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Postcards from Abroad

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The Changing Norway

Laura Breshock
Linfield College

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THE CHANGING NORWAY

9/25/12

In class we have been discussing the "Changing Europe." This refers to the major migration movements from areas like Africa, the Middle East and Asia to Europe in the last 40 years or so. As an American it was interesting to hear these discussions because we don't have them. We have discussions about illegal immigration and what not, but not about immigration. The major difference I have noticed is that in Europe, immigrant families are still considered foreigners even when they have lived there for most of their lives, or even grew up there. In some cases, there could be 3 generations living in a European country and they could still be considered "foreigners."

In America, I would say that that does not happen. We are a nation of immigrants. Immigrants and different types of people are not new to us. Yes there is still quite a lot of racism in



FIGURE 1: MY CLASS AND I VISITING THE OSLO MUSEUM'S EXHIBIT ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN NORWAY.

some areas, but for the most part, if a family has been living in America for 40 years, I don't think Americans would consider them "foreigners." The idea of the Changing Europe is to combat the narrow-minded thinking that is quite prevalent in Europe. Not to the extremes of the terrorist attack in Oslo on July 22, 2012, where a man mass murdered 82 people as an attempt to keep "Norway for Norwegians." But the subtle things, like immigrants living in one pocket of town, and the white Norwegians living elsewhere, or the idea that children of Pakistani decent that grow up in Norway, and speak Norwegian, have a hard time calling themselves Norwegians. This is happening in countries all around Europe. To further understand these minority groups, and to pass on the message of the changing Europe, or in my case, the changing Norway, Oslo Museum created an exhibit that replicates the religious minorities of Norway's sacred sanctuaries. The religions represented were: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Judaism, and Sikhism. There was a room with a small version of the local synagogue, and the local Catholic church, and so on.

We were also allowed to participate in rituals belonging to each religion, which made the experience very fun and hands on. The most moving thing, though, was a segment in the middle of the exhibit about the terrorist attack. They had pictures from that day and the city's response, and quotes from people and their reactions. It was so heart breaking and beautiful all in one. The most moving thing was a room, completely empty except for benches to sit on. The walls were white, and blank except for one area in the middle. There were 2 sentences, first in Norwegian, "Om én mann

kan vise så mye hat, tenk hvor mye kjærlighet vi kan vise sammen." Then the second sentence was in English, "If one man can show so much hate, imagine how much love we can show together." I sat in that room staring at those words for a long time. I thought about so much, I thought about 9/11, I thought about my own life, I thought about being so scared after tragic, unexplainable things. I thought about hope and love, and the power those two have. How they can move nations, and individuals.

Studying abroad is teaching me so much about the world, America, and myself. Oslo has taught me things I didn't know I needed to learn. Oslo has given me things that I can never give back to it. I will forever be in this city's debt, and we both are okay with that.

Laura Breshock