BY KIRSTY LIDDLE | March 17, 2015

On July 22, 2011, a Norwegian man woke up, got in his car and drove the short distance to the Oslo city centre. Outside of the Government Quarter he planted a bomb that killed eight people and injured dozens of others. He then changed vehicles and continued his journey towards the small heart-shaped island of Utøya where he mercilessly ended the lives of 69 people, many of whom were just teenagers. Later this man would be named as the 32-year-old right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik, someone whose warped ideology convinced him that in order to preserve the traditional values of Norwegian culture these young people had to die.

One of Us: The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacre in Norway, written by celebrated Norwegian author and journalist Åsne Seierstad, is perhaps the most complete account we will ever have into understanding how, and more crucially, why Breivik did what he did on that day. One of Us is the key into examining the underlying factors in Breivik’s childhood and the political landscape that these young people had been born into. However, in order to comprehend the full scale of the atrocities that occurred in both Oslo and on Utøya, it is necessary to look at the country as a whole.

The Kingdom of Norway is a small country, yet it would be hard to find a more patriotic people who are deeply caring and extremely hard-working. It is no coincidence that Norwegians living abroad naturally gravitate towards each other; they have a common bond, and in turn that reminds them of home. It is a beautiful, remote and peaceful region where you trust friends and neighbours because you have no other reason to doubt them. In
Modern Norwegians had no memory of terrorist attacks, unlike those on American soil or even in the UK. Norwegians had no reason to fear the unknown because it had never happened. Political engagement remained high with plenty of young Norwegians joining Political Party youth organisations and volunteer groups. Utøya was a gift to The Workers' Youth League, the largest youth political party in Norway, and the youth wing of the Norwegian Labour Party, more commonly known as the AUF. An annual summer camp was held on the island where teens from all over the country came together to attend seminars, take part in activities, but most of all to have fun. It was this place that Breivik targeted as he felt the young people would be brainwashed into following the decisions of their elders.

It is perhaps expressed most succinctly in the title of the book with the simple name *One of Us*: Breivik was a Norwegian who feared multiculturalism and the increasing presence of Islam in Europe. However, this is not only the story of one man, but the story of a nation and the hopes and dreams of those who fought proudly to call themselves Norwegian. It greatly explores Breivik's childhood, his odd and anti-social behaviour alongside seemingly delusional ideas about the world. Indeed, the book describes in great detail the long hours it took him to concoct his explosive devices, gather equipment and plan his operation.

It also tells, amongst others, the stories of Bano, a young, intellectual Kurd who fled to Norway with her family and who had saved hard to buy her own traditional *bunad*, or Norwegian national costume. It pays tribute to Simon, a young, handsome boy who wanted to change the world for the better, who was bright, kind and hard-working, who had – instead of running away – valiantly tried to save the lives of others.

*One of Us* is a moving, thought-provoking and at times difficult portrayal of the political landscape, societal pressures and cultural values that make up the core of a changing nation. It is an essay into the thorny issue of immigration, a foray into the lives of ordinary Norwegians and a window into the troubled and at times deluded psyche of a very intelligent, lonely and increasingly dissatisfied man. *One of Us* does not read like a history book and nor should it; this is not a tome that should lie forgotten and gathering dust in a library, but one that should be read over and over.

The people mentioned inside the book once lived and the beautiful use of colour in Seierstad's words bring them, just for one heart-breaking minute, back to life. Seierstad weaves masterful storytelling with the hard, cold facts of their deaths. It is available in English and Norwegian via amazon.co.uk.

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