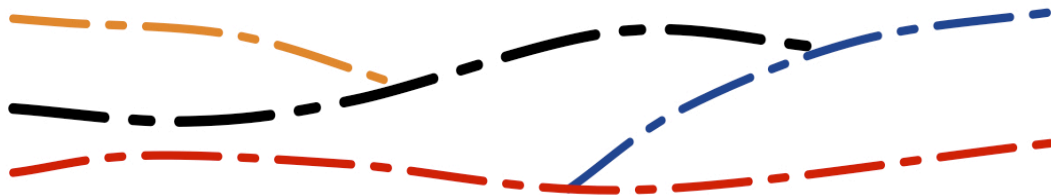


# EUBORDERSCAPES



## Working Paper 12

### Changing Borders in Published Migration Narratives in Norwegian

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### ABSTRACT

This working paper gives some of the interpretations and working hypotheses reached at this stage of my contribution to research within the EUBORDERSCAPES project Working Package 10, Research Task 3: "Cultural Borders of Europe 'Bordering' and 'Re-bordering' Europe through Fictional Narratives: The Case of Immigrant 'Others'". The paper examines migration literature written and published in Norwegian by the children of migrants or migrants born elsewhere but growing up partly in Norway, for rhetorical and narrative figurations of borders and border-crossings which can provide keys to changing conceptions of borders and to the values these are ascribed. The paper argues for the close connection between border concepts in the corpus and the status of the books as performative acts crossing from private experience to public discourse. This process is often explicitly addressed in the texts themselves and is part of an extended borderscape. I intend later to address further texts, the negotiation of border concepts in the reception of texts, the social context and research literature on migration in Norway, and research literature on migration literature in general.

**Key words:** migration literature, border figures, border concepts, borderscapes, public sphere

### The glass wall

Early on in Amal Aden's book *Min drøm om frihet: En selvbiografisk fortelling* (2009, "My Dream of Freedom: An Autobiographical Narrative"), the main character and narrator sees a glass wall in a government office in Oslo. She has just arrived in Norway and has been taken by two other Somalis to register at the child welfare services, the concept of which is incomprehensible to her. "We walk in through a door, and I see a woman sitting behind a glass wall, just like they sat at the airport."<sup>1</sup> This is the first time she meets and talks with – or is talked to by – white Norwegians: "We go into a small room with the white ladies. We sit down around a table, and now they all speak Norwegian. I do not understand anything. The only word I recognize is my name" (38).

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<sup>1</sup> My own translations from the Norwegian texts, unless otherwise indicated. I have not included the original Norwegian texts in this working paper.

What we may recognize is the image of the glass wall or divider, manifesting a form of border. In feminist discourse, a metaphorical glass ceiling allows women pursuing careers to imagine reaching further in the hierarchy, but bars them from actually moving upwards. In the story "La frontera de cristal" ("The Crystal Frontier") by Carlos Fuentes, part of the novel of the same name (Fuentes 1996, 187-213, trans. Fuentes 1999, 166-189), a male guest worker from Mexico and a female office worker in New York have an encounter and attempt to communicate with each other, but any true meeting is prevented by a highly symbolic glass wall: she is standing inside the building, while he is washing its windows, neither able to hear the other. In Aden, in feminist discourse and in Fuentes, the glass divide forms a border with a specific epistemological dimension – the border is transparent and almost invisible – which simultaneously stands for a power relationship and for a form of exclusion. In Aden and Fuentes at least, the glass wall also signifies a lack of signification: people communicate across the divide, but do not understand each other. Aden's book contains within it an indictment of the Norwegian child protection services as ill-prepared to deal with young refugees from other cultures and linguistic spheres.

In both *Min drøm om frihet* and *La frontera de cristal*, the glass wall actually exists in either a non-fictional or fictional world, and is not a metaphor. In both cases however, as we have seen, the glass wall is given a symbolic dimension, indicating a form of partial access without true participation. This symbolic dimension is furthermore strengthened by a metonymical connection to the national border. The image of the glass wall in Aden and in Fuentes is a version of the national border, topographically displaced in a way typical of borders and border figures, indicative of the way in which national borders form and are formed by extended borderscapes (cf. Brambilla 2015, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007, Schimanski 2015). In Aden's text, the image of the glass wall would have had less weight in this reading if it had not been for the added clause in the above quote, "just like they sat at the airport" (38). This is a reference to a description, only a few pages previously, of Amal's entrance into Norway via an airport: "We stand in a queue, and Hassan talks in the weird [*merkelige*] language with a lady sitting behind a hatch" (35). The border to Norway, itself displaced topographically from the outer edges of the nation to an international airport near the capital city, is repeated on a symbolic level as a difference of culture which Amal will meet continually throughout her life in Norway. This symbolic border is given topographical

materiality through an architectural detail, itself a topographical border on a micro scale, which thus allowed to function as a border figure.

### **Sea, war, back, tunnel**

A "border figure" (Schimanski 2006, 58-60) is an image which stands for the border and which gives it a specific form, different from other border figures, bringing with it sometimes the same but also other connotations, also dependent on the context in which the border figure is read ("figure" here refers to rhetorical figures, rather than to people, through of course a person can also be a border figure in the sense used here). Border figures can be striking images such as the glass wall or as we will see, an open sea, a war, a turned back or a dark tunnel. They can however also be more complicated configurations (or "con-figurations") of time and space as produced in narratives of border-crossing or borderland life.

In *Min drøm om frihet*, "My life in freedom", "freedom" (*frihet*) must be understood ironically to a large extent, as Amal is successively subjected to life as a child soldier outside Mogadishu, as policed by Somali communities in Oslo. The freedom she attains at the end of the narrative is contingent on being brought into a police protection scheme in order to protect her from those communities. However, almost exactly at the middle of the novel (on page 92 of the in all 178 pages of the main narrative), there is a narrative turn or reversal. From being caught in a downward spiral into violent behaviour and drug abuse, Amal goes to beginning upward integration into Norwegian society. This halfway point, marked by Amal's meeting the woman who is to become her first Norwegian friend, constitutes a narrative border in the book's text, dividing the first half from the second, and coinciding with the break between two chapters. In a book which is otherwise notable for its stark and direct prose, it is notable that this cultural border crossing is directly preceded by a passage in which the text itself crosses over into the language of metaphor (following Franco Moretti's thesis that "figurality goes up" at the border, Moretti 1998, 45):

I feel as if I am swimming in the middle of the sea, but do not know which direction it is right to swim so as to reach land. I am confused and desperate. I sleep a lot during

the day and often end up in fights at night. I am scared, here is also a war. I feel unsafe wherever I am. I feel that the past is hunting me. I feel alone. I feel that the world has turned its back to me. I am lost for ever because I cannot stop getting high. Getting high is a monster which lives inside me, I cannot live without getting high. I am becoming more and more violent, there is nobody there to help me, I am alone with my problems. The long, dark tunnel which is my life is still dark, there is no light and no future. (Aden 2009, 92)

The passage from alienation to integration is a cultural border-crossing which follows the topographical passage from Somalia to Norway. The border is crossed again and again, at various points in time and in the text. The quoted paragraph contains a string of border figures that attribute different values to the central border-crossing of the novel, just as the glass wall does. Swimming with no sense of direction in open "sea", but with hope of land, points to the disorienting effect of border-crossing, in which the border becomes an uncanny, unsafe zone with no surety of success in its crossing. The perceived conflict lines of "war" in Oslo indicate the way in which the internal strife in Somalia crosses the border to Norway with Amal. Alienation caused by border-crossing and failed promises of integration is a "back" turned; a barrier is formed and the subject is made invisible as the other's gaze turns away, dis-recognizing the self. The extended border-crossing becomes a "dark tunnel" of continual, constricting negativity. Through these figures, the book presents migration for the child soldier refugee as an over-extended border zone.

The narrative border configuration of the plot's turning promises an partial ending to this zone, "freedom" taken in a non-ironic sense. The Norwegian neighbour she meets in a supermarket who is to become her friend has been given the alias "Liv", a Norwegian woman's name but also the noun *liv*, meaning "life", which thus repeats 1) the last sentence of paragraph quoted above, and 2) the very last word of the following short paragraph which ends the chapter before the turn takes place: "I want a better life" (29).

## **Published immigrant tales**

In this study, I examine published texts by immigrants (or the children of immigrants) relating to diaspora communities in Norway, asking how their images and stories of borders and border crossings contribute to shifts in our concepts of borders.

Why look at published narratives? In literary studies, this question is not often asked. Literary texts are mostly assumed to have been published. In social studies however, narratives are often seen as what our lives and identities are made of, together constituting a large set of narratives of which the overwhelming majority are not published. Indeed, the social scientist may even hold a prejudice against published narratives, seeing them as removed from the real thing, subject to the vagaries of markets, publishers and state subsidies. Even worse, many published narratives are in fact fictions and fantasies, and scarcely reliable as objective sources.

In the following I suggest however that published narratives provide essential keys to understanding the public social imaginary which is an important element in a political and democratic society. They are in themselves performative acts of border crossing between the private and the public, making the private visible. Seen in this way, the difference between documentation and fiction is of less importance, though it also often has an effect on how published narratives become part of the social imaginary. Within the public sphere, literature overlaps with other public discourses, even when it describes private, individual experiences.

Norway has a developed culture of public debate in which literature often has played a major role, following the internationally familiar model of Ibsen's plays, for example. While the autonomy of literature has been much debated in Norwegian literary studies, as it has elsewhere, it is clear that Norwegian literature caters for the desire of readers to follow public debates. Looking specifically at immigration literature in Norwegian, I propose in the form of hypothesis that these cater not only a desire for 1) aesthetic experience, but also for 2) ethnographic information about immigrants' lives, 3) political knowledge about ongoing public debates, and in some cases 4) therapeutic identification on the parts of readers who

stem from diasporic cultures or feel marginalized in other ways. The lack of an aestheticized, postmodernist tradition of diaspora literature similar to that which is to be found in English, French, Swedish, German, etc. may indicate that these desires in the Norwegian public sphere have a relatively equal weight.

The embedding of public debate in literature works both ways: on the one hand, literature is given a role in public debate; on the other, literature becomes more difficult to differentiate from other kinds of published narrative. Methodologically, this means that any approach to diasporic literature, a form of literature which addresses highly mediatized public issues, must take into account a wide spectrum of genres, ranging from the purely documentary to the heavily literary, fictional and figural. This spectrum is borne out by the extensive range of published immigration narratives available in Norwegian, including novels,

PHASE 0	generation 1 no authors	no access to Norwegian literary culture	autobiographies, fictionalized autobiographies (sometimes written pseudonymously), anonymized interview-based biographies written in the 3rd person (Eskild 2010), along with anthologies of letters from children
PHASE 1	Khalid Hussain <i>Pakkis</i> ("Paki") 1986	"father" of modern immigrant novel in Norwegian	
PHASE 2	generation 1 ½, generation 2 authors	access to Norwegian literary Culture	

(Kumar 1997), interview-based narratives (Aden 2011), short stories, and narratives resulting from oral narratives projects (Johansen and Vedeld 2008) and autobiography projects (Danielsen 2005). Some of these narratives are produced by diaspora "authors", others by diaspora "public intellectuals", still more by Norwegian "researchers" (my scare quotes indicate the status of such labels as discursively produced subject positions).

Typically, in public and also academic discourse, diasporas are divided up into generations: "1st generation" and "2nd generation" (born in Norway) immigrants. Recently, mention has been made of "generation 1 ½" immigrants, with reference to children born in other countries, but brought up in Norway, but also in a form of ironic discourse analysis of the "generation" rhetoric which emphasizes a feeling of hybridity and "halfness". In giving an overview of diaspora literature in Norwegian, it is difficult to avoid a similar 'generational' logic. One can for example speak of Khalid Hussain's pioneering novel *Pakkis* (1986, "Paki"), a novel of urban youth caught between Oslo street and Pakistani family cultures, as

constituting in itself the “phase 1” of diaspora literature in Norwegian. This would be preceded by a “phase 0”: the original immigrants who lack access to the Norwegian literary and public spheres and thus lack a public voice. It would be followed by a “phase 2” of books by writers who have grown up in Norway, in some cases being brought there as children, in others being born there.

I attempt here to differentiate between immigrant narratives, diasporic narratives and “immigration narratives”. The Norwegian term *innvandrerlitteratur*, seems often, like the term “immigrant”, used to cover literature also written by people born in Norway; thus the term “diasporic” may seem more appropriate. However, my concern here is more to do with narratives of “immigration”, whoever they may be written by: i.e. narratives which include stories of original and secondary border crossings. These are not usually written by adult immigrants to Norway, who have not been in a position to publish such writings. Hussain’s book also does not directly concern the border-crossing into Norway presumably made at one point by the protagonist’s family. Phase 2 authors and writers continually figure border crossings both to and from Norway, usually by airplane, in their narratives. These border crossings are made back and forth between Norway and countries of birth (or their parents’ births), or between Norway and other countries (such as England) connected by global diasporas. Very often however, these narratives also tell the stories of the original immigration to Norway by a previous generation. As such, these narratives provide a rich material for an investigation into literary and para-literary contributions to shifts in the border concept.

### **Borderlinks and umbilical border objects**

Aden’s *Min drøm om frihet*, introduced above, and Roda Ahmed’s novel *Forberedelsen* (2008, “The Preparation”) are both published book-length narratives by authors who are part of the Somali diaspora in Norway. Through their use of genre may shed light on the different forms of publication involved, one being an pseudonymous fictionalized autobiography (“Amal Aden” is a pseudonym), the other a novel – though both address controversial questions of identity and more concretely violence against women through ritual genital mutilation. Somali immigration narratives appear in all the genres mentioned



earlier. As in many other European countries (though not, for example in the USA), Somali immigrants, often refugees, have in Norway been seen as especially “problematic” and “difficult” to integrate; Somalis have also grown to become one of the largest diasporic communities in Norway. Public debates about migration have sometimes focused specifically on Somali immigration, and this may go to explaining to wide range of generic differentiation to be seen in published narratives about the Somali diaspora in Norway.

The two texts are both by women and tell coming-of-age stories, i.e. narratives about young people crossing temporal borders between childhood and adulthood. Both are emphatically narratives of liberation; their main plotlines are structured by extended epistemological border crossings as their protagonists discover they are caught in both Somali and Norwegian discourses. Captivity is a major motif, with both books ending in escape as Ahmed’s protagonist takes the Eurostar train from London to Paris and Aden’s protagonist enters the security of Norwegian police protection.

The two texts however can be contrasted both in terms of plot and style. Ahmed’s protagonist Zara is born in Norway and grows up in a privileged background with professional parents. She feels fully integrated into Oslo society as a child, and it is only on entering puberty that she discovers a change of rules. There may be a reference here to the “Love Laws” of Arundhati Roy’s bestselling postcolonial novel *The God of Small Things* (Roy 1997). Crossing North-North national borders from Oslo to the London Somali diasporic community, Zara finds herself alienated and experiences a form of splitting and a positioning in a “third space”. Aden’s unnamed (though autobiographical) protagonist grows up as a war orphan and child soldier in and outside Mogadishu, crossing the South-North border as a young adult. She finds herself in a life of crime and drugs on the outskirts of the Norwegian state and the Somali community in Oslo, and her narrative becomes one of redemption as she makes a journey both into writing and into protection.

Both books are written in the first person. Ahmed’s book is strongly aestheticized, combining the exigencies of the adolescent romance plot with the postcolonial, magical realist style familiar to readers of much diasporic literature in English. As such, the author utilizes the fragmentation of narrative time, playing with metaphors, fables and other forms

of symbolism, and building a narrative frame around a collection of photos from Hargeisa, which the protagonist finds in her grandmother's house in London. In contrast, Aden's book is written so as to be as straight-forward and accessible as possible, and as spare as everyday language in its use of metaphors. In most of her published work, Aden clearly writes primarily in order to communicate. As its subtitle "[e]n selvbiografisk fortelling" ("an autobiographical narrative") indicates, the book is not a novel, and tends towards the documentary and testimonial. Her main fictional turn lies in her anonymization of herself and other characters through aliases and changes to events and places. The possibility of anonymity in public writing becomes her protagonist's helper in protecting herself and her friends from possible violence.

Aden's stark prose and often nightmarish plot gives her book a perhaps unintended literary force. It also makes it possible to directly delineate the use of metaphor in the book, of special interest when it comes to identifying its conceptions of the border. As described already, the crossing from the prosaic into the metaphoric is made, significantly at textual borders and in conjunction with borders crossings in the plot. Metaphors appear in her foreword (7-9), where she describes the act of writing. They appear, as quoted earlier, directly before the book's turning point, the moment when she for the first time meets the Norwegian woman Liv, signaling an important step in her integration into Norwegian society. The tunnel metaphor from this quote appears already in the foreword, though with the addition there that her border crossing from Somalia to Norway opens into light and freedom (7), summing up symbolic border-crossings from trauma to integration, from violence to security, from voicelessness to writing, from captivity to liberty.

As the reader crosses over into the main narrative of the novel, she or he is presented with a striking image of Amal's aunts' house in Mogadishu, roofless (the corrugated iron roof having been stolen two weeks earlier). The paragraph is linked formally to that in the middle of the book through their common use of a day-night scheme in one of their phrases. The phrase from the middle of the book, "I sleep a lot during the day and often end up in fights at night" (92), stands however in negative contrast to life with the aunts:

During the day the sun fries, now it is evening and cool. The women and I sit close together on the floor with a blanket around us. It is full moon, and the sky is clear and full of stars. The women tell me stories about the stars we see in sky above the house. I listen closely, it is exciting to hear the women tell. The stories make me forget a daily life full of war. (11)

For a moment (before the horror of the next page when her aunts are killed by marauding soldiers), we are presented with an idyllic border figure reminiscent of psychoanalyst Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger's concept of the "matrixial borderlines" (1994). The aunts' house, with its openness to the sky and the close bodily contact between its inhabitants, provides a formal memory of a pre-natal space of "borderlinks" rather than the patriarchal border cut of the Oedipal phase (Lichtenberg-Ettinger 1994, 40-49). Underlying the aunts' stories of the stars is the direct communication of the stars through the roof, again reminiscent of a unordered and subtle "semiotic" and not a structured "symbolic" language, to cite the terms used by Julia Kristeva about the relationship of literature to such a pre-natal space (1990). In this space, narrative is not a negotiation with the Norwegian public sphere or a reminder of violence, but a childhood memory of Somali oral literature. Aden's book finds its way back to an originary scene of story-telling which provides border figures which stand in contrast to the law of violent border-crossing which is the main motif of her book. The spatial configuration constituted by a house without a roof in itself signifies a specific conception of the border, a topos in which the border is replaceable by an open space, and the lack of protection which is the result of a border being lost can temporarily open up to a sublime and relational space.

Aden's protagonist continually meets specific configurations of space which define her sense of borders. More often than not, such as when she first visits the child protection agency, her space is threatened by penetration and occupation by others. The culture shock and accompanying potential for misunderstanding is expressed in the scene where she throws a television – an object which she does not understand – out of the window of the room the agency has provided her with in Oslo (41). Increasingly through the book she experiences social exclusion from the Somali diaspora community and inclusion from her Norwegian friends. Most importantly however, the book figures her life in Oslo as a liminal

period which only reproduces the threatening violence of her life as a child soldier on the outskirts of Mogadishu. Oslo becomes a place a mixing between Norway and Somalia, as a life of drugs and crime creates for the protagonist a war-like situation in a peaceful country. Continually, narrative agents who appear to be her helpers transform into antagonists, symbolic border guards: this applies to members of her family, her friend Mustafa in Somalia and her husband Yassin in Norway, as well as to the child protection agency.

The physical border-crossings between Somali and Norwegian territories take place in aeroplanes. The ordinary migration to Norway takes place under the influence of sedatives provided by her Somali guide, and the sense of border disorientation she experiences here spreads through the book, only to be countered as she gradually gains in confidence and competence after the plot's turning point.

Turning to Ahmed's novel *Forberedelsen*, the image of the roof open to the stars which connects Aden's protagonist to an original security is replaced by a more material form of "umbilical object", a border concept described by Debra Castillo in the context of immigration to the United States (2007). "Umbilical objects" are objects brought to one's new country in order to remind oneself of home; in their new contexts they paradoxically function both as connecting lines tying the migrant to the motherland and as border markers (Castillo 2007, 124-125). The umbilical object in Ahmed's novel is an envelope full of photographs from a prosperous past in Hargeisa, dating back to 1920, which her protagonist Zara finds in her grandmother's house in London.<sup>2</sup> These form the entrance into the main narrative of the book, which then goes back in time and recounts the story how she comes to be alone in her grandmother's house and decides to escape on the Eurostar train to Paris, which is how the book ends. The photographs, mentioned at both outer edges of the main narrative (Ahmed 2008, 9, 165), frame the story in an ambivalent fashion, bringing together a longing for lost origins with an escape from a diasporic community which is caught in traditions Zara cannot live with. They create a figure of border

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of photographic borderscape is a typical topos in migration literature, and can be compared to the sonic and culinary borderscapes which structure other migration novels and which are developed on in Jopi Nyman's and Stephen Wolfe's contributions to EUBORDERSCAPES Working Package 10 Research Task 3.

contradiction in the diasporic experience for a young women conceived in Africa but born in Europe (18).

Before the main narrative, Ahmed however gives a short fable as an introduction to the book (7-8), pointing both to the traditions of Somali oral literature and to the magical realist tradition in postcolonial literature. The fable recounts the story of an exiled slave who is enchanted into a mermaid, but who ends up establishing a new country, which will only be for exiles. It also figures a sailor, who is metaphorically described as a jellyfish on land. As I have already indicated, Ahmed's novel is rich in metaphor, and in particular images of the border between land and sea, of monstrous transformations in keeping with her narrative of coming to age. In terms of border concepts, her figures produce spatial images of cultural hybridity and of being caught on the border between cultures. These images progress however, in a move similar to that in Ingeborg Bachmann's poem on cold war Central European spaces "Böhmen liegt am Meer" (1978, "Bohemia Lies by the Sea"), to the creation of an imaginary nation of exiles in a utopian maritime space.

## **Honour**

Nasim Karim's autobiographical novel *IZZAT - For ærens skyld* (1996, "IZZAT – For the sake of honour") and Romeo Gill's first two parts of a projected trilogy, *Harjeet: Roman* (2008, "Harjeet: Novel") and *Ung mann i nytt land: Roman* (2011, "Young Man in New Land") both involve border crossings between the Sub-Continent (Pakistan and India) and Norway. They also exhibit certain similarities in theme, most clearly an inter-generational conflict involving proud fathers with a strong sense of honour or *izzat* perceived as being part of Pakistani and Northern Indian culture. This theme is lacking in the two Somali diaspora narratives discussed above, but in common with these is an emancipation plot involving escapes. In Karim's novel, the protagonist Noreen makes a dramatic escape after an arranged marriage which takes place during a visit to Pakistan, receiving police protection on her return to Norway. In Gill's novels, the son Akas (or so his brother speculates) becomes the first Indian in Norway to move out from his family against their will, again under the threat of an arranged marriage, moving in with his Norwegian girlfriend. The border-crossings in Karim's and Gill's novels are temporal transitions within coming-of-age narratives, epistemological

crossings as the protagonists discover their own fathers and explore the reasons behind their motivations, and topographical crossings centred around plane flights. Both involve travels to countries of origin which take on the status of non-ritual liminal spaces.

However, where *IZZAT* focuses on the trauma of abuse, anorexia, suicide attempts and imprisonment, *Harjeet* and *Ung mann i nytt land* (as the latter makes clear) are more concerned with coming-to-literature; we imagine that the third, projected book of the trilogy might take the form of a *Künstlerroman*. Other intersectional aspects are involved in these differences, mainly to do with gender and religion (Noreen is the daughter in a Muslim family, Akas is the son in a Sikh family).

In order to clarify the roles of these two narratives in relation to the public sphere, it is – as in the case of Aden’s and Ahmed’s books – necessary to take into account questions of style. The authors’ narratological decisions affect the way in which these books function as public representations; in Jacques Rancière’s terms, the way in which politics and aesthetics meet in the “distribution of the sensible” (2004). Both Karim and Gill avoid overt metaphors and magical realism, preferring a more traditional realism with strong ethnographic components giving cross-cultural explanations. Karim’s short novel is argumentative, ending with a short polemical afterword, while Gill’s more epic style reaching back the experience of Akas’ father emigrating from India to Norway as a guest worker in the 1970s has a strong historiographical element. Karim chooses a conventional first person, retrospective style corresponding to an act of autobiographical witnessing, while Gill’s lengthy descriptions in the third person provide for literary defamiliarization. Gill constantly delegates focalization to others than the protagonist, allowing the reader to cross the generation and gender divides involved in his novels. While writing in the third person, also about Akas, the first sentence of *Harjeet* makes clear that the narrator is actually Akas himself: “He writes the story as he believes it must have been: [...]” (9). Gill thus asks us to read the novels as an act of narrative identification and imagination across generations on the part of Akas, underlining the epistemological border-crossing between times, generations and cultures.

The aesthetic dimension partly defines the way in which these texts construct border concepts with the help of border figures and border configurations. The prosaic style used

by both Karim and Gill avoid metaphors for the most part, but Karim uses some both powerful and conventional metaphors in order to describe states of cultural hybridity and incommensurability, describing the children of Asian parents in Norway as “Europe’s niggers” and “Asia’s white population” (5) and as feeling “half Norwegian and half Pakistani” or as “split” between countries, languages and cultures (25), and talking of a “collision” between the norms (105) of a daughter and a father who are “light years apart” (115). The result of these violent divides is that her protagonist Noreen becomes a form of zombie, a hybrid, uncanny, both dead and alive figure of the border. At her arranged wedding in Pakistan, she is a “corpse who is brought in by her father” (118) and when signing the marriage papers, she feels that she has “signed her death certificate”; and after her escape to Norway with the help of the Norwegian ambassador to Pakistan, her mother is forced to treat her as “declared dead” (137).

The most striking metaphors or symbols of borders in Gill’s books are more ambivalent. Akas is repeatedly attracted away from the horizontal act of crossing the border to a vertical axis, either up into the air or down into water. As a child in *Harjeet*, his brother allows him to fly a kite, presaging the journey by air to Norway: “And while Akas steered the kite, he day-dreamed. He flew high up among the birds and clouds and thought that it would be wonderful to be able to fly to school, [...]” (18). After his father has moved to Norway, he attempts to imagine the tall houses there and knows that he “had actually never been so high up into the air at any point” (160). In Punjab, he has never seen the sea, and imagines the danger of drowning (163), and then, again crossing an epistemological border to Norway, “wonders whether it was possible to swim in the sea in Norway, for if it was, he would learn to swim” (164). The day his father comes home to visit from Norway, he imagines falling into a well and dying (192). This first book of the trilogy ends with Akas flying together with his brother and mother to join his father in Norway. The second book, *Ung mann i nytt land*, begins with the family travelling from the airport to their father’s home in Drammen. Growing up there, Akas learns to swim (74), and after moving out, he imagines his future, beginning on the last page of the second book, as a repeated struggle in which he sees “himself being thrown against the rocks pointing up out of the sea, again and again he saw his body being thrown against the rocks. This will be a struggle against the tide and the waves, he thought, but this struggle will be my struggle” (313). On this outer edge

of the book, he sees himself as “a young man in new country”, quoting the title of the book and also the Norwegian title (*Ung manns land*, “Young man’s country”) of the debut novel *When the Lion Feeds* (1964) by bestseller author Wilbur Smith. He then opens the first Norwegian novel which he will read, Knut Hamsun’s *August* (1930), the story of a man who returns home with great ambitions after a long stay outside of Norway.

Harjeet, Akas’ father, is often absent; he carries the border within him. Before leaving to work in a factory in Norway, he had worked as a border soldier in Kashmir. His formative memory and trauma was the violent exile on Division, as he was 5 years old and had to flee with his family from what had become Pakistan (64-67). He becomes a figure whom Akas cannot trust, but Akas’ day-dreams and imagination before becoming (we imagine) an author are predicated on the absences, free movement above borders and imagined places his father represents.

Both Karim’s and Gill’s narratives describe extended topographical border-crossings and the borderscapes that these articulate. Whereas Karim’s book figures the topographical, cultural and generational border as a split, Gill’s books focus more of a gradual progression towards independence in which differences, commonalities and defamiliarizing gazes in the passage between India and Norway are emphasized. On the first page of *Ung mann i nytt land*, the smell of new-mown hay in Norway, similar to smells he recalls from India, reminds Akas that he is on the same planet (9); but only a little later, impressed by the perceived qualities of the Norwegian environment, he finds he is in fact on another planet (20). Gill’s books, with their historical perspective, repeatedly utilize the topos of the unique, the last, the first, and the new: in *Harjeet*, the last summer the family celebrates the rains together (113), Harjeet being the first immigrant to move in at Åssiden, a part of Drammen in Norway (171), the first white man Akas sees, at the airport on the way to Norway (249); towards the end of *Ung mann i nytt Land*, Akas is compared by his brother Suraj with record-breaking adventurers, reminding the reader of Akas’ imaginations of vertical movement: “Akas must be the first, he thought. Somebody had been the first on Mount Everest, another had been the first to fly across the Atlantic, Akas was the first Indian in Norway to move from home against the will of his family” (300).



## Coming of age

The corpus examined here of in all 6 modern immigrant book-length (or two-book length) narratives of border-crossing published in Norwegian is – in keeping with its second generation and generation 1,5 perspective – has the coming-of-age narrative, the temporal border crossing from childhood to adulthood, in common. All are novels which invite ethnographic and/or political readings through their documentary and testimonial elements: Gill's and Ahmed's novels are realist novels based on the authors' experiences; Maria Amelie's pseudonymous *Ulovlig norsk* (2010, "Illegally Norwegian") is like Aden's book a partly fictionalized autobiographical narrative, and contains lengthy excerpts from her blog.

	year	genre	diaspora	migrate	borders	class	landscape
<b>Karim</b>	1996	novel	Pakistani	work	visit	privil.	urban
<b>Gill 1</b>	2008	novel	Sikh	work	originary revisit	non- priv.	differ.
<b>Ahmed</b>	2008	novel	Somali	politics	originary transdias	privil.	idyll
<b>Aden</b>	2009	testim.	Somali	war	originary revisits	non- priv.	gothic
<b>Amelie</b>	2010	testim.	Caucasus	illegal	originary	privil.	idyll
<b>Gill 2</b>	2011	novel	Sikh	family	originary revisit	non- priv.	real symbolic

The forms of migration involved are various: reference is made to historical phases of migration (Pakistani immigration in the 1970s and Somali immigration in the 1990s and 2000s); some of the books deal with work migration wither by their protagonists or by their parents, some specifically with different forms of refugees (Amal is a child soldier refugee, Marie's family are political refugees, while Sara is the first refugee granted asylum on the basis of faith – as a convert to Christianity, she has been persecuted for apostasy). There is an equal balance between migrants coming from privileged backgrounds and migrants coming from poorer backgrounds. All except one (Amelie's book) are stories of legal migrants and their children. Some describe original border-crossings from other countries

either by parents or children with visits or revisits to countries of origin; one (Ahmed) describes a transdiasporic visit.

One key to an understanding of changing border concepts in this corpus seems to be historical changes in mobilities, with cheaper air travel allowing for more frequent journeys back and forth across borders. These are all narratives which challenge the monolithic stereotype of migration, in which border-crossing is relegated to a past, originary moment. Another key is the identity of the oppressions and conflicts involved in these stories, the cause in a shift of narrative opponents. If previously oppression was external, taking place within a postcolonial or neocolonial framework, and emphasizing everyday racism, now the narrative are more complex, with borders internalized to diasporas and to families. These forms of oppression are regulated by the polarities of honour and transgression, by modernization processes, and by gender and the body. Increasingly Norwegians become ambivalent, often taking on the role of narrative helpers in relation to second generation or generation 1,5 migrants.

Broadly speaking, the border figures and border configurations produced in these narratives can be sorted into two different discourses, one of cultural identities and difference and one of personal identities and development (*Bildung*). These come together in migrant literature when narratives of the transformation of identity are embedded in the extended migration borderscape (Nyman 2015). In the discourse of cultural identities and difference, the corpus produced images of an extended border-crossing or disseminated border, of a disorienting in-between, of the alienations and defamiliarizations of cultural difference, of the divisions and clashes of cultural hybridity and ambiguity, of a coastal surf signifying border identities, and of oxymoronic paradoxes (e.g. the title of Amelie's book, "Illegally Norwegian"). This discourse is one already well-established in the theoretical conceptualizations of postcolonial theory, while the discourse of personal identity complicates this somewhat. Here we find the liminal states of coming-of-age, a focus on bodily borders, topoi of captivity, escape and protection, the figure of flying, an imagined utopian homeland for exiles which may function as "transcommunity" of literature and be connected to originary idylls, and in extension of that plots of crossing the border into writing.

### Coming to writing

The corpus examined here is made up of texts which are to a lesser or greater degree performances, either staged performances of performativity or actual performative actions in the public sphere. Writing and various aspects of writing – access to writing, becoming a writer, access to ordinary and Norwegian literary cultures – take on a major role in this performativity. I have already described how elements of especially Aden's, Ahmed's and Gill's book point to the symbolic crossing into writing as being part of the extended Somali-Norwegian, Somali-transdiasporic or Indian-Norwegian border-crossings. The excerpts from Rasmussen's writer's notebooks in her *Skyggeferden* make clear that it is the story of a writer who one day will write the novel the reader is now reading. But it is Maria Amelie's pseudonymously-published *Ulovlig norsk*, like Aden's *Min drøm om frihet* an autobiography which borrows techniques from more literary genres for the sake of anonymity, which is the most clearly performative piece of writing in the corpus.

The plotline of Amelie's book can be reconstructed chronologically as a *Bildungsroman*-like journey leading from a childhood in the Caucasus to the writing of the book itself in the year before its publication in 2010, leaving an ellipsis at the end in which the readers – a significant part of the Norwegian public, judging by its sales figures – must reconstruct events (the author's subsequent arrest and deportation, followed by her readmittance to Norway) through reference to media reports. Amelie's family arrives as refugees from an anonymized country in the Caucasus in Moscow in 1997 and seek asylum in Finland in 2000 and then after rejection of their application in Finland, in Norway in 2002. After renewed rejection of an application for asylum status in Norway, the family chooses to go into hiding as illegal immigrants, where they are caught between despondency and successful integration into local Norwegian society, as Maria records in her diary. An imperfect bureaucracy allows Maria to study at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim and to take a degree in social anthropology, keeping an anonymous blog which is reproduced in the book. Encouraged by a correspondence with the acclaimed social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen at the University of Oslo, she writes a book – the book the reader is reading – detailing her life as an illegal immigrant in Norway. The book and the blog combine to make Maria Amelie into a *cause célèbre* in Norway. Campaigns are launched to grant her asylum status in Norway, and after the book is

launched both named Norwegian of the year and arrested at a public speaking engagement at the Nansen School in Lillehammer, to be deported to Russia. A minor change in the law, known as “Lex Amelie”, enables her to apply for a stay permit in Norway and take up a job as a journalist. The book may thus be read as part of an application for Norwegian residence, but also part of the process of becoming Norwegian, crossing the cultural border. The border to writing becomes the border to Norway.

While written more as a testimonial than as a literary text, the book actively uses metaphors, for example supporting its performativity in the short prologue with the help of strong, metaphoric oppositions in a direct address to the reader: “After reading this book I want you to lift your gaze and see the world in another way. I want you to see perspectives, not details. I want you to see the sunset on the horizon and not the screen of your computer” (11). The book begins, in the textual border-crossing into the text, with a direct staging of the textual border between text and reader, framed in a metaphorical language focusing on epistemological places of bordering.

Early on in the book the illegal crossing into Norway from Finland, by way of the less populated route through the North of Finland to Kilpisjärvi and then to Tromsø, is described in detail (16-17). This takes place in a car which is threatening to break down, at night in the snowy winter darkness. The text carefully delineates a lack of differentiation and of borders in Finland: “We are approaching the border to Norway. The white snow merges with the sky, nature looks empty and lifeless” (16). As in many border-crossing scenes, the crossing becomes a place of reflection, opening up a liminal space in the text where Amelie goes through the motivations of her parents in want to make this journey (17). The border-crossing itself, again typically, is displaced and disseminated across space and time. On driving through the border post the narrator exclaims: “We drive through! We *are* in Norway! And as if need something to make us believe this, a sign appears: ‘Norway’. [...] We drive for many kilometres without meeting a single car, just winter darkness. We are really in Norway!” (17).<sup>3</sup> Then, in strong contrast to the “deserted waste” (16) in Finland and also,

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<sup>3</sup> The border post is presumably the policed customs post some distance away from the actual border, inside Finland, so in fact they are not in Norway once they have gone through the border post. However, the marked

as it becomes apparent, to Moscow, Norway become the subject of the sublime and the domestic at once:

I stare out of the window in astonishment. Nature has changed so quickly, now it is earthshakingly beautiful. Mountains, mountains, mountains, mountains, tall mountains! Just like at home in the Caucasus! I turn around restlessly in the car, look up and down and left and right and out through the back window. At last I can see mountains again, the mountains which have been part of my life from birth. They didn't have anything like this in Moscow. And not in Finland either. Magical [*eventyrlige*], majestic mountains! (17)

In a form of matrixial borderlinking, the Norwegian mountains function as a pseudo-umbilical cord to Amelie's birthplace and original home. As is often the case in border crossings, an element of the fantastic is introduced – the mountains are not only sublime, but “[e]ventyrlige” (“magical”, or more directly translated, “fairy-tale-like”).

The word *eventyrlig* is also used in foreword to the book (entitled “To the reader”, this precedes the prologue mentioned before) in a way which connects it to the oxymoron (and border figure) of the title *Ulovlig norsk*. It signifies the ambivalence of Amelie's Norwegian existence: “My life here has been strange, sad, but at the same time magical [*eventyrlig*” (8). Magical Norwegianness, here further specified as connected to the love and friendship of the people she meets in Norway, comes together with sad illegality, here connected to the brutality of the law. The ambivalence is in itself “strange [*merkelig*”], partaking in an uncanniness of the border.

The *eventyrlige* or magical is however also connected with the genre of the *eventyr* (“fairy-tale”), and in the description of the border-crossing into Norway, with the activity of storytelling and specifically of telling stories to children, that is to say in an ordinary scene of narration. In terms of the border figures involved, the image of the Norwegian – or Caucasian – mountains on the border in Amalie's *Ulovlig norsk*, with their sublime

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and signed border is followed at a short distance into Norway by a simple road sign saying “Norge” (“Norway”).

verticality, can be read as corresponding to the scene discussed earlier of story-telling under the stars in a roofless house in Mogadishu in Aden's *Min drøm om frihet*.

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