

[Aaron]: Hello and welcome to a new podcast series entitled culture in conversation. My name is Aaron Cargile I'm professor of inner cultural communication studies here in California State University Long Beach. I'd like to begin our first episode by talking to the Meling family from Oslo Norway. We'll start with Tosten Meling. Torsten, welcome. Why don't you talk a little bit about yourself?

[Torsten]: Yeah, my name is Torsten Meling, uhm.. I live in Oslo Norway, Norway is.. part of Scandinavia uhm.. of Europe, em, northern part emm.. Norway facing .. England in the southwest and Denmark to the south and um, Iceland and Greenland up north, em.. it's a shore country, very long shoreline uh, very stretched out and if you, ehh.. pin it down on the southern-west and flip it around, you end up way down in Italy somewhere between Venice and Rome. Uhm, being coastal, fishing is a big part of.. of um both the economy but also uhm, our food, uhm, being relatively a big country with respects to population of 4.5 million people, it also offers a lot of nature, uhm, so we have a close contact with uhm, both the sea and the forests.

I work as a neurosurgeon at the National Hospital in Oslo, uhm.., currently head of brain tumor section uhm, but also do a lot of craniofacial work with uhm, deformities, congenital deformities on children, and uhm, skull base tumors.

Well, I worked both in Norway, I worked in England, and I've, uhm, visited uhm, the States, uhm, spent a month in New York and spent a month in DC during my training. Uhm, I think, our uhm.. Socialized medicine system does influence our clinical practice. Uhm, they also had that in England but they had much more stretched on resources, uhm.. so I think we tend to operate uhm.. older people, uhm.. we tend to stretch the limits and counts the patients, uhm, I would re-operate three, four times brain tumor cases that in England probably wouldn't have been had the biopsy. Uhm, with respect to America, I.. when I worked in DC, I.. both at George Washington and at the VA hospital, uhm, and it was uhm.. quite troublesome to see how different those two hospitals were, uhm, the VA being uhm.. less well equipped, uhm.. more into.. well they probably stretch for resources too, so they will do the minimum they can get away with ,uhm.. whereas George Washington being private and.. and.. have to ensure patients uhm, would be more top line and high tech. Within my field, neurosurgery for instance, most of the development during the past ten, twenty years have actually come from France and Germany, uhm, both respect to uhm, innovations uhm, and also respect to uhm.. clinical studies uh.. perspective randomize control trial uhm, that are not conducted on the large scale in the United States.

[Little Girl]: What were your pres-

[Man]: Impression

[Little Girl]: impression when you came to America?

[Torsten]: Uhm, because my- my impression- my impression then was that the States has a lot of.. optimism, a lot of energy, a lot of friendliness and openness towards uhm, newcomers at least to.. to a certain level. They're friendly neighbors

and they will have- have parties. It's slightly more difficult to go deeper than that. Uhm, but I liked the optimism and the energy and the self believe.

[Aaron]: okay, in it- this is an interview with uhm.. Trim Meling. Trim, would you like- would you mind explaining to us uhm, how Americans eat?

[Kids laughing]

[Trim]: Well, they eat very uncivilized. How the Americans uhm, started to eat with their hands, that's a mir- that's a mystery. How the- why the Americans started to eat with their hands and being so uncivilized when before they were.. they (unintelligible) with a knife and fork, always went to Sunday churches, so why they're eating with their hands now, I have no idea.

[Aaron]: Yes, Stuard, what do you think?

[Stuard]: uhm, well you know, you have to make knife and fork out of metal. Then they, don't use- they don't use metal, they don't use the metal to make a knife and fork, they use this on other things.

[Aaron]: So what are your impressions about being here in America?

[Trim]: Well, it's nice. I mean the way American eat their food, that doesn't.. like- well sort of, it doesn't make the whole big difference. So I'm having a nice time here.

[Aaron]: well, what have you noticed about America that's different from Norway?

[Trim]: there are very many fat people here. They speak different language too, but I mean we can understand it so we don't think so weird, and they drive very big cars. In Norway you would never see that big cars they have. And it's like- they have- it's more cheaper in here too, much much cheaper. They play much more tennis, and they have different sports here, and they- and- on the sort of- all this things you can do here, there's quite a lot of things you can do here that you would've be able to do back in Norway.

[Aaron]: For example?

[Trim]: Sea World, for example, Disney Land, umm, Adventure World- Park

[Aaron]: What do you think toward about being here in America, what's different about America than back home in Norway?

[Stuard]: Well, you know, it's uhm.. in Norway we just normally have two uhm.. car fields where the cars can drive in, and here it's sort of normal to have four on each side, and that's uhm, sort of uhm.. and it's sort of stand shelt only right and only left and only forwards and sort of.. yeah, okay thank you!

[Aaron]: So we- we're conducting this interview in English and uhm, English is my native language but is not your native language, so ho- how is that we've come to this place? In other words, you know, w- where is the status of English in Norway? And why- why is that you speak English and I don't speak Norwegian?

[Torsten]: (laughs) yeah, well, in Norway, uhm.. people have to learn English from.. used to have from, from, year four another start year two or three. Uhm, Norway's also very close to England and- and England has always been the closest ally. Uhm, both in respect to- to of course military and- and- and political. Uhm, but also uhm, the royal houses are you know their cousins, ehm, and England is our most important trading partner. So English for Norwegians is very important uhm, that's probably why in Norway, Sweden and Denmark are the countries, the Scandinavian countries with the highest proportion of England speaking- English speaking, uhm, people. Uhm.. so, coming from a small nation with a small language, and dealing with England as a main industrial partner uhm, English has always been um, o-or well, since we were two been- been important. Pre-World War II, uhm, every Norwegian would speak German and some how that went out of fashion after 1945.

[Aaron]: What is it about, uhm.. Scandinavian cultures, why- why do you think these three national cultures are- are- are lumped together? What is it- what is it that your national culture has in common with these other cultures? In- in- in what respects is it very different?

[Torsten]: Well the Scandinavian countries comprise Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland is part of the Northern countries including Iceland but Finland is culturally and- and linguistically completely different. Uhm.. the only other country that Finish is similar to- or- or language is- is Hungarian. Uhm, but the Scandinavian countries, um Norway was the colony under Denmark, uhm, for almost 400 years, uhm, and that was from the 14th to up to 18th, uhm, c- 18th century. Uhm, so the whole, uhm, bureaucracy uh, and written language was established in that period, Uhm, the laws for instance, uhm, so we were basically one nation. After 1814 when Denmark, Norway sided when the Poland and lost, uhm, to punish Denmark, Norway was handed over to Sweden, uhm, but remains sort of separate, we had our own constitution, but we had the common king and we had the common uh, foreign policy. Uhm, so that- but that was not ended until 1905 so nearly uhm, 100 years later uhm, so you have- you have the fact that they- the- you know we have been colony eh, a colony under Denmark and Sweden was sort of in between the two and we also have the geographic uh, closeness and the language and so sinc- uhm, culturally uhm, there are more similarities than differences. Uhm, we tend to be uh, I guess timid in a sense uhm, not terribly outspoken, not aggressive, uhm, but resilient, uhm, strong wills, uh, interesting thing about uh, o- th- one of the differences is belief in authority. Norway being the colony state, uh, we wo- have almost no respect for authority at all. The kids don't have the same respect for teachers, uhm, as they would in Sweden, for instance, uhm, students would not have it for their professors. Uhm, we don't tend to in hierarchies and- and- and running a

business, running a hospital, for instance, i- is- is uhm, is very flat organization uhm, we have to use arguments uh, to convince people, and not mere power, power will o-or brute force will- will not lead you anywhere. Uhm.. uh, and I guess that's why Norway in- in some respect have been- has been successful as an negotiator in- in different conflicts.

Uhm.. we have a well developed social, uhm, security system and- and-and- and benefits for people uh, without work uhm, and usually in a- before elections an employment care for unemployed uhm, care fo- for- for uhm, uh, the poor i- often come up as- as- as a big issues uhm, alongside with health care in school. Uhm, those are the issues that are being debated and- and those are the things you- you win or lose in the election for instance. Uhm, so yes, I think is- I think is central with respect to- to uhm, to uhm, work to live, I think- I agree with that, uhm.. may not be my personal uh, way on life but uh, most people will- will uhm, work to live uhm, wit- with average uhm, uh, week of- of 37 and half hours uhm weekends off 5 days holyday per year.

[Aaron]: It's often said that cultures are like the self, you can't never see yourself directly, you can only see it reflected back to you on a mirror if that's the case, uh, what can you tell us about US American culture? What can you reflect back to us?

[Torsten]: uh, I wish had more- more time to think about the answer because i-it has you know you have many levels to it, you have United States as a- as a.. super nation, you know, the only- the only big nation left with- with uh, uhm, economic power and- and military power, and- and dominated the world scene, uhm, but you also have a more every day America and- and this super power uhm, you know, uhm, looking from- from a small country in Europe uhm, it's super power at time bullying smaller nations uh, using it's power to- to obtain its own goals, uhm, and a lot of inconsistencies in the policies uhm.. so you- you- you know you had that level of the answer and also you had a more down to earth, every day life American culture. With respect to every day life, I- I- I- I found California life quite busy uhm, a lot of driving uh, large distances uhm, whereas I'm used to walk in to university, ride my bike, kids go to school uh, probably different pace of- of- of life in the we live in the capital.

I think- one- one- one thing that really, really struck me when I started high school was to see how many of the students that have never been outside US borders, uhm, and you have a president now that never had been outside borders before became president probably you know have possible uhm, I would like to encourage people to travel more, American people to travel more uhm, to see different cultures. Uhm, America is big country and I, you know there's lots of things to see and do uhm, but traveling in the world is easy nowadays, easy access to everything and- and in almost any country that you can get by will speak in English. Uhm, so there's no big reason why not to uhm, that would be- be probably be the number one uh, less, uh, focused on America and more on the world.