

In the beginning it was not an easy task to interview informants about their choice of career, identity and future prospects, for example. Although the boys were not talkative in explaining what they did at the school in the forest and at their spare time, they would nevertheless always let me observe them with the camera. Here, the camera was a big asset since it made it possible for me to observe the way the boys interacted with each other as well as others in the field such as teachers and grown up forest workers. I could observe and record the way they prepared for their exam and how their forestry education was connected with their interests, such as the lumberjack competitions. Although many of my informants seemed indifferent to my questions with their short answers in the in-depth interviews, it stood as a strong contrast against what I observed, and I was able to use the footage in order to better

understand and analyze certain situations.

The camera could also occasionally be an obstacle for me in the field. I had to focus on many things at the same time, such as sound and light, in addition to interviewing and participating, or observing. Someone could tell me something important, but I had to focus on the light and the sound at the same time, and therefore I could maybe seem a bit unfocused or uninterested. In particular, in this field, since a lot of new information became available to me that I had no previous knowledge about. The camera could also prevent me from moving as fast as the people I was filming, for instance in the forest, because I had a lot of equipment to carry, and sometimes I had to put the camera in my bag which took time, and therefore the others walked faster than I did, and this made me unable to catch up on their conversations and the ongoing interaction.

I often heard the boys and men in the field saying that city people knew about nothing of value; and that they did not manage any important skills. This image of city people was only reinforced during the first stages of fieldwork, since all I carried with me was my pen and notebook, and the camera as equipment. My focus on this equipment's would strengthen the picture of me as an "educated" and academic woman from the city. However, I also think that my informants found it exiting being part of a film which made them more willing and interested in participating in my project. Furthermore, despite of the image of city people "knowing nothing of value" it seemed that they began to respect me because they gradually understood that I had my own equipment, in the same way as the boys often carried chainsaws or other equipment. The boys seemed to respect me because all the stuff that I carried and my skillful use of the camera perhaps resembled their own interest in and skills in using other kinds of instruments. So in the end, my presence as fieldworker and documentary maker had both advantages and disadvantages, but the advantages became stronger as they understood the importance to me of making a good visual portrait of them and how making movies is also an endeavor that required technical skills and experience, as opposed to my presence there being merely based on a distanced academic interest.

#### **4.6 Tempo, pace and silence**

Often when I asked the boys questions, they would answer that they did not know, or with silence. At the beginning, when I asked the boys questions, such as "why do you want to become a forest worker" they would answer, "I don't know". Since I was somewhat nervous myself during the interviews in the beginning of the fieldwork, and not familiar with the very short and slow way of answering questions, I often started asking a new question before my

informants got the time they needed to think about the question I had asked. I realized that by looking at the footage in the evenings, and I learned that more patience was required on my part, and that I had to ask more open-ended questions.

After a day in the forest, I would always sit down and look at my material. Through looking at the material, I realized that my “tempo” was very different from the tempo of my informants. If I had the opportunity to interview the boys, like for instance when they were alone working in the forest, I was so nervous of losing the opportunity to ask them questions that I was doing everything too fast. It was when I looked through my footage that I realized that the boys actually were planning to say something more after being quiet for a while and had been thinking about my question, but that I interrupted them with a new question before they had a chance to respond. Often a lot of very important information was given in informal conversations with the boys after they had been silent for a while as in the following example:

Me: “What is it that you like about working in the forest”

Informant Ole: “I don’t know” (silence for a very long time) “I guess it is important to like to work individually and that you enjoy spending time by yourself” (18-year-old male student).

The silence in the interview settings was difficult to handle. It made me very insecure about what the silence meant. Was the informant going to say something more or was it the end of their reply to my question. I had to be constantly aware of my tempo and pace, when asking questions. All of my footage of interview settings in the beginning of the fieldwork shows that I repeatedly failed to give my informants enough time to think about, and answer my questions. Slowly I learned that interviewing in this environment, and in particular with the young boys required that I slowed down and adapted the tempo and speed of my informants. I also worked with accepting silence, which was very hard for me in the beginning of the interviewing process.

#### **4.7 Anonymity, ethical responsibility and contact with informants**

In order to protect informants, live up to ethical responsibilities and to protect anonymity I am using pseudonyms instead of real names. I also conceal the identity of informant’s and the local community by using a pseudonym for the school. In order to live up to ethical principles of inclusion and reciprocity in the field I involved informants in the editing process of the film and made sure that the main characters accepted and approved of the visual presentation. The students, teachers and parents of students who were minors at the school accepted to

participate in the project by signing written declarations prior to the projects. In addition, I have maintained contact with informants through a private Facebook group where we have discussed central concepts, and I have been able to ask informants questions during the process of writing this thesis, to make accounts as accurate as possible, and to ensure that they felt they could identify with my representations of them and the community. The picture on the front of the thesis is taken by an informant at the school. The student on the picture and the photographer have both accepted the use of the picture in this thesis.

#### **4.8 Being “the Other” in the field: Becoming or not becoming Solung**

A key notion among forest workers and the male informants is “Solung”, a notion referring to the identity of people in the area of Solør, with specific values, norms and traditions. In terms of getting access to the field and becoming accepted I needed to know the extent to which I was able to be accepted in relation to these values, or at least how I was positioned in relation to that notion in the community. One day I asked Knut the following question,

Can people from the city be accepted as Solung<sup>8</sup>?

*“People from the city can be “Solung” if they stop behaving like city people here in the district. That involves dress codes. Do not wear bad shoes (sneakers) or expensive clothing. However, the most important thing is not to steal chicks or jobs” (Knut, 19-year-old student).*

Then I asked if I can be Solung. Jon-Henrik answered,

*Yes, you can, but then you have to eat the same as us and stop talking so snobbish. You are working on it. The language will probably be your biggest problem (Jon-Henrik, 18-year-old student).*

My knowledge about rural environments and rural men before entering the fieldwork was very limited and based on a few channels of information. Growing up in a middle-sized town in Norway, I remember other youths that came from more rural areas. However, I did not choose the same education direction as these youngsters and we did not have much contact. Also, I have had few family members in Norway. I have often got the feeling that many Norwegians, although living in the city have family that lives in the districts. My situation is

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<sup>8</sup> Solung: young people from the area Solør in Hedmark



different. By being newcomers and immigrants in Norway, my family did not have much cultural knowledge about the districts or rural culture in Norway.

Due to the facts presented above, the main information I have been surrounded by when it comes to rural men and rural communities is the discourse presented in the media such as in newspaper articles and from films and TV-shows. In particular I think the representation in media that people from rural community dislike foreigners and that racism is widespread, is something that have formed my ideas about village life. For instance, stories about people that were send to reception centers for asylum-seekers in Norwegian villages or newcomers that experience total isolation in district Norway.

Nevertheless, as I will elaborate in the analysis I managed to gradually getting closer to being accepted as part of the Solung community by acknowledging and or adapting to their values, language use, manners and by performing certain roles there.

#### **4.9 Being a female researcher in a male environment**

During the fieldwork, both my study objects and I had to negotiate roles in order to make contact acceptable. Situating myself in the field was a challenging task. Ever since the beginning of fieldwork, I found it challenging to be a female researcher in a male-dominated field. However, with challenging I do not mean problematic in a negative sense. Finding a way to maneuver myself in a field where I was the outsider, was an interesting exercise. Prior to fieldwork, I lacked basic knowledge about forestry and rural life. I belonged to a completely different environment in Oslo. In addition, the fact that I was an outsider was visible in terms of my gender, appearance, foreign name and age. I was about 10 years older than the students, yet I was younger than the teachers, and I did not have children, which is common for women my age in rural environments.

Life at a forestry school involves certain types of clothing codes. At the school, I dressed in outdoor clothing and fleece sweaters, in order to try to blend in and live up to local norms. Although the forest boys used yellow overalls, my clothing did not distinguish much from others in the field. However, my Iranian name was very different from what my study subjects knew from before. Already at the first week of fieldwork, one of the cantina ladies pointed out that my name was difficult to pronounce. “We have tried to note it down, but we forget it all the time”, she said. Do you think we can call you Kari instead? It may be possible that she was joking when she said that, but to me the proposal was a great opportunity. Those who were in the cantina laughed when she came up with the suggestion, and I could see how the teachers were surprised that not only did I accept, I seemed to be very happy with my new

name, because it might enhance my chances of blending in.

I could see that one of the teachers, Hans, the most popular teacher among the forestry boys, seemed entertained by this situation. We started to joke about it at once, and in this way, we became friends. Through the alias Kari, I was suddenly less dangerous to my informants. Previously, it seemed like it had been difficult talking to Pernian. My original name seemed to be a symbol of my disparity. To me, my new name was a symbol of acceptance. In anthropological literature, I had read stories about researchers who went to exotic and foreign places where they were local gave them new names as a sign of acceptance. Now, in a sense, I had my own “tribal name”.

Nevertheless, there were still other challenges that related to what a social role would end up having. It seemed difficult for the boys to understand that I was there as a researcher. To some extent, they could understand that I wanted to make a film about forestry, but then it should be technical film. However, they quickly discovered that I knew little about chainsaws or machines, and they did think it was strange that I wanted to make a movie about them.

Still, conducting fieldwork at a boarding school has its advantages. The youngest boys sometimes seemed to be missing their family members back home, and therefore seemed to like spending time with me in after school in the evenings. I used to watch footage in the cantina, and they liked to see what I had filmed or giving me advises on what to film. They also spent time around me in the evenings just because they liked being with adults.

Yet, with the older boys studying forestry, it was more difficult to establish a role that made contact possible. I think the test on the trip to Estonia was critical. From being completely distant towards me, the different phases of the trip associated with the sexual language and Solung discussions lead to discussions about language, environment and diversity. During the trip, I established a deeper contact with the team. The boys seemed aware that it was a challenge for me to attend the tour and they tested me a lot. On the return, I was so tired that I did not get on the bus to Kviståsen, but stopped in Sweden to take the train back home. When I came back to ‘Kviståsen a week later, that was when the breakthrough occurred. The day I returned, I realized that both teachers and students had been unsure if would ever come back to the school, and suddenly I was greeted with my real name rather than Kari. When I asked them why they used my real name, they said it was time for that now. I went into a role as not only the photographer and researcher, but more like “a big sister” and the contact between me and the forestry boys seemed to become de-dramatized and the constant testing of my limits came to an end. The boys invited me to the rooms to hang out, watch music videos and participate in fishing trips in the evenings after school.

Finally, it was the contact with Hans, the teacher that made it possible for me to participate in all forest activities. At the first few weeks of fieldwork, I had been unsure about our contact. Hans was known for flirting with the canteen ladies at the school, and some of the forestry boys made jokes about me being his girlfriend something that made me insecure and a little restrained, which was perhaps unnecessary since he was my main “door opener” in the field. Hans later invited me home to his farm where he lived with his children. There I became friends with his daughter who spent a lot of time showing me around in the district. Through the contact with Hans’ family, I believe that I entered into the role of a daughter, in a social and symbolic sense. The role of a daughter made it possible for Hans to take on a father role, of somebody who taught and explained me about forestry work. In addition, we could talk about the challenging elements of the field, such as language and social codes. Taking on roles that resemble existing kinship ties is not uncommon among anthropologists, in particular, as a gateway to acceptance and acquiring a meaningful place and some sort of membership in a community (Geertz 1973; Graveling 2009).

My role in the fieldwork was not something that only was important to me, but obviously also important to my study subjects. As mentioned earlier in the method chapter, the use of the camera and camera equipment made my role in the field more explicit. I was recognized in various roles. The role of a photographer, big sister and daughter made it possible for me to get close contact with the study subjects and participate in the field.

#### **4.10 The challenges and negotiations when confronted with sexual language**

The following will describe a situation that happened during my fieldwork that I will refer to as *the sexual language*. My first meeting with the sexual language started on a trip to Estonia. This trip occurred after the first week of fieldwork. The boys had won the Norwegian competition in forest skills and were traveling to Estonia to compete in the European Championships. On the trip I experienced the transformation from being treated as total outsider “a guest”, towards a more relaxed tone from my study objects. The trip lasted for six days, and started at the school Kviståsen early in the morning. We spent several hours in a bus together before we traveled with a ferry from Sweden to Estonia. In Estonia, we stayed at a school for four nights during the European Championships before we had the same travel route back to Kviståsen.

Before going on the trip, I hoped that joining the boys through the championship could be an important event that would give me insight on the motivation of choosing the lumberjack profession. I also thought traveling together with my study objects could function

as an "icebreaker". I hoped that the trip would break some of the distance I experienced from the boys. In addition, at the school I had started to get the feeling that the boys needed a reason beside my research project for why I should "study them" in their everyday activity. However, on the trip, I became the *photographer* that was filming their achievements. This role seemed to make my presence more accepted. Prior to the trip I expected to see lots of passion for the competition and I wanted to examine the boys in an environment with others who were interested in forestry skills in the same way as them. So far in the fieldwork, I experienced the boys as very closed, distant and reserved whenever I tried to film them or even talk with them without the camera.

The boys changed their behavior already during the first day at the long-lasting bus drive to Sweden. They talked about the competition, they commented on tractors, forest machines and the forest we saw from the bus. The many hours that we spent in the bus together made the distance between us smaller. After a while, they started to talk with each other, as I was not there (something I was very happy about). However, In particular the conversations started to be more and more about sexual related topics, that I guess they could have chosen to have somewhere else than in my presence, if we had been somewhere else than in the bus, for example at school.

The boys talked a lot about sex, they had a very sexual language, they talked about girls at the school, girls they saw, girls they once knew, and rumors. They also talk about sexual episodes at the school. It ranged from sexual descriptions of situations they had experienced, or that other people they knew had experienced, to commenting girls we saw on the road while we were driving. The teacher and the younger assisting teacher did not comment on this or corrected the boys, quite to the contrary, they sometimes even contributed to the conversation. The assistant teacher was quite active in the sexual conversations with the boys, telling stories from when he was himself a student at the school. Sometimes the main teacher also contributed to the talk. Often, he merely laughed at what the boys said, and if he contributed to the sexually toned conversations, it was always in a humoristic way.

This is perhaps a representation of what we might call a more uninhibited language and expression of masculinity than seen in parts of more highly educated segments of the city, where language among youth is certainly also sexualized but where there may also be a stronger notion of gender equality and ideas that an overt sexualization of women is less educated and "civilized". Again, the men's insistence on sexual talks may be showing how they are practicing a cultural resistance, both through their internal interaction and in their reaction to my presence, in the sense that I represented the well-mannered city culture, more

than anything else around them.

After spending almost every hour with the boys in the bus and after being the target of the sexual talks at one point, I contacted my supervisor. It was in particular my role that I was concerned about. It started to become very strange to be the only female, 10 years older than the boys, but still not their teacher, to just observe all these everlasting and sometimes quite uncomfortable conversations. My supervisor advised me to film these conversations if it was natural to do so, and to not stop the filming if they started to talk about sex. Unfortunately, before I talked with my supervisor, I had not filmed many of these conversations. In the beginning I became so surprised by the comments and the very sexual language that I automatically turned off the camera in these situations. Sometimes, they also censured themselves when they saw that the camera was on. I also thought that the sexual language was quite revealing (they were mentioning many names) and also not part of the project or part of the work I had been allowed by the headmaster to do. Prior to the fieldwork, the headmaster was worried that the project would become some kind of "reality show" as he called it, meaning that students would be exposed in a manner that would be uncomfortable to them in the future, or that could create problems for them. I had filmed a part of a conversation where I ask the boys about their sexual language. The problem with the clip is that in many ways it contains a "provoked reaction", which is why I chose not to include the clip in the movie. Also, the boys and I had come into a situation where I could not hide that I was uncomfortable by what I felt as constant sexual conversations.

Here it is important to mention that I had most likely been able to handle the situation differently if I had had the opportunity to "take breaks" from the fieldwork. Since I constantly spent time with the boys, from the early morning to late evening, it was difficult for me to avoid being influenced by the conversations. In particular because none of the teachers corrected the situation, and at one occasion the language was also aimed at me, at a point where I was very tired, and the boys had been drinking alcohol.

After the trip, when I came back to Norway, and had time to think, I thought of myself as a bit naïve, prior to the trip. What I hoped or thought that I would experience was not what happened, and was immediately perceived as a big disappointment. This disappointment is something that I will further discuss, and describe as a consequence of my *romantization of the study subjects*. When my study subjects did not fit my idealistic ideas that I somewhat had about them, I started to make quite simple assumptions. I studied them through my own cultural glasses, which was in accordance with stereotypical ideas about "village men". In the middle of the trip to Estonia, I had started to get a range of simplified assumptions about my

informants, such as: *My study subjects are primitive and childish. They lack good role models. They are suppressing women, and their teachers are as well, and nobody confronts the sexual way they talk about women.*

#### **4.11 Reflections on my own positioning and prejudices around “their” authenticity**

When I discovered that my study objects acted different on the trip to Estonia that I had imagined, in a way that I did not expect, I started to read them in the same way as stereotypes present “young rural men”. Prior to the fieldwork, I expected this situation to happen, but not at all in the degree that I experienced. In particular, I was shocked by the lacking reactions of the teachers. I gave my own culture and myself “the definition power”. When I described the situation to my friends in Oslo, they were shocked.

In contrast, when I talked with the female students at Kviståsen, I got a very different reaction. My female informants told me that the sexual way the boys talked did not affect them at all. They said that they regarded it to be normal. Actually, they said that they never reflected upon it. My female informants did not at all seem to be suppressed. They expressed a lot of self-confidence, and they told me they had many male friends at the school, and that they would choose the school as a much better environment than a school with mostly girls. They said that they felt free in this environment. For example, because, as they said, they could wear working clothes all the day and not worry about makeup.

Other men my own age that I met in the field told me that females in their environment talked in the same way about men. One of the teachers, actually the teacher that was on the trip to Estonia said, “maybe it is more issue related to class rather than gender”. My way of understanding *appropriate behavior* contrasted to the environment I studied. The informal tone, the humor as a part of *the sexual language* was difficult for me to understand as *the Other*.

This experience made me realize that what was perhaps most surprising was not their language, but my reaction to it, in the sense that it revealed how I was trying to uphold an image of these men as somehow authentic, and therefore more respectful to women than other men. This, of course, was a prejudice, and I realized that the sort of “respectful” manliness I expected to find in the field was more a trait that these men would develop over time, in the process of becoming men, and forest workers, and not in the middle of their youth and education, in a place with very little contact to the opposite gender, and even less with women from the city. This realization is perhaps akin to what Hastrup describes as the ability to become amazed or surprised (*forbløffet*) in the field in order to gain new insights into the

culture and one's own place in it (Hastrup 1992). As Hastrup argues, amazement or even shock can lead to new understandings that may also change the analytical perspective on experiences in the field in close encounters with its people (Ibid).

## **5.0 Analysis: How young rural men construct their identities**

In order to analyze the way young rural men construct their identities in the rural community around Kviståsen in Hedmark I apply the methods of visual attention to social aesthetics of the school and thick description of the observed situations as well as addressing the core notions and expressions, which the boys and men used in relation to everyday interaction and how to "become a man" in the community. Furthermore, I apply the theoretical concepts of social aesthetics, of hegemonic, complicit, marginalized and subordinate masculinities and of cultural resistance, which in different ways shed light on identities of young men in relation to the school and machine use in the forest, in relation to women and other men, including their teachers, other seniors and finally, in relation to city people.

### **5.1 The young man and the machine: domination and navigation in the forest**

MacDougall (2006, 94) holds that social aesthetics provide access for understanding human behavior since there "there are moments where the social world seems more evident in an object or a gesture than in a whole concentration of our beliefs or institutions". Inspired by MacDougall's approach and Geertz' outline of thick description I will in the following section present a field note describing a young forestry student who navigates himself through the interaction with machines, tools and knowledge in the forest, as well as in his direct interaction with the forest and its natural elements:

It was one of these summer days where it was easy to forget that winter could ever come back again. The boys gathered on the parking lot outside Sønserud starting to fill the cars with chainsaws, gas, food packets and thermoses with coffee. Then they would sit in the car, passing belts with threes, and while driving towards Finnskogen, the asphalt road would be replaced with gravel road, and gravel road would be replaced with forest road.

Even though the seasonal cycles of the trees make it best to cut down trees during winter or early spring, the boys work in the forest, although it was the beginning of May. Out in the forest, it felt like it was the first day of summer, the spring air had changed with the smell of summer, and the sun was standing high on the sky and sunbeams were visible through the

dense forest.

The threes in the forest are in different shapes and sizes. The forest workers divide them into different felling classes. Felling class one consists of the youngest and smallest threes, while felling class five are the oldest and tallest threes. There are a lot of Pine<sup>9</sup> out in Finnskogen, but also Spruce<sup>10</sup>. I could see an area in the forest where the boys had planted new threes and about on hundred years these threes would be timber class five.

Moving around in Finnskogen means passing small ponds, rivers and streams in addition to trees. Looking at the trees you can see evidence of the animals that lives there. If you look closely at the trees you can see scratches from animals that have been fretting on the tree trunk. Wolves and bears live in Finnskogen as well, and until June, the mosquitos that are so famously aggressive in this area, will bother everyone around. But it is the boys and their teachers who dominate this place, and they do not shy away from showing this in their every step and interaction with nature here. Cutting the trees to timber, working and shaping the landscape, and using the machines and tools in a way that expressed their power to control the forest, but also a certain respect in their thoroughness and attention to detail, not only when they cut the trees but just as much when they planted new trees and took care of them. The noise from the forest machines are loud, but still you will hear the soft sound of birds whistling. At the end of the day, however, it is always the noise of the forest machines, that will overshadow the romanticized sense of nature, reminding everyone that this is a place where “man meets nature” and conquers it in the end, and at his own will.

Deriving from the wheels of a big forest machine, I see a deep mud groove, and I follow the tracks until I can see a huge machine driving towards me. The driver is carefully handling the machine. A long crane from the machine reach new stables of timber. The machine stops and out comes a boy named *Kristian*. He stops the machine, pulls himself out of the driver's seat, and walks towards me. I am very surprised to see that the one who has steered the forest machine with such a steady hand, maneuvered the machine gently and confidently without damaging the trees, is a young boy who wears an overall because of the *russe celebration*<sup>11</sup>. His black overall testify that he is a student in the final year of the vocational education. He is looking shy, but has an open facial expression and says "hello". Kristian blushes a little, but stands straight and smiles, although it is clear that the camera

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<sup>9</sup> Wood type Furu in Norwegian

<sup>10</sup> Wood type Gran in Norwegian

<sup>11</sup> Russ celebration is a Norwegian traditional celebration for high school student that find place in their final spring semester. The students celebrating is wearing the same overall for one month, and are described as Russ.



makes him a little shy. I noticed that Kristian had a good flow in his driving without making too much damage on the trees in the forest. I could not help asking him about his motives and feelings about being and working in the forest,

Me: What is it that you like about working in the forest?

Kristian: “It is fun to drive the machine. I guess it is not like other jobs. You can spend time in nature. That is nice for people who like that. (Silence for a very long time) I guess you need to like to spend time alone”.

And with that statement, Kristian gave the most fulfilling description of what he liked about forestry during my whole fieldwork. He did not need many words for describing what he felt out in the forest. However, showing what he liked about rural life and forestry was something I observed him do all the time. While he and the other boys and men seemed to be somewhat uncomfortable by my questions regarding feelings for forestry, they were very comfortable with showing their performance out in the forest.

I learned to see the relationship between Kristian and the forest through seeing him driving the machine. At the end of the day, Kristian could stand in front of a huge stable of wood, seeing the physical evidence of the work he had done that day. The stable of wood represented the working hours he had spent, and that was a huge contrast to for instance watching numbers in an excel sheet. Out in the forest, Kristian was always prepared. He knew the forest, and he had been playing out there since he could walk. Driving a forest machine was not an easy task. Only those with great experience and knowledge can handle the machine without damaging the forest. Kristian would always start the day checking the engine and oil supply. Everything had to be in order before he could start driving. Then driving the machine, the shifts were complicated. He had to remember the connection to the crane. Otherwise, the crane would just bounce everywhere out of control.

In the forest, Kristian was a responsible man. In contrast to the way he behaved at the dormitory or out with his friends where he had the role as a clown, he was trusted in the forest. Younger boys looked up to him and, and the teachers and the headmaster were impressed by his work. Out in the forest, Kristian was focused, and he used knowledge that his grandfather had taught him from when he was a child. He knew how to act together with nature depending on the different work he had to do. A warm summer day meant sweating under the heavy safety gear. Days like that were best to spent in the machine where he did not need to work as hard physically as when he used the chain saw. However, during winter, the

temperature could go as low as minus 25 degrees. Under such conditions, the heavy workload of maneuvering the chain saw would be the best assignment so that he would keep warm on a cold winter day.

As shown in the field note above, although words of the informant are important, in the very concrete and comprehensive way he describes his passion for forestry, the most important way of understanding his interaction with nature and what makes him an integrated part of Finnskogen and the community is gained by observing and sensing his action and navigation in close contact with machines, tools and the elements of the forest and nature there. The social aesthetics of movements, gestures and handling of machines in a very particular place and sensory environment of smell, sound and vision is what ultimately gives an impression of what it means to be a boy in the forest, and a boy on his way to becoming a man. The manner in which Kristian handled and dominated the machine and nature around him, through corporeal effort and sensory attention to the surroundings bear witness to how he had acquired the skills needed to take over the jobs of the older generation, and carry the responsibility that is absolutely necessary to become respected by teachers, fellow students and the community and thus, living up to the local ideals of masculinity.

## **5.2 Interactions and relations among the boys**

Around 35 boys lived at the school dormitory at the time of the fieldwork. The boys lived at the dormitory because of the long distance from their family houses and the school, which meant that without staying at the dormitory, the boys would have had to spent hours traveling every day. Although only boys lived at the dormitory while I was there, girls were allowed to live at Kviståsen as well<sup>12</sup>. With one exception, a boy from Bergen, all the boys living at the dormitory at Kviståsen were district boys from the county. During the fieldwork, the headmaster of the school told me that the boys studying forestry came from forestry families with long traditions owning forest or working with forestry in generations.

During the time I lived with the boys at the dormitory, I got the opportunity to spend a lot of time with the boys in their spare time, in addition to the time I spent with them during school day. The method chapter has described the process of establishing contact with my informants. I have discussed the methodological steps from the first contact with the boys in

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<sup>12</sup> There were no girls were living at the dormitory while I was living there. Girls I talked to told me that they that it was because they would rather choose to take the bus home to their families, although it involved hours traveling every day.

the corridor of the dormitory – to the last weeks of my fieldwork, were I spent much time with the boys and was invited into their rooms, hanging out, watching movies and joking, and taking part in fishing trips, and driving around in cars.

### **5.3 Together with the boys in their dorm rooms: Watching music videos**

From the beginning of the fieldwork, I felt that the rooms that the boys lived in (two or three in each room) was somewhat a sacred place that I could not enter. From the beginning, I considered the classrooms and the forest to be the main place to study the boys. Walking in the corridors and sitting in the cantina during meals were great opportunities to explore the interaction between the boys. However, the distance I felt from my informants, that I also noticed when I looked through my footage at night was somehow problematic. I realized that I filmed the boys from a distance, and this made me think that I was still “on the outside” even though I wished to try to portray them from the inside. It was clear in the way I had filmed them that there was a distance between us that I had not been able to overcome. I was not their teacher, and not their classmate. I was someone with a camera trying to study them. They could understand that I wanted to film them working with forestry or compete in chainsaw competitions, but why I asked so many questions was something they did not really understand. Once one of the boys said, “you asked really strange questions in the beginning, but after a while we have sort of forgotten that you are here all the time with the camera”. After a month I was getting used to the fact that I was accepted in the classroom or in the forest, in the tool room and in the cantina during the meals. During the weekends, the boys would travel back to their families and there would be no one left at the school, besides a boy from Bergen, however, even he would go and visit friends over in the village. Therefore, I would go back to Oslo and spent the weekend there, and I would come back to the school on a Sunday evening.

One Sunday evening when I had just arrived school, I met Bjørn in the hall while he was calling his mother, I saw there was a note in the hall that the school was selling chainsaws and I overheard Bjørn discussing buying one with his mother. I got my camera because I wanted to film the conversation, and after hanging up, Bjørn said that he wanted to show me something I could film in their room. I went to the dorm room with him and three other boys were there as well. Three other forest boys that I already knew very well from Elmia wood and all the hours we had spent in the forest and at the school during lectures, lived in the rooms as well. When I came to their room I started to film the boys from the doorstep, and asked what it was they wanted to show me. It was the note on the wall with rules for the

dormitory. About how often they had to clean their clothes, change bedclothes and wash the floor. The boys laugh and made fun of how seldom they did that. Inside the room I saw bottles, snus and candy. I saw hunting gear and working clothes. The boys sat down on their beds and one started to play music from his computer, it was gangster rap. At the same time another boy was preparing for his exam. I was somewhat waiting for something to happen, were they going to make a joke or planning to fool me, but they did not. They just wanted me to be there while they were hanging out, and I realized that I was invited to hang out with them. At this point I began filming the more intimate aspects of their lives, and as can be seen from the footage that I produced later on, there were more close-up recordings and the images and scenes in the film became gradually more intense and personal, since a higher level of trust had been build and my role as “intimate observer” became more acceptable.

I remember seeing the young men using the dating app Tinder, and searching for women and girls, and I found myself watching tv shows and music videos with them at night. Their uses of social and other media and identification with youngsters in other parts of Norway and the world through such media reminded me that these men are far from ”cut off” from the outside world. Globalization and globalizing images reaches the most isolated parts of the world, including rural areas with otherwise little personal contact with people from the capital or bigger cities (Hylland Eriksen 2007, Friedman 1994). Still, they see themselves as very different from ”kids” in the city and also it was clear how they understood and appropriated the images, music, apps and videos quite differently than I would expect city youth to do. For example, they used gangster rap to bolster their sense of being ”tough young men”, even if the gangster phenomenon is notoriously urban. The interaction I observed in the rooms, and the intimacy of the relationship I obtained, both points to forms of masculinity that relate to showing off manhood vis-à-vis women, competing around who is most popular among girls or confirming their heterosexuality by commenting on women on Tinder or discussing how to get in contact with them. It also found expression in the identification with toughness, dominance and bodily strength as shown in music videos or rap songs. To some extent, referring to Connell (1987), this behavior can be interpreted as conforming to a hegemonic masculinity that is prevalent in this part of the country in a rural area. So although such practices can be seen as an example of a marginalized masculinity by the media and people in the city, like myself, because it might exhibit a less “cultivated” and well-mannered or respectful masculinity, to the boys this is a way of living up to local codes of conduct ensuring accept among peers as well as seniors.

I would argue, that much of the activity inside the rooms, the sexual talks and the fact

that the teachers talked the same way, poster of naked women in the teachers room, and condoms on display, can be explained as a way of conforming to a particular hegemonic rural masculinity, which is locally accepted. Yet, it can also be seen as a special kind of subordinate masculinity, in the sense that such practices might be condemned and portrayed as “looser masculinity” in the national media and in the city. This, I argue, is an example, that a practice, which is hegemonically masculine in one local context, might at the same time be subordinate if seen in a broader national context of class and identity. This subordination and the boys’ reaction to it, I think can be illustrated by the concept of cultural resistance. The boys showed signs of cultural resistance in a number of ways, that indicated how they constructed their masculinity in opposition to the ideal masculinity in the city and among the social and cultural elite of, for example, Oslo. Hegemonic masculinity in Oslo will mean something else than in Hedmark. Being eloquent, well-mannered, living up to standards of gender equality, and performing a range of cultural codes related to clothes, music, art, architecture and food may all be said to characterize certain segments of Oslo, and which sometimes are idealized in the media. These characteristics, however, are to a large extent seen as “foreign”, and as something that is not obtainable or even undesirable among the boys at Kviståsen. Not having access to the same kind of cultural and symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 1984) of these city men, boys in the forest explicitly oppose the values, norms, symbolism and practices that city men and boys represent. Being sexually explicit, dressing in practical and unfashionable ways, showing toughness, and working machines, all contribute to their cultural resistance in opposition to city men. This is at once a way of distancing themselves from what they cannot have access to and at the same time a way of maintaining and justifying a different choice of life and a more “traditional” male identity.

The informant’s behavior can be seen as cultural resistance because of the need to make it clear that they would not give up their right to have an own space with a specific set of codes and rules that the city people, and *the bureaucracy*, could not dictate. It was not because I was a woman, my informants explained, that they reacted to me the way they did; it was because I was too soft skinned and snobbish, the way they think city people are. People in the city are considered to be vain and shallow. To be considered as a real man was an important value in the community, which required keeping a rougher attitude in order to show a resistance and opposition to urban life, perceived of as weak and soft skinned.

#### **5.4 Together with the boys in their dorm rooms: Becoming “an older sister”**

After I had been living at the dormitory at Kviståsen for more than two months, the boys were

quite relaxed about me being there. We had established a sort of contact that made me accepted among the boys in almost every situation such as in the forest and classroom and tool room during school day, meals in the cantina and after a while we started to hang out in the afternoons and evenings at the dormitory after the teachers had left. One day the boys asked me if I wanted to go fishing with them in the afternoon. I said yes although I knew it involved driving with one of the boys as a driver and without any teachers joining us.

At five a clock in the evening, I got a message from one of the boys. He wrote “Are you ready?” I said yes and went out to the parking lot with the camera equipment. The boys came out of the dormitory and together we walked to the car. The boys were playing music while we were driving, and they were laughing and talking. We drove to a lake nearby the cabin of Peter, one of the boys. The boys gathered all the fishing equipment and we started walking to the lake. They boys were joking with each other and making fun of everything they saw. At the cabin, they wanted me to film a wall full of fishes, and then they started to argue about which fishhook that was the best one to use. We fished for hours and when the boys decided that we could drive back home it was past supper at the dormitory. They boys were hungry and started to discuss if they should cook a fish or not. However, they were tired and it was late so the idea of starting cooking was not really what they looked forward to. Prior to my fieldwork I had received a grant and asked they boys if they wanted to go out for supper. They were really happy about that idea and they wanted to have pizza. However, the local pizza restaurant was already closed when we are arrived. Therefore we drove to the gas station to buy hamburgers instead. Although the boys had been joking around me like always the whole day, and been farting and burping as they did all the time, their attitudes towards me changed for some seconds. Although I explained that it was the grant money I used to by the hamburgers, they still stood in a line in order to say, “thank you”. One after one came over to me to shake my hand in a serious way and thank me. Positioning me in the field had been hard the whole time, but from that I learned that I had symbolically become what might be called “a big sister” that enabled me to be more a part of the group, not as a fellow student or a teacher, but performing according to a big sister. In terms of gender, this can be understood as a way of fitting into a category that does not threaten their masculinity at the same time as they began confiding in me as a person they could trust with secrets about their personal lives and with whom they did no longer have to live up to certain expectations of them in terms of being “a man”. This is probably also the reason why they to a lesser extent used sexual language to provoke me or test my limits as a woman, and instead talked to me in a more respectful and confidential manner.

### **5.5 The story of Halvor: Personal dreams and hopes of becoming a forestry worker**

“My father studied forestry at Kviståsen. When my brother decided secondary education, he was not sure if he would do the same as our father or choose general subjects instead. He regretted not choosing forestry. I was always certain that I wanted to study forestry at Kviståsen. And I have not regretted it ever since” (Halvor, forestry student at Kviståsen, 2015).

Halvor, an 18-year-old student at Kviståsen came from a potato farm placed around one hour away from the school. From the beginning of the fieldwork, he was the first student I established a deeper contact with, I got to know his parents and bigger brother, we travelled to Estonia together for the European competition in forestry skills.

Halvor showed interest in my project from the beginning. In contrast to the other boys, he started to talk to me early on. He liked being in front of the camera, and from the beginning he was one that I often directed the camera towards. While all the boys wanted to be filmed when they were out working in the forest, Halvor also wanted to show me other parts of his life. However, it was not before the end of my fieldwork that I started to spend time with him alone. In the beginning I always approached my informants in groups. This was because they seldom were alone and off course also because of gender issues. Halvor was a very active boy; he played football every week, competed in several sports and in the local youth 4H organization. In addition, he was very helpful and dedicated on his family farm.

“My greatest dream is to become a forest worker and to inherit the farm at home, together with my brother” (Halvor, age 18, 2015).

I once asked Halvor why he was so much more open about his dreams and future prospects than the other boys, and he answered that he thought it could be because he was trained in leadership from the youth organization 4H. Halvor was the contrast to the media discourse on rural young men. The quotation's above shows how Halvor have been dreaming about a rural life since childhood. It is in the rural he wants to establish himself and here he wants to live. Choosing forestry his something he wanted since he was a child all his interests is concentrated around that.

But Halvor also knows that working within the rural industry such as farming and forestry is hard,

“It is very seldom that one man can work with farming as only income. Farming is hard and tough life and usually the whole family needs to contribute. In order to make it financially, you often need to have another job as well. I want to work with forestry and farming together with my brother” (Halvor, 18, 2915).

Getting to know Halvor showed me a different world than the media discourse on rural young men. Halvor was not a passive actor that choice rural life because of lack of opportunities. In contraction, he knew that rural work life is hard. Therefore he worked solidly in order to follow his dream. In the same way as other men I met in the field, Halvor also told me “you don’t get rich working in forestry or farming”. Halvor had top grades; he was competitive, popular and curious. I asked myself, what could be the reason behind Halvor dreaming so strongly about a life in the rural, a familiar world that he had already known since he was a child. Although I observed Halvor at the forestry competition and at the school Kviståsen, and with the machines and chainsaws in the forest Finnskogen, it was when I visited Halvor during summer vacation at his farm that I really started to understand why Halvor worked so hard to get a rural life.

He picked me up with his car in the morning. I came with the bus. We drove to his farm and I met his family. Today, Halvor, Halvors dad and brother were working with moving potato boxes. Halvor came from a potato farm. I filmed him the whole day while he worked at the farm. Halvor, although being the youngest was clearly a central part of the work-power at the farm. He was in charge and I could see how the parents relied on him. I got the opportunity to talk with his mom who told me that without the sons it would have been impossible for her husband and her to be potato-farmers. They had been potato farmers for generations and she told that she was very grateful for their sons wanting to inherit the farm and the forest that they owned.

All the work I saw Halvor did at the farm was impressive. I observed that he was familiar with the hard work and something he had been doing for several years. While Halvor and I walked to a tractor at their property, I asked him if he got tired of working so much at the farm. He told me that he did get tired of this sometimes. For instance he did not have so much time to spend on friends as a child and now as a youth he felt that he did not have as much time as he wanted to meet girls. He told me he hoped that he could meet a girl that wanted the same life as him.



“When I was a child I always climbed into the tractor and slept inside of it. In the morning, my parents would find me sleeping in the tractor. I loved sitting next to my dad in the tractor while he was working on the farm. I have cousins in Oslo, every summer since we were kids they have visited us here at the farm, and they loved it here. I have visited them as well. Oslo is nice but it is nothing like life here” (Halvor, age 18, 2015).

In contrast to the media representation on rural men, Halvor did not choose a rural life because of lack of opportunities. The text above shows that forestry, farming and life in the rural are what Halvor has been dreaming of since he was a child. By studying the social aesthetics concerning Halvor's passion for preforming with chainsaws, participate at forestry events such as Elmia Wood (portrayed in the movie), and interaction with his family at the farm are objects and gestures that manifests who he consider himself to be, who he wants to be and what that generates meaning. He knows that he has to work hard to live in the district. The decline in rural industries makes competition of local jobs harder, and the values Halvor pursue provide him with a greater chance to establish a rural life in honorable way.

## **6.0 Student-teacher relations: Competing notions of rural masculinity**

### **6.1 Being a bloke: Toughness, showing off and “not making it”**

“Being a bloke” (å være kar) was a central concept among the boys at Kviståsen in their descriptions of other young men, or if they were joking with each other. “Being a bloke” means to try to be cool, act tough and show off one's power, status or possessions in front of others. As Martin said, “They try to be better and tougher than they really are” (Martin, 23-year-old local boy). The phrase was mentioned several times during fieldwork. The boys would use it if we saw someone driving fast with a car or making car-noises in order to get attention or if someone had a fancy Volvo 240 that they had “built themselves”. “Being a bloke” was the description of someone who tried to get social power and status without actually managing to get it. However, such young men could become popular, but rather because they were looked upon as entertainers, and not because they were respected in the community.

It seemed to be more legitimate and accepted being labeled as a bloke if you were a young man than if you were adult or elderly. While it normally was the young men and boys at Kviståsen who used the phrase, I also heard adults say it to describe the behavior of an elderly man when he was in his youth,

“Off course I know Evenes. He is a local farm owner and his family has been living here forever. However, when he was young, he always tried to be a bloke, you know, and he was often in the newspaper. You should go to his farm and film him. He knows a lot about the history of the community” (Knut 55, local bus driver).

However, being a bloke was often used to describe local people that had been living outside of Solør for a while. Maybe they had been to school outside of Solør, at a longer vacation or been working in the city for a while. All the “new things” they brought with them back to Solør such as material things like clothes such as jeans, t-shirts and sneakers that Solung seldom used. Some, if they had been living outside of the district for a while would stop talking Solung and then they would be “trying to be blokes” for real. This concept can be seen as an expression of a male identity that in one regard lives up to one kind of hegemonic masculinity, that of the “rich and tough man” but at the same time is challenged by another kind of ideal masculinity, of the humble and traditional man, referred to as “solid wood”.

## **6.2 Solid wood: Performing “traditional” lumberjack masculinity**

During my fieldwork, a forest day was arranged in Finnskogen. Here, local forest workers, forest owners as well as local politicians and entrepreneurs gathered in the forest to hear about the newest inventions, see the newest machines and tools being demonstrated and network. The boys and teachers from Kviståsen were there as well. Around 100 men was gathered in the forest, also a few women was there too. The men was wearing lumberjack outfits such as jeans, checkered shirts and boots. I filmed the men the whole day. I was there the whole day, and filmed conversations between them, their lunch and the different speeches and demonstrations. During a demonstration of a new high technology forest machine, I started to film some of the men while they were watching the demonstration. Suddenly a man came over to me and pointed towards one of the men, and said: “Point the camera towards his boots. You can see it by the way he stands. As you see, his standing firm on the ground. You can see the man is made of *solid wood*”.

I knew the concept *Solid Wood* (*Hel Ved* in Norwegian) from before. It became famous from Lars Myttings (2012) non-fiction book *Norwegian Wood*<sup>13</sup> - a huge publishing success in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia. The film material I have from the forest day

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<sup>13</sup> The original Norwegian book title is “Hel ved”.

are filled with footage of men that at least look the way you would imagine men who want to be solid wood look like. It was also something I knew from the hipster environment in Oslo some years ago. It became very popular to look like a lumberjack. That city men wanted to dress like lumberjacks was something the men I met during fieldwork hated. They described them as posers; soft men who did not know much about physical work, but pretended to be something they were not.

However, being Solid wood was described as the contrast to being a bloke. While the bloke was someone who tried too hard, and no one believed, and was considered a poser and entertainer, men described as Solid wood were associated with humbleness, authenticity, knowledge and were seen as role models. However, the men seldom talked about being Solid wood as some sort of phrase. Instead I observed what it meant by paying attention to practice and interaction clearly revealing who had status and who had not and how performance of certain kinds of masculinity would earn a man this label, and its connotation of being a role model for the young.

### **6.3 The competition between “being a bloke” and “solid wood” in becoming a Solung man**

Both “being a bloke” and “solid wood” were categories of masculinity that I encountered at Kviståsen. Being a Solung, however, cut across both these categories and identities of different generations because Solung was an identity category that tied to local values and norms, whether or not these were inspired by outside influences and globalized images of manhood or deeply rooted locally. Therefore being a Solung can be understood as a kind of complicit masculinity as it supported any kind of masculine ideal, whether relating to “being a bloke”, and expressing youth, showing off and toughness or relating to “solid wood” and its values of humbleness, vocational skills and adherence to tradition.

As Connell noted (1987), complicit masculinities are those, which do not challenge but rather creates a fundament for hegemonic masculinities. But even if Solung was the fundament for other categories of valued male identity, there were great differences between these categories. Being a bloke, for example, can be regarded as a pathway to acceptance as a young man, that stands in sharp contrast to solid wood, because it entails qualities that threaten or challenge the qualities of solid wood, and vice versa. One cannot be a bloke and also be acknowledged as solid wood. This goes both ways. Also because being a bloke was in some cases associated with city behavior, the boys’ attitude towards such practice and values was ambivalent and caused a dilemma.

The respect that one could get out of being a bloke, in relation to girls and women for example, was regarded as “false” and doomed to failure in the end, because such a status could not be maintained in the broader community and among senior men. It was something tied to youthful behavior and the passage from being boy to being a man, but if one was to become a respected man in the community and get full membership with all the privileges of local acknowledgement, it was implicitly understood that “showing off” in order to attract girls had to be replaced with the values and responsibility of solid wood.

#### **6.4 Peder: Authenticity, actions before words and solid wood without “knowing it”.**

The first time I met Peder was at the forest day. I saw him immediately. He was wearing a forest uniform and looked like he was around his eighties. I went over to him and started to film a conversation between him and another forest man about manual logging technique.

In the city, authenticity has become a buzzword. The dream of living an authentic life makes people go to yoga, eat raw food or dream about moving to a farm in order to cultivate and make their own food. Many people in the city romanticize rural life, and in anthropology, the idea of exploring the other, the rural Other as also been associated with the idea of discovering the untouched and real. Values concerning authenticity is also extremely important in the forestry community. However, I never heard the specific word authenticity being used. The following will describe my empirical observations of authenticity in the field:

It was exciting to observe Peder on the first day. He carefully followed the presentation of the modern technical methods with a watchful eye. He was great to look at, wearing an old-fashioned forestry uniform. Even though it was old and had slightly weaker colors, it was still in top condition. He had thick boots. Bodily, you could see that, despite being an old man, he had been physically active his whole life. You could see it on the movements that he was a man that was taking technical consideration when moving his body. He was trained within maneuvering timber in difficult terrain. As a young man, he had studied at Kviståsen and later worked at the school as a teacher. He was a specialist in laying cableway for transportation of timber in difficult terrain. He had traveled around the world to teach others the technique.

Peder hated war. He had experienced the Second World War in Norway. His eyes got dark when the war was mentioned. Peder was a man of action. Already on the forest day, we agreed to see each other again. I got his phone number and we decided on a time that I could call him. Peder wrote it down in an appointment book he carried in his pocket. When I called him, he told me he had been thinking about my project. If I had asked years ago, he would

maybe have said no to participate, but now he thought it was important that people learned about manual forestry work. The other day he had seen a picture in the local newspaper of a *two-man saw* that the journalist had described as a *Tigersvans*. Peder had called the journalist to correct the mistake, but the answer was that the journalist did not think it was a grave mistake since *Tigersvans* was such a nice name for a saw. The episode had reinforced Peders desire to participate in my project. People should learn about the traditional and manual forestry work, and he intended to show this to the camera and me. He showed me axes, saws and a range of different techniques. Working techniques were the most important thing he had learned at Kviståsen. How to use your body, the rhythm and tempo that suited the different techniques, equipment and tools. So now, this master project and the movie was also Peder's project. It was our joint project to show manual forest work to the world.

Peder drives a red old Volvo 240 that looks like it is in a perfect shape. He parks it in a nicely organized garage. Here every tool and equipment has its own place. Peder shows me the *Tigersvans*. It is a saw for hot-headed people, he explains, and "I have a fierce temper" he says and smiles. While the *tigersvans* requires harsh temper, you need to be two people to handle a two-man saw. I never dared to ask Peder what he felt like being out in the forest. However, the last day we were filming, he explained that forestry is a challenging profession, and that is what makes it fascinating. "Those who chose the profession like challenges", he said. "The times have changed, but young people who choose the professions stay the same".

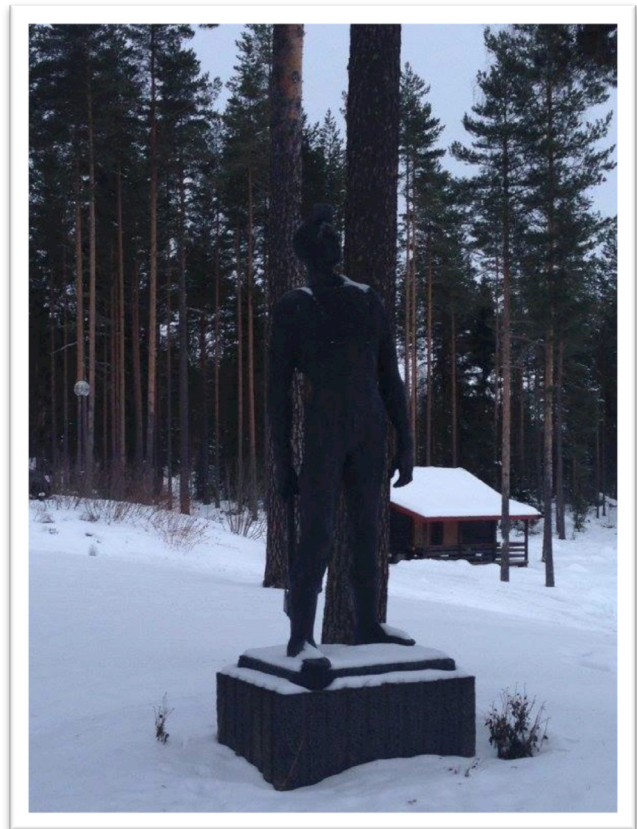
MacDougall (2006) notes that every community has objects, gestures and patterns of behavior that those within the community know. The specific features and uses are instantly recognizable to its inhabitants. I never heard Peder or any other of the boys or men use the word *Solid wood*. But everybody knew what it was. In short, being *solid wood* is a person that you can trust. Someone who stays true to his values and has strong work ethics. It is someone who chose actions before words. Someone not always talking that much, but when he talks, people will listen. You can identify him through objects and gestures, because he does not need to tell who he is, simply because he *is* solid wood .

## 7.0 Cleaning the statue: Social aesthetics of the school

When I first came to Kviståsen it struck me as some kind of scene from a movie. In the same way as MacDougall described his meeting with Doon School, my first meeting with Kviståsen was like “a performance going on” (2006, 105). The school consisted of many buildings constructed in 1947 (see chapter two). Outside of the school was a statue of a lumberjack, portraying a proud and strong man with an axe in his hand. He was strategically placed outside the school surrounded by trees, looking at the trees as if he was trying to figure out which to cut.

A previous teacher and retired forest worker at the school told me that a local forest worker was the model behind the statue. During my fieldwork, the statue ended up having a central role. In the afternoon, I would often walk around in the school area by myself. I could also stand outside the school looking at the statue in the mornings, and then suddenly a bell would ring, and boys would run out of the main door of the dormitory ready for a day in the forest. They would walk beside the statue in order to get down to the parking lot where they would drive with their teacher to the forest. I would stand there with the camera directed towards them, and they would walk towards me, all dressed in the same “costume”/workwear. Then they would depart to different classrooms, cars or workrooms.

MacDougall (2006) argues that it might be possible to view “a small community such as a school much as one would view a play or other creative work”, and asks “who would be the creators, the players, and the viewers” (MacDougall, 2006, 105). In my case, I could be the viewer being *the observer*, while the boys would be the central players, and the creators could perhaps be the teachers. However, we could also easily switch roles, depending on the eyes that watch the play unfold. The last day I lived at the dormitory with the boys was also the last day of school before the summer. The boys were washing out their dorm rooms and cleaning all the workrooms. I went out to the forest worker statue. I wanted to film it one last time. I saw that the status was full of bird dirt and decided to wash the statue. I fetched a



bucket with water, soap and a rag and started cleaning the statue. Suddenly I realized that the teachers, cantina women and the boys were looking at me through the school window, smiling, taking pictures and laughing. At that moment, I realized that I was not the only viewer in the field. After three months of fieldwork, I was no longer only a symbol of the world outside the school, I was also a player or actor with a role and having a part in the script, being observed and measured in my actions, deeds and the choices I made. I was part of a drama of inclusion and exclusion, of status and transition, and of becoming somebody, just as the boys were in a process of becoming men, in a transition of status.

### **7.1 The tool room: Performing masculine roles between teacher and student**

The school Kviståsen had a special room for equipment's, tools, machines and motor saws. In the tool room the group of boys would find the motor saws, groom them and clean them, take away all the parts and put them together again. Sometimes the boys would compete in how fast they could put the parts of the saws together. The way they put the parts of the machine together all the way and would clean the tools after use can be consider somehow ceremonial among the men with passion for the lumberjack profession.

I noticed the same pattern when observing the elderly forest workers as well. While the young boys would have a clear focus and rhythm in the way they prepared tools, the grown up forest workers would do the same thing with the machines or the saws they had for personal use at home at the farm or at their cabin. However, their movements and timing was even more of a routine than the young men. I could see the same rituals among the retired men when they showed me how they used the handhold machines, prepared them for used, cleaned the machines and in the way they used their body when they performed the different traditional techniques.

At the forest school and in the classroom I saw how the students learned the skills properly and warned about the dangers of not being careful doing it the right way. It was interesting to see the teacher Jostein instruct the students in the classroom. To me he seemed to act more like a coach and a mentor than as a teacher. He was always enthusiastic in his approach, serious and strict towards the students, but still warm and kind. The students clearly showed respect for him and sometimes I heard small close conversations between him and a student. The students would be eager to tell him a story, maybe about a special tree they had seen or some type of special machine, and he would always listen patiently and take them serious.

Although the teachers were not interfering or correcting the boys when they where

talking, playing or joking together, they would still be clear and strict when they were teaching them something or giving them an assignment. The teachers educated the students about the responsibility they had with the tools and machines, and among all the three generations I could see a serious attitude whenever tools and machines were discussed, described and used. Any kind of clumsiness or playing with tools was not only strongly forbidden, it would even be considered highly disrespectful. During the time I was there I never tried the instruments myself and nobody ever asked me if I wanted to try. A person needs experience and special skills to be allowed to interact with the tools.

One time in the tool room I was filming the boys when they were going through the tools together with the teacher. The teacher was screaming the name of the boys, using their second name and the boys replied with a report on every instrument and tool that they had, one after one. The boys were quiet and disciplined during this ritual with a formal and solemn feeling, and after it was over one of the boys gave me a chain saw so I could feel the weight. It was heavy and it was not before that day I realized that all the trips in the forest where the boys were carrying all the equipment, they were carrying quite heavy stuff with them that not just anybody would be able to handle. Still I never heard them complain about that, although they heard me complaining about carrying my camera equipment.

## **7.2 Working in the forest: Becoming men through imitation of male superiors**

The forest education outside the school is held in a part of Finnskogen near Flisa. Usually the boys gather with their teacher around eight or nine in the morning and then the teacher will drive the whole group of boys out in the forest and start the training. Some of the boys will start practicing driving the forest machines while others will go with a teacher in a smaller group using chain saws to clean an area.

What is important to everybody is to treat the forest with care and attention. When driving the machine it is important to handle the machine in a way that is lenient with the forest. The same thing applies to the chain saws. It is important to fill on gas on the chain saw before entering the forest so that you are sure that you will not spill gas out in the forest. Crucial in the education is also how to treat the forest in a sustainable way. Almost all of the boys are from families that have long tradition with forestry so values concerning sustainable forestry are transferred from generation to generation. Sustainable forestry stands central in the forestry education. In this way the young men were transformed from being young men, in some cases seen as “being blokes” with little respect for traditions, to becoming on their way to earn the label and identity of solid wood, and in line with what it means to be a real Solung.



## 8.0 Conclusion

The main idea behind this project was to find out what motivates young rural men to *stay in their home county* instead of seeking opportunities elsewhere, and how rural young men construct their identities in the process from being boys to becoming respected men. The thesis has shown that the study of social aesthetics of a forestry school provides rich material for understanding how the students see and construct themselves as forestry workers, and which practices and ideals of masculinity and forms of cultural resistance unfold as they find their place today's Norwegian society.

In order to analyze the way young rural men construct their identities in the rural community around Kviståsen in Hedmark I applied the methods of visual attention to social aesthetics of the school and thick description of the observed situations as well as addressing the core notions and expressions, which the boys and men used in relation to everyday interaction and how to "become a man" in the community. Furthermore, I applied the theoretical concepts of hegemonic, complicit, marginalized and subordinate masculinities and of cultural resistance, which in different ways shed light on identities of young men in relation to the school and machine use in the forest, in relation to women and other men, including their teachers, other seniors and finally, in relation to city people.

By observing and analyzing the social aesthetics of objects, gestures and patterns of behavior, I have tried to identify what generates *meaning and agency* among the young rural forestry worker. I found that boys at the school construct their identities through interaction with a range of objects such as tools, saws, machines and symbolic elements such as the food they eat and the clothes they wear as well as everyday gestures and expressions of male identity in relation to each other, to women and not the least to the teachers as their primary role models.

The transition from boyhood to manhood was a recurring issue among my young informants, troubled by the challenges of becoming "real men" and living up to ideals of masculinity in rural areas, through education, work and finding a partner. To different degrees they pursue what they see as traditional values by trying to become "solid wood", meaning a man who is trustworthy, hardworking and humble and or sometimes by "being a bloke", in the sense of expressing toughness, youthfulness and materially showing off their status. Both of these forms of masculinity are sought for but in the end they know that they must live up to the "solid wood" qualities in order to be accepted by the local community in the long run and

acquire their place and membership in the group. While these male identities are in a sense competing in the internal dynamic among the boys and their teachers, I realized that another identity, being Solung, was expressed vis-à-vis people from the outside world, often to distance and differentiate themselves from so-called city people. Being Solung entails being skeptical towards changes and city people and I experienced how their reaction to me as city women and others revealed that they build their own Solung identity around language use, taste in food and clothes, hard manual work, and a local pride connected to the traditions of forestry skills and interaction with nature.

I interpreted the Solung identity as the most foundational to all men, young and older, at the school, and as an identity, which is what Connell call complicit masculinity, since it encompasses both youthful practice as in “being a bloke” and ideals of adulthood in the “solid wood” identity, and because being Solung did not challenge any of these two hegemonic ideals. But although the boys practiced complicit masculinities and tried to live up to hegemonic masculinities of “being a bloke” or becoming “solid wood” in the local context, the adherence to the identity of Solung, I argue, can be seen as an expression of a subordinate masculinity in a national context, through resistance to ideals of manhood represented by city people and media portrayals of rural men as backward, marginal and “uncivilized”. What Krange and Skogen term cultural resistance seemed to be a widespread practice that entailed an emphasis on eating meat on a daily basis, defending the right to shoot wolves, and a pragmatic use of the forest and dominance over nature, in opposition to city people’s appraisal of a more romanticized version of nature through environmentalism, saving animals, eating vegetarian food and protecting nature. However, this did not mean that the boys and the teachers disrespected nature. Quite the contrary, I observed how they interacted with nature and the forest in a very respectful, careful manner, in the way they used the machines and tools in the forest, performing the skills and techniques learned from their older role models.

It is important to stress, that although the boys were skeptical towards change from outside, and certain modern value from the city, time does not stand still among the young forest workers. There is a decline in rural industries and increasing competition around getting and keeping jobs in the region. The young forest workers know that rural working life and private life, including finding a partner, is hard, and so they must keep an open eye to developments of modern machines and technology. This applied both to their professional and their private life, using Facebook, Tinder and listening to rap music and music videos, showing that they are not resisting global influences, but actively incorporating some “modern” features into their everyday life, while rejecting others.

I have in the thesis tried to challenge the idea of young rural men as passive actors who have little say in choosing their own destiny. By telling the story of different informants, observing and describing them in the field and at different social settings as well as looking at their role models I found that many of my informants actively choose life in the rural community based on childhood dreams, hopes for prosperity and realization of the good life, and do not merely navigate their lives based on lack of opportunities. In addition I learned that my informants represent themselves and form their own identities vis-à-vis the surrounding society as well as in relation to each other and older rural generations.

Using a personal account of the challenges I encountered in the field as an “outsider” from the city and a female “other” with a foreign background I described and conveyed through concrete examples of their use of sexual language, their steady work in the forest and social activities in the rooms at night how elements of masculinity shape their life at the school and confirm their youthful manners of dealing with what it means to be and become a Solung man. Through methods of participant observation and creating confidentiality in the role similar to that of an “older sister” I describe how one, as a fieldworker of another gender, class and background, can manage to gradually get closer to being accepted as part of the Solung community by acknowledging or adapting to their values, language use, manners and by performing certain roles there.

Using MacDougall’s approach of attention to social aesthetics I found that although interviews and words of the informants are important, in the very concrete and comprehensive way they describes their passion for forestry, the most important way of understanding their interaction with nature and what makes them an integrated part of Finnskogen and the community is gained by observing and sensing their action and navigation in close contact with machines, tools and the elements of the forest. The social aesthetics of movements, gestures and handling of machines in a very particular place and sensory environment of smell, sound and vision is what ultimately gives an impression of what it means to be a boy in the forest, and a boy on his way to becoming a man.

For example, the manner in which informants like Kristian handled and dominated the machine and nature around him, through corporeal effort and sensory attention to the surroundings bear witness to how the young men sought to acquire the skills needed to take over the jobs of the older generation, and carry the responsibility that is absolutely necessary to become respected by teachers, fellow students and the community and thus, living up to the local ideals of masculinity.



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