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Russetid: The Norwegian Ritual Transition to Adulthood

A Thesis

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Seventeen days. At the end of their final year of high school, Norwegian teenagers spend seventeen days drinking and partying all while traveling around the city in giant luxury buses, all while wearing matching outfits. This is the Norwegian graduation celebration known as russetid; the time of russ.

The prospect of my undergraduate thesis being focused on russetid was something met with shock and amusement from my participants. Norwegians found it novel that russetid was a topic I devoted so much time to researching in an academic setting. Their reaction speaks to the lack of popularity of this topic among researchers, proven by the fact that scholarship specifically regarding russetid is rare, dated, and often published only in Norwegian. This lack of attention is exactly why research—such as that done in this thesis—is important. The unobserved truths of a culture can be found within their rich, unique, meaningful rituals - even in small countries like Norway. This thesis will address russetid through an anthropological and folkloric lens in a way that has not been done before, focusing on the personal experiences and stories of the very people who have participated in this rite of passage.

Background

A rite of passage is a transition from one life stage to the next and the experiences within them help teach participants what they need to know to succeed in their new social role. Rites that are culturally widespread, as russetid is in Norway, become a significant marker of an individual's cultural capital. Russetid's cultural significance comes from its reflection, and enforcement, of the behavior, beliefs, and culture of Norwegian adulthood - such as alcohol use, conformity, and career path - through an intensified ritual performance. Russetid is a rite of passage structured by and for its own participants - 18-year-olds. Through social policing and

violence, russ are enculturated into intensified values and behaviors aligned with social concepts of cultural capital in adult Norwegian society with the hope of creating a homogenized adult population.

Russetid makes up the period of time from May 1st to May 17th when students in their final year of high school celebrate their graduation and transition into adulthood. This celebration, called russefeiring, functions as a coming of age ritual and a form of bonding and enforces cultural expectations and norms. The russ (participants) all wear the russedress (full body suit or overalls) - and russelue (hat with tassel) colored in coordination with their field of study. The celebration starts with the russedåp (russ baptism) then the rest of the celebration typically takes one of three forms: russebuss, vandreruss, or russebiler. The most costly and intensive choice is the russebuss which entails the formation of a group with a theme and group name which is used as the base for the design of a full sized bus. The bus will include sound systems and party lights which are used for rulling - partying in the bus while being driven around the city. A less intense version of this is the russebiler which functions the same as russebuss but is instead in a small van. The last, vandreruss, meaning walking russ, may choose to form a group with a name and theme, however, they don't have a bus or van and will have their own parties or, if invited, will rulle with the other russebusser.

Methodology

This research was done using qualitative research methods, conducting multiple in-depth interviews with 6 individuals. All research participants were Norwegians, four men (referred to using the pseudonyms Henrik, Elias, Jonas, and Einar) and two women (under the pseudonyms Eva and Noora). Henrik, Elias, Noora, and Eva all completed russ themselves while Jonas and

Einar witnessed russ as outsiders. Through face-to-face Zoom calls, phone calls, email, and text messaging, I kept in contact with my research participants from October 2020 until March 2022 and used their insight to guide the conclusions and analyses that are drawn throughout this thesis.

Because russetid is adaptable and changes each year with each new group of russ, it can change to address the dynamic popular Norwegian values and beliefs. Despite the fact that adults are not a significant part of this rite of passage to continue its legacy, russetid maintains popularity and cultural significance because of its ability to remain relevant. Rituals reflect important societal aspects because if they were not culturally relevant, they would die out.

Russetid also maintains its own longevity by institutionalizing its own process of recruitment and enculturation, demonstrated in a few different ways. For example, on May 17th the russ parade alongside and in front of Norwegian citizens and act as examples and role models for the next generations. They also hand out russekort, which are like individualized business cards matching in color with the individual's russeadress featuring the russ' name, year of graduation, and a quote of their choosing. Children collect these cards for fun and this process creates interactions between the russ and future russ, ensuring its continuation.

Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu is the creator of the concepts of habitus, and social/cultural capital. He defines habitus as the way one's approach to the world is dependent on one's background which influences one's expectations, reactions, etc. To align oneself with a certain habitus can bring social and cultural capital that can lead to an increase in status and social mobility. Capital can determine one's role in society and the social world. Cultural capital can be described as what one has and knows, and when one shares cultural capital with others, a feeling of collective identity can occur as a result. Social capital is who one knows; their social network. Groups share their capital so that it becomes part of their collective capital, therefore

joining a group grants one access to their collective capital, and the more capital one has determines how easily they are accepted by the group as more capital makes one more desirable.

To not participate in drinking is to isolate oneself and effectively kill social opportunities while also marking oneself as different. “But in my Russegroup, we never met anyone who didn't drink. Maybe they took a day off, but then they didn't join the events or whatever we did at all.”

The policing which occurs to ensure conformity to these norms also contributes to the Norwegian value of homogeneity and ‘equality’. Although there is no rigid set of rules dictating one’s behavior, russetid is not a time of complete freedom from social boundaries or expectations. Despite Henrik’s assertion that Russ and drinking is a choice - “People forget that it's a choice. It is a choice, you don't have to join in” - his personal experience suggests that there is only an illusion of choice. One may not have a written obligation to use alcohol or participate in russ but the social ramifications for not doing so incentivize conformity. The consequences for not conforming may be high, likely resulting in lower cultural capital and ostracization.

Liminal

The construction of liminal space is inherent in the structure of a ritual and is an essential part of how Russetid is able to exist within Norwegian culture. Though some previous literature suggests that russetid is a prime example of the liminal space being constructed by intoxication (see for example Sande 2000 and Banister and Piacentini 2008), it isn't just the presence of alcohol that constructs the liminal. It is the *intensified* use in terms of amount and frequency. Because alcohol use is an important part of everyday Norwegian culture, its presence in this instance does not indicate a disruption or shift in norms. Also, the date of May 1st, when the russedåp occurs, is a more effective marker of the beginning of the liminal period and it is

physically marked when all russ don their russedress on this same day. Intoxication is an inherent part of the tradition because of its place within the ideal Norwegian cultural identity and therefore these behaviors can be enforced during this important transitional phase. This is thus not a liminal ritual space that removes social barriers nor does it result in a unified cultural identity but rather constructs an illusion of equality through social pressure that is achieved through the cultural values of conformity or “janteloven”.

As argued by anthropologist Allen Sande, the leading publisher of russetid research, all rituals feature an aspect of conformity because they are based on ideals of equality. Through intoxication and excess, russetid (and other similar rituals) alters the personality and facilitates a space where one can explore their identity with low risk and adopt characteristics that make each russ unique without jeopardizing their sense of belonging, thus creating an equalized youth before their transition to adulthood. This amount of conformity is necessary for the collective integration of the participants into their new roles in society.

My research has led me to a slightly different conclusion (Sande 2000). While I agree that some level of conformity is necessary for all rituals, the liminal period here does not function to allow exploration of identity because, during russetid, differences are policed, especially for individuals whose behaviors and values do not align with those that grant cultural capital. These individuals are ostracized and/or policed so as to not disrupt the maintainment of ‘janteloven’ in Norwegian adult society.

Pressure to conform is typical to some extent in rites of passage, as demonstrated by the russ. Neither the liminal period nor intoxication nullifies all social boundaries and expectations. Despite the lack of a rigid set of rules dictating one’s behavior, russetid is not a time of complete freedom from social boundaries or expectations. There is an illusion of choice, one may not have

a written obligation to use alcohol or participate in russ but the social ramifications for not doing so – including loss of social and cultural capital – incentivize conformity. True, a sense of equality is established during russ and results in collective reintegration into society. However, the distinction is that this equality is not established naturally through the structure of the rite of passage nor is it constructed by intoxication, but that the Norwegian cultural disdain for deviation encourages conformity and social policing which creates an illusion of equality and choice.

Conformity

Rituals such as russetid are a public performance for which uniformity and the erasure of the unique are temporary, but with the hope that the shared ethos will carry over beyond the ritual into life. Beyond russetid, uniformity is continually relevant in everyday life and, as explained by Einar, its importance is demonstrated by its impact on the Norwegian language and culture.

“We have a norm or saying here dubbed “Janteloven” which basically means you are not better or worse than anyone. It’s both loved and hated by everyone I’ve met! In practice it means that you should not stand out, for example by wearing over the top expensive clothing etc. This norm by definition makes uniqueness a ‘bad thing.’”

This account is a testament to the overarching presence of the pressures of conformity that exist before, during, and after Russetid. Russ encourages adherence to a certain set of behaviors through social policing. A strong sense of Norwegian identity is tied to these norms and behaviors, making them the means of gaining cultural capital.

Another aspect of Norwegian language which influences culture and russetid is that the root word to almost every emic term regarding russetid is ‘rus’, meaning intoxication. As alcohol

is an apparent part at nearly every step of this ritual, this translation is not surprising. According to the theory of linguistic determinism,¹ the consistent presence of the idea of intoxication can impact the conceptualization of russetid as a ritual as a whole. At every turn its participants are reminded of the implicit association between russetid and intoxication, which in turn is carried out through excessive alcohol consumption.

Secularism

Historically, Norway has always been Protestant, most commonly evangelical Lutheran, and therefore a culturally significant rite of passage was confirmation. Because confirmation became a signifier of adulthood in a legal and social sense, it was required by Norwegian law from 1736 to 1912. One was to be confirmed by the age 19. Once one was confirmed they gained the rights of adulthood, such as the ability to marry or serve in the military (Thornews). The Norwegian Protestant confirmation, as practiced in the modern era, occurs at age 15 and signifies one's ability to make their own decision to commit to the church, they are independent from the will of their family. It is the final process that must occur before one can receive communion, meaning that confirmation opens the opportunity to partake in the consumption of the altar wine.

As Norway is becoming increasingly secular, the significance of confirmation as a rite of passage and a coming of age ritual is weakened and a ritual void created. It is perhaps a causality dilemma, whether this decline in confirmation's popularity is a result of growing secularism or if secular trends were inspired by the separation of church and state. Nonetheless, the cultural significance of religion seems to have declined. As of 2020, only 30% of Norwegians said they believe in God compared to 53% in 1985, as found by The Norwegian Monitor survey. In 2020,

¹ Linguistic determinism argues that one's language shapes one's worldview and cultural behaviors (Ahearn 2019)

the age demographic with the lowest religiosity was from 25-39, with only 19% saying they believe in God (“The Social Survey...” 2022). Russetid has partially filled this void and has grown in popularity inversely to the decline of religion. Though it is important to note that while it can fill the void for a rite of passage into adulthood, it is not demonstrative of growth into religious maturity.

For centuries of Norwegian history, the ability to consume alcohol, at least in the religious sense, was a relevant factor in signifying one’s cultural and religious maturity. Once confirmation was no longer a legal requirement it maintained significance as a religious rite for nearly three centuries. However, its popularity has slowly dwindled over time, despite the introduction of a non-religious confirmation.² As of 2004, only 17% of youth go through Christian confirmation where only a century earlier it would have been nearly 100% (“Confirmation...”). An example of common sentiments regarding confirmation among non-religious Norwegians is seen in this quote from Jonas, an individual who did not partake in any ‘typical’ rites of passages including confirmation and russetid. “I didn’t do confirmation because I’m not baptized and my family didn’t think it made sense to do a non-christian confirmation.”

Alcohol use, and intoxication, have been an important part of religious rituals for thousands of years, seen in Judaism, Catholicism, and ancient Greek religion. It remains an important symbol in Protestant and Catholic traditions which see wine as symbolic of the divine. Similarly, intoxication has been important in instances that function as social markers for maturation, such as the ability to drink the altar wine after being confirmed. This was true in Norway, at least until 1537 when the king proclaimed Norway to be a Protestant country. The

² A separate institution from Russetid.

cultural shifts in Norway that came with the religious reformation saw changes in conceptions of alcohol; as the populous changed so did religion. Piety was tied to abstinence from alcohol and was an ideal promoted in churches. Therefore, after the national shift to Protestantism, the altar wine used in the eucharist did not contain alcohol, and after the Nordic reformation in 1537, Catholic transitional rituals were completely discarded. Alcohol may have a technically small role in religious rituals but its symbolic importance is deeply rooted. As Russetid has grown in popularity, filling the ritual void left by the diminishing popularity of Catholic confirmation, it has become a widespread and culturally recognized marker of adulthood in place of confirmation.

Russetid functions as a rite of passage only in a secular sense - it is a secular celebration with no implicit religious affiliation or spiritual development. Therefore it cannot be said that russetid is a replacement of confirmation, at least on an individual level because while russetid is similar in that it marks a social and individual transition to adulthood, it does not fill the role of a spiritual transformation. Thus, as also seen in the above quote from Jonas, confirmation in modern Norway is seemingly only used in cases when it is spiritually meaningful and relevant to the participant.

The first stage of russetid, the russedåp, demonstrates the religious-cultural influence on russetid. This event is often facilitated and regulated by the participant's school and the russ gather to chug an alcoholic drink, normally beer, in a short amount of allotted time which is typically around 10 or 15 seconds. Any of the drink that the participant does not finish gets poured over their head and russedress. The required russedress is worn for the first time during this ritual (similar to the donning of the Bunad for the first time during one's confirmation),

symbolizing the beginning of russetid; the first time the russ are visibly separated from everyday life.

The significance of intoxication during the russedåp stems from the longstanding cultural association between alcohol use and (religious) coming of age rituals. Russedåp isn't an inversion or replacement of confirmation or baptism, it is an alternative rite of passage that is more culturally meaningful and relevant in contemporary Norway while still building off of historical ritual forms and symbols that have long-standing cultural meaning.

Directly following the russedåp, participants are given their russelue (russ hat) and are 'christened' with a new name which is written on the hat. Henrik tells his experience.

“ And I was called Snope because I played Quidditch and I was basically in a role that Harry Potter plays. And the Norwegian word for snitch is snope. And the funny part is, another word for penis in Norwegian is snope. So I both get called the snitch – the golden snitch – and I got called a dick. So people always assumed I was named after a dick and not the...golden snitch. And it was on the frame of my cap and also written in large letters on my butt. And it was written by a drunk guy.”

With this new name, each participant is baptized; however, instead of using holy water, as used in Christian baptisms, alcohol is used, which symbolically depicts a shift in Norwegian cultural values and behaviors over time. As more people participate in russetid and fewer go through confirmation, it is as if alcohol has become the more 'holy' substance. Alcohol, though culturalized as a pollutant, is the substance that facilitates the incorporation of young Norwegians into cultural and social adulthood. The inverse is true for traditional baptism which uses holy water, a substance seen as pure, to signify one's transformation into religious adulthood.

A notable point of intersection between religion and russetid is the existence of the Kristenruss (Christian russ) group, which is often shortened to Kruss (pronounced k-russ). Although Kruss is a religiously affiliated organization, Christian values are not always held higher by its members than the expected behaviors of russetid. Henrik maintained that he stayed sober during russ and emphasized how he never felt inclined to drink, however when prompted about his russedåp experience, he revealed the integral importance of alcohol use when he said the following: “Yeah, hm. That time I- wait. No! I actually forgot. That time I drank there (at the russedåp).” Alcohol is an elemental part of the russedåp so much so that Henrik participated despite his personal assertion not to drink which was reinforced by his religious beliefs and community values.

Although it was the only time Henrik drank, it was easily forgotten when he originally recounted his experience because there is an inherent correlation between alcohol and the start of russetid. Henrik’s treatment of this event as an exception to his personal stance against alcohol use shows the conceptualization of alcohol within this ritual. Because the russedåp is built on historically significant ritual forms, alcohol in this ritual is not thought to be an intoxicant but rather is seen solely in a ritual sense and as a marker of adulthood. Henrik even explained that the authority figure who conducts the russedåp is labeled the ‘russepriest.’ The use of alcohol is compartmentalized, just as alcohol is thought of differently in a religious context, and is no longer considered an intoxicant but a ritual tool.

Henrik explained that he joined the church initially because he had been bullied in school and it provided him a space to make friends and something to do on Friday nights. Joining Kruss³ was then a way to stay with the community he had already become a part of and cultivate

³ Associated with the Norwegian Lutheran church

social capital which would then benefit him as a russ. However, because members of this group are sometimes visibly separated from the rest of russ participants, their association with Kruss may also result in the loss of cultural capital. As for Henrik, he wore a bandana with the Kruss logo around his leg, which marked him as Christian and therefore caused his peers to perceive him as a teetotaler. Despite their association with Christianity, this section of russ participants does not necessarily approach russetid with a religious goal or intention, but rather aims to participate in russetid in a way that aligns with their Christian value system (which is not equivalent to the value system that grants cultural capital in Norway). This is why Henrik originally found comfort in wearing the Kruss logo; it meant he didn't need to constantly explain his sobriety and therefore helped him avoid ridicule or peer pressure. Or so he thought. Despite his association with the Kruss Henrik faced peer pressure and harassment, especially regarding his abstinence from alcohol.

Pressure to conform is typical to some extent in rites of passage, as demonstrated by the russ. Neither the liminal period nor intoxication nullify all social boundaries and expectations. Despite the lack of a rigid set of rules dictating one's behavior, russetid is not a time of complete freedom from social boundaries or expectations. There is an illusion of choice, one may not have a written obligation to use alcohol or participate in russ but the social ramifications for not doing so – including loss of social and cultural capital – incentivise conformity. True, a sense of equality is established during russ and results in collective reintegration into society. However, the distinction is that this equality is not established naturally through the structure of the rite of passage nor is it constructed by intoxication, but that the Norwegian cultural disdain for deviation encourages conformity and social policing which creates an illusion of equality and choice.

Henrik was the victim of this policing, the intensity of which demonstrates the insistence on conformity and a homogenized culture that appeals to hegemonic Norwegian norms - the characteristics which align with increased cultural capital. Henrik recounted the many times he was asked how he managed to stay sober, during Russ and otherwise, despite all the pressure, and his answer, as if it was simple and obvious, was just to say no. But it is not so simple, as although it appears that one has the freedom to act in accordance with their own personal values, this choice is illusory. Henrik was not able to carry out his own actions without intervention and extreme pressure, as seen in his following story.

"There are some people who are like: 'Oh, you don't drink? Cool'. But then I go to the toilet and he has poured half of a beer into my Coca-Cola. There is this peer pressure - there are these people out there who are like 'The fuck? You don't drink? What is wrong with you?'".

Henrik's experience demonstrates the societal pressure to partake in the use of alcohol, but also the hierarchy of importance between one's own religion/personal morals and participation in the russedåp. Alternatively, the immense importance placed on this event is reflective of the historically rooted norms of Protestant confirmation as one had to be baptized to be confirmed.

Russetid in general is not an inversion of confirmation nor is it an exact replacement; it has grown in cultural significance while confirmation diminished due to the changes in Norwegian values. Ultimately, participating in russetid is not an active nor inherent rebellion against religion nor is Russetid as a cultural institution a rejection of religion.

Gender/Sexuality

Although there are many aspects of russefeiring that attempt to facilitate liminal homogeneity, it still serves as a microcosm of Norway as a whole, albeit an intensified one. Here, russetid will be examined for the way it highlights trends regarding gender performance, social treatment, and sexual behaviors. Sex/loss of virginity is an important symbol in transitioning to adulthood and is therefore a crucial aspect of the celebration of russetid (Boislard 2018). Within the excessive expression of sexuality during russetid there is no absence of sexual abuse and violence, sometimes accompanied by intoxication (alcohol or otherwise) and intensified performances of gender. The amount and tolerance of sexual violence and gender-based harassment during Russetid demonstrates the cultural value assigned to this behavior. These negative behaviors are compartmentalized in the context of Russetid because they are so intrinsic to the ritual process. During russ sex is a means to gain cultural capital, however outside of russ, there would likely be different limits, expectations, and responses.

Although there have been many attempts from outsiders, gender equality and sexual safety are not factors that the russ have picked up or integrated into russefeiring, an indication of the cultural relevance of these issues. Despite many conversations surrounding russ and sexual violence as well as numerous campaigns, very little has been effectively implemented or supported and it shows. For example, the Norwegian Campaign Against Sexual Assault has done multiple press releases speaking on the issue of sexual assault in Norway as a whole but has also addressed it specifically in terms of russ. They state that the majority of sexual assaults in Norway are party-related rapes (Vik 2020). Most notably, this organization is responsible for the well known 'nei er nei' (no is no) patches that are included, along with a whistle and a condom, with each russedress purchased, however, as mentioned by Eva, it is not very effective despite

wide recognition. Because russetid is not guided by any adults or ‘experts’, it is up to the russ themselves to implement and internalize these proposed ideas and solutions and because rebellion is one of russetid’s running themes, the russ are not keen on outsider influence. The aforementioned patches are almost never worn by the russ, as mentioned by Elias when he said the following.

“You don't have to attach the patch to your suit. It just comes and you can choose to attach it or not, but I don't think it's really helping. I think in general it has gotten better, but I wouldn't say because of the patch.”

The sexual behaviors that are encouraged within russ culture, however, are serial sexual activity, sometimes public, and often risky. Sex is a way for a russ to gain clout and cultural capital; various russeknoten⁴ can be earned by fulfilling specific sexual requirements. Thus, having more sexual partners and in risky contexts, the more social clout one gains which is physically marked by the russeknote. Most notoriously, someone will earn a golden pinecone to signify that they have had sex in the woods. These knots are outward expressions of one’s sexual experiences and are proudly worn to signify their achievement and cultural/social capital.

Similarly, another example mentioned by both Elias and Henrik is the use of russ hoodies as markers of one’s sexual achievements. They explained that male russebuss groups often make sweatshirts with their group’s logo and name on the front and roster of the group members’ last names on the back. The owner of the russ hoodies have their name highlighted on the roster, indicating the identity of the wearer. Oftentimes russ will order many extras and when a member

⁴ . Russeknote are strings attached to the traditional russ hats in which one ties different objects as physical markers of different challenges they have completed.

sleeps with a girl they will give her one of the sweatshirts with their name highlighted so that they can claim their conquest and she can be used as a trophy. This connotation is clear in Henrik's story about his sister.

“So if you sleep with someone, you give them a hoodie and then you can see who the wearer slept with. My sister borrowed my hoodie for a russ team party and she didn't want to put it on until she got to the party because everyone would think... Yeah.”

Despite the equalizing qualities of the liminal period and the donning of the russedress, gender is still marked during russetid. Gender, the concepts of man and woman and the differences between them, are constructed rather than innate and are therefore recreated during russetid in spite of the equalizing factors. The separations and hierarchies are learned and enforced by culture (Abu-Lughod 1991). Judith Butler continues this argument by saying gender is not a personal construction and presentation of an inner self or identity but is instead the repeating of norms that one is socialized within and taught (Butler 1988).

During russ, women are often categorized as sexual conquests whose worth stems from their physical attractiveness. As detailed by Henrik, there are some instances in which younger, non-russ students (specifically, girls) may participate if they buy a ticket to attend the bus party. The factor that determines who is allowed into this exclusive party is one's physical attractiveness; as Henrik explains, one “has to be attractive to even get asked”. They are only invited into party spaces, such as the bus, where drinking and sex occur, possibly because this is the context in which both parties are able to gain cultural capital. For the male russ, the girls are a means to gain capital in terms of sexual experience, and the girls gain capital just from the association with an older russ group. Elias explains this dynamic in the following quote.

“There's always this desire for younger people – who are not russ yet – to be with russ and rulling and at their parties. And thats where a lot of... it's not rape, but it's still... Where they kind of get pressured into that. Yes. Cause there's a lot of clout chasing.”

However, the girls are treated like objects which can be used as a stepping stone for one's own personal social gain. Because sex causes an increase in cultural capital an increase in cultural capital can cause one to be more wanted and valuable in social circles. It is not important to ensure that the girls have a good time nor is their safety a priority; their safety is treated more like a game. Like a shark playing with its food. Russ groups sometimes drop the girls off in remote places just for the fun of it. Both Elias and Noora explained this phenomenon to me using similar tones and word choices. The russ' treatment of younger girls does not seem to be perceived differently depending on one's gender. Noora said the following.

“Because they're (younger girls) trying to party with the russ too. So they will pick them up in the bus and the girls will come up on board and they'll just drive off with them and then drop them off somewhere else. Which is sometimes fun but other times they'll drop them off somewhere so remote that it's hard for them to find their way back.”

The following quote from Elias highlights the importance of ease and number in terms of sexual relationships, at least, in the context of male russ groups.

“It's obviously easier for them to just to pull up to some girls (non-russ) who are just interested to join them and party. And they are with them for an hour or two, partying on a bus or sleeping with them or whatever, and then they just drop them off somewhere because they don't care about their safety or if they come back home safely. They'll just

drop them off for convenience. And there are groups who, for fun, just drive as far away as possible to drop them off.”

Through sex, males can prove their social status, virility, manliness, and dominance through female “conquests”, which reinforces hegemonic patriarchal systems socially and culturally. The ideal image of ‘manliness’ is the inverse of the image of ‘gayness’, which in turn means that heterosexual sex contributes to one’s masculinity. To say a man is ‘acting gay’ is an effective way of socially diminishing their sense of masculinity. Perhaps the harassment that Henrik experienced was so tied with male genitalia because of the fact that many people thought he was gay. Therefore these actions were attempts at further diminishing his masculinity and therefore also reducing his social clout.

“The first time someone meets me, they always think I'm gay. So, I had this quote written on my pant leg that said “how bent can a straight object be?” You have another word for penis in Norwegian which is k-u-k, kuk, and they wrote a big K-U-K on my leg. And one time I was at a party, and I was laying in the grass with my friends and someone wrote “kuk”, the word for penis, on my entire back!”

Similarly, his performance of gender, when deemed to be not masculine enough, was labeled as gay and reacted to with violence to demonstrate the social disdain for this behavior. Though omitted by female participants, every male participant mentioned the significant presence of physical violence and fights that occur during russetid. These fights function as a way to prove dominance, manliness, or ownership of women but also serve as a means to police peers who may not conform to or agree with popular Norwegian values. In response to a gender performance that is deemed to be ‘ineffective’ or incorrectly demonstrative of the ideal concept

of masculinity, violence – often physical but sometimes solely verbal – is used to punish and enforce the correct behavior. Elias details this mentality when he said the following.

“It's, first of all, about status. You want to be like the top groups or whatever. People run their mouths a lot and people are constantly drunk... and want to be like the toughest guy or be alpha or whatever...there's a lot of fighting.”

Similarly, in the following story, Henrik details an experience in which this very phenomenon occurs. His performance of his gender is not one that would grant him cultural capital and because of his unconventional expression, he is approached violently by a man intending to police his behavior.

“I used to do this thing where I would switch clothes with a friend. I would wear her blouse and she would wear my shirt. There was this guy at a party; I went out on the balcony, there was like 20 people there, and he was just shouting over everyone like ‘What the fuck are you wearing are you fucking gay?’ So, there's always this guy at a party. And he was about to punch me because I was wearing clothes that he felt looked gay. I said to him; ‘don't be mad at me just because I look more beautiful than you.’ So, I kind of asked for it.”

Social class

Although the use of intoxication may appear to act as an equalizer, especially through a structural ritual analysis, russetid functions to prolong stigmas surrounding social class and those who live in rural areas. During russ, students police each other based on these stigmas, enforcing the social hierarchy, of class and gender, through physical and verbal violence. Certain russ

traditions, such as the russedress, highlight differences in class and community and create a space which facilitates social discrimination.

As previously mentioned, on May 1st the russ begin to wear their russedress, which they will wear until May 17th without changing or washing their clothes. These garments come in two main forms and 4 colors: a full body jumpsuit style (heldress) and an overall style (snekker) and the colors red, green, blue, and black. The color of one's russedress is representative of their field of study - black indicates a vocational path, green represents agriculture, blue is business, and red denotes a traditional liberal arts education. The majority of russ wear the red and can be referred to as rødruss (red russ).⁵ Based on conversations with my participants, the preferred styles depend on the location of the russ in terms of urban or rural. Participants from urban areas explained that from their perspective those who choose to wear the snekker are associated with rural parts of Norway and carry a stigma. Noora described the sentiment to be similar to the American concept of the 'redneck', explaining that wearing the snekker means that one is not associated with the "class of the cities." Those whose appearance indexes rurality are targeted and harassed, sometimes with physical violence. This ostracization could indicate a Norwegian cultural value of wealth and a social disdain/rejection of individuals living in an urban area, going to university, and getting a 'respectable' job. In the following quote, Elias details the stigma surrounding the snekker.

"In the more posh, more central parts of Norway, you don't wear the snekker. It's a status thing, you don't want to be seen in that. I had a friend who bought them (the snekker) because he didn't really know about the customs of russ and I remember he was

⁵ Red may be the most popular color because of social pressures/policing which encourages this path of study or it may be due to the fact that the red path of study denotes that one is likely, and able, to attend university ("Norway - Secondary Education." 2022).

genuinely scared of being beaten up just because he wore those kinds of pants. I come from a very posh county and we don't like it when people break with a custom, I guess.”

Therefore, wearers of this style are targeted because they exemplify what is deemed as an inferior or unhonorable occupation or lifestyle and therefore have less cultural capital and do not maintain janteloven.

The other variable factor regarding dress is the color which denotes one's path of study. Russ who wear green (grønnruss) or black (svartruss) russedress are ostracized and, svartruss especially, are often victims of physical violence because of the societally low ranking of their educational/occupational path. This is a form of internal policing that reveals and addresses the cultural value of wealth and occupations that are perceived as honorable or having high wages. Elias continued his story by adding that the same friend who wore the snekker also wore them in black, indicating that his high school studies were focused on vocational skills. He asserts that this color is, similar to the snekker, not a popular choice in his county. Elias specifically pointed out that those who follow a vocational path are not qualified to go to university as they are only required to complete two years of schooling, while the other fields of study take three years. Similarly, Henrik explains the response to the svartruss.

“There's apparently, like, hate like you're not a real russ, you don't deserve this because they only go for two years of school, instead of three (and continue to apprenticeships rather than university). So, there's a tendency to think that they don't deserve this (russ) because they only went two years of school and didn't have all the same classes as the rest of us.”

The word ‘soss’ is used in reference to the upper class in a way similar to the English words “snobby, snooty, spoiled.” Jonas specifically described it as the people who ‘try to act and look upper class’ which could be expressed through brand name clothing and technology, such as always flaunting the newest iPhone. He says that those who wear blue are often seen to be the most ‘soss’ and inversely the black and green are the least; the concept of ‘soss’ being akin to one's cultural capital.

“So my friend actually wore those (overalls) as a kind of protest...but my group was like ‘you can’t wear the black one, red dress people will go and find the people dressed in black and beat them up.’ That's what my group told me. Because I was like, ‘oh the black one looks pretty cool, maybe I should get that’ and they were like ‘no no no, you're going to get beaten up bro. You’ll get beaten up. Don't do that.”

One can actually gain cultural capital by inciting violence against those with lower capital, as Einar explained that one of the russekorte achievements is actually to “beat up” a svartruss. This constant threat, and encouragement, of violence, then causes weariness about wearing that style russedress (and therefore fear to identify with the qualities that are indexed - vocational studies/work or living in rural areas).

Reincorporation

The final day of Russetid always falls on May 17th, Norway’s constitution day. This day is important nationwide and is celebrated with parades, the biggest of which occurs in Oslo, bringing in around 100,000 attendees each year (“Norway’s...”). The russ join in on this day, still marked (making them stand out, especially to kids who want to collect their russekort) and

wearing their russe dress while many other citizens wear the bunad⁶. The russ are welcomed into the parade, presumably approved as adults, and parade in front of the king. This day is like a community celebration of their new identity that is built from hegemonic values encultured during russefeiring. It also functions to demonstrate what the youth of the country have to look forward to, a part of russetid which at least partially ensures its continuation. Russ will hand out their russekort to children, party on their buses for one last day, and drink. Definitely drinking. Henrik said that this is often the craziest day of partying as it is the last.

Conclusion

Analyzing my ethnographic data using grounded theory and the application of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the values and behaviors which grant cultural capital in Norwegian society are highlighted through russetid and are encouraged through social policing and violence to ultimately create a homogenous youth to reincorporate into adulthood. Although I have spoken on many themes, there is still more research to be done on the topic; especially regarding race and religion, both of which were brought up in the interviews I conducted. These aspects may contribute to why one may choose not to participate in russetid. If one is treated differently during russ because of their race or religion, this may further indicate how these factors contribute to or reduce cultural capital. Another concept that needs to be addressed in the future is the aspect of patriotism and Norwegian identity and how russetid incorporates patriotic sentiments and if the enculturation during russetid is meant to align with a possible concept of an ideal Norwegian identity. Because russetid is a rapidly changing ritual with a rich history, it is important that it remains a topic of study and of anthropological focus in the future. Rites of

⁶ Traditional Norwegian dress.

passages and rituals such as russ can be used as magnifying glasses to examine changing values and trends in a culture.

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