



The Black Gold

I don't have black hair like you. That's why they noticed me when I moved in here. After some months my neighbor confessed she had thought that I worked undercover. 'No Suedis move here', she said and continued to tell me about the naivety of Sweden's immigration policy. 'We're getting fucked. We should've thought about that when we opened our border and shouted welcome!' At night the area's bird flies over our suburb. Often I don't notice it until my neighbor texts me. 'Do you hear it?' It watches the area, searching for crimes and suspicious behavior. I keep surfing in the sofa by the dark window. Outside, I am safe with you.

We have moved here from different places. For different, sometimes violent, reasons. On my floor in our concrete building we come from as many countries as there are apartments. But if you scratch the surface you can find a common cause. Thousands of miles from our windows lies an answer, underground. Below is a black gold, a thick liquid more desirable than the metal. It used to gush out of the ground but today it is harder to find. One liter provides one hundred and fifty hours of hard human physical labor, a magical energy that makes both objects and people move, far away. The black gold is overlooked by an eagle soaring in the sky, controlling its spheres of influence. A hurt bear looms near the borders while a red dragon is on the rise in the East.

Ten days after two planes flew into the World Trade Centre buildings in New York City in 2001, retired General Wesley Clark made his way through the corridors of Pentagon. He had just ended his term as Supreme Allied Commander Europe commanding the NATO forces during the Kosovo War, and now he was visiting his old colleagues at the Defense Department. But Rumsfeld, Bush's Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz didn't have much time for him. 'Nobody is going to tell us where and when we can bomb. Nobody.' Rumsfeld burst out before leaving him in the middle of a sentence. On his way out, Clark went downstairs and ran into a general from the Joint Staff, who used to work for him. 'You got to come in and talk with me a second', he sounded worried. 'Sir, we are going to attack Iraq!' Clark was perplexed. 'Why?' The officer said 'I don't know'. Clark asked him if it was because they could tie Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks but the officer told him 'No'. He continued 'I guess they don't know what to do about terrorism, but they can take down governments and they want to look strong.' Six weeks later he met the same officer again and asked him if they were still going to attack Iraq. The officer answered 'It's worse than that. I just got this memo from the Secretary of Defense's office. It says we are going to attack and destroy the governments in seven countries in five years. We are going to start with Iraq, and then we are going to move to Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan – and finish off with Iran. Seven countries in five years.' Clark left stunned, but decided to not tell anyone. Then it came back to him, a meeting ten years earlier, also at the Pentagon.

Soon the backyard will be green again. The cats will lie in the shadow and my neighbor's face will meet the sun. I will laugh at her jokes and if we are lucky the Syrian engineer and his relatives will have a barbecue and invite us for food. We will learn if his wife has been able to get through the new restricted Swedish border controls to join him and their children. My neighbor will pat my cats and tell me stories about her dog. He passed away some years ago but in our conversations he is always present. Her apartment walls have photos of them together. 'When my boyfriend and I broke up, it was nothing. The worst thing had already happened to me.' I will say something as I try to not think about how old my cats have become. When my neighbor was eight years old she walked together with her family over the mountains from northern Iraq to Turkey, among thousands of other refugees. To save their lives her mother had persuaded her father to leave his political fight against Saddam Hussein and flee. His sister and brother had already been imprisoned and they knew he was next in the line. My neighbor moved here twenty-seven years ago. I am new.

The water surface on a dark lake mirrors what is above, letting the sun watch its own reflection and believe the visible is the only existing reality.

'If you ever come to Washington, come look me up', Paul Wolfowitz had told him. One Friday afternoon when he was bored Wesley Clark took him up on his offer. In 1991, after the first U.S. war in Iraq, Wolfowitz was Undersecretary for policy in the Pentagon, under Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. The seven months long war in the Persian Gulf was the American response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The whole world had watched CNN's live coverage, supplied by the military, of precise missiles hitting their targets on the ground during Operation Desert Storm. Clark congratulated him on the American victory. 'Mr. Secretary, you must be pretty happy with the performance of the troops in Desert Storm?', but Wolfowitz looked concerned. 'Well yeah', he said 'but not really, because the truth is we should have gotten rid of Saddam Hussein and we didn't... But one thing we did learn, he said. We learned that we can use our military in the region in the Middle East and the Soviets won't stop us. And we've got about five or ten years to clean up those old Soviet regimes, Syria, Iran, Iraq.' The following year, Wolfowitz along with colleagues in the Cheney administration, drafted a secret doctrine. The Soviet Union was falling apart and they thought the US had ten years to take control over the countries in the Middle East, before the next super power would challenge them.

Gold, the non-oxidizing king of metals, is synonymous with the sun and in patriarchal societies often a male principal. His clear sunrays enlighten the silver moon, the black night's eye who spends her day in a cave and comes to you during sleep. The moon is perceived as female because of its passive character, a celestial body that receives its light from the sun and creates the rhythm of the menstrual cycle. Because of her constantly changing shape and shifting positions in the sky, she has been seen as unpredictable, irrational, the power of nature's dark mysterious side - chaos, sexuality and death. We continue to reproduce the dualism between these cultural notions, the male and the female, sun and moon, gold and silver. First prize and, half a step below, second prize. They contain a hierarchy deeply rooted within European culture, internalized in our vocabulary and imagery. Father in heaven and Mother earth. The clear logical enlightened thought and the irrational bleeding impure body. Spirit and body, the conscious and the unconscious, theory and practice. It is not only an abstract hierarchy but visible in the differences in our paychecks depending on which category our bodies and work fall into. A division that extends beyond the concept of gender and is present between the white male European archetype and – everything else. The Senegalese poet and president Leopold Senghor argued that 'emotion is Negro, reason is Greek', and was criticized by other Africans for perpetuating racist and colonial stereotypes. To be labeled the other limits our freedom of movement. With the need to defend our complexities against hierarchical stereotypes, we risk neglecting the damage of the hierarchy itself.

The fight to control the oil around the Persian Gulf has a long tradition that has resulted in surprising friends and flexible morals. United States' strategic alliance with the oil-rich ultraconservative Islamic monarchy Saudi Arabia goes back to the days of Roosevelt. In the fifties, when Iran wanted to nationalize the country's oil reserves exploited by British Petroleum, Great Britain asked the U.S. for help. To secure Western oil interests the CIA orchestrated a coup against the first democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mosaddegh, who was replaced by the pro-American Shah of Iran. There has been an American bipartisan consensus about the geopolitical agenda in the Middle East. President Jimmy Carter warned the Soviet Union when they invaded Afghanistan in 1979, that any attempt by the Soviets to gain control of the oil in the Persian Gulf region would be regarded as an assault on U.S.'s vital interests and be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. From then on the U.S. has, often in corporation with Saudi Arabia, recurrently recruited and armed radical Islamists to combat counterparts in proxy wars.

Light and dark are culturally embodied symbols. They are also notions hierarchically located in my physical body. Intellectual analyses are located on top, in my light upper body, close to the air above it. From the waist down in connection with the ground, a darker denser materia harbors bodily needs and functions. Two differing personalities in a competitive relationship struggling to collaborate. Vertically runs another border. My present front reflects the light, is open to the world and vibrates in a high frequency of insecurity. My dark neglected back is a slow mantle that caresses my grief, like seabed embracing water. They have different methods to communicate their knowledge. The light-upper-front-part uses thoughts and ideas. The lower-back-dark-part gives me wordless moods, images and symbols that I have to translate into thought-based conclusions. I have learnt to trust them. The content of a dark lake is not known trough vision but in the meeting between body and water. What Leopold Senghor described as intuitive reason through participation.

I look at the photo of my smiling neighbor with her arm around her dog. 'My aunt said it was better when Saddam ruled Iraq' my neighbor tells me when we drink tea in her apartment. 'Despite what the regime did to your family?' I ask her. 'Yeah, and I can say that I have heard many Iraqi say so, regardless if they are Christians, Muslims, Yazidis. Kurds are those who I haven't heard say that, but they have their own agenda, so... Well, as I've said, most Iraqis say that. Before you knew whom to watch out for, that was Saddam. People knew what to do to stay alive, and that was to not oppose his politics. So you had one to watch out for, but when he disappeared you didn't know whom to watch anymore. To then put a Shia Muslim in power after Saddam was the final nail in the Iraq coffin. It created political chaos. The uncertainty and lack of a dictator created disorder in the country and many started to wonder if it hadn't been better with Saddam after all.' So she fled after the U.S. invasion?', I ask. 'Yes, my aunt left Iraq 6 years ago. You know, Saddam butchered everyone but he didn't divide us up.'

When Wesley Clark left the Pentagon building in 2001 he thought to himself 'They want to destabilize the Middle East. Turn it upside down. Make it under US control.' The conclusion of Wolfowitz's Doctrine in 1992 had been that the resources of the oil-rich countries in the Middle East would be sufficient to generate global power. The purpose of gaining control over them was not just to guarantee enough oil for the U.S., the largest oil consumer in the world, but to secure its global power before China or another rising power was strong enough to do it. Four of the seven countries that they wanted to attack were major oil producers, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Iran, while Syria, Lebanon and Somalia were located strategically in relation to the first ones. All of them had regimes that were not trusted by U.S. and Western elites. Under false pretence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction United States invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003. The governments of the seven countries were not destroyed in five years. But fifteen years after Wesley Clark's former colleague revealed the plans to him there has been regime change in Iraq, war and regime change in South Sudan and in Libya, a destruction of Somalia and an ongoing civil war in Syria with demands for regime change, and preparations for an upcoming war with Iran.

The value of gold is based on aesthetics. The black gold makes us move. It is a transportable energy capable of magic, the lifeblood of modern civilization. The desire to control its movements creates a geopolitical choreography of movable alliances and proxy wars with far-reaching consequences. Millions of memories move thousands of miles, or get buried underground. A repeating narrative overlooked by the eagle in the sky, controlling its spheres of influence. A hurt bear looms near the borders while a red dragon is on the rise in the East. Unspoken desires are disguised in a rhetoric of black and white. White is up and black is down. But what is above is like what is below. When the sand was sea millions of years ago, microscopic plants and animals lived in the ocean. They absorbed the energy from the sun and sank to the bottom of sea. Buried ever deeper, in layer after layer, pressure and heat began to rise. It transformed them into a liquid of unseen energy density. A black gold of fossilized ancient sunlight, that migrated all the way to the surface and escaped into our time. Creating a society addicted to white sand ejaculating a pillar of black gold into the air. Invert the image, and in front of me, a lion in my bed has chased away the cats.

The day after the terror attack when a truck drove over people in Stockholm City I get a text from my neighbor. 'Do you see them?' When I look out photographers and journalists are standing in our backyard. The terrorist was registered at an address a few doors away, before his application for residency permit was rejected and he went underground. Later I manage to avoid a television crew on my way home from the subway. In my suburb we have our own bird in the sky. The police helicopter is searching the night for drug related crimes. Schools are closing down and animals of all kinds are getting to know each other. A moving neighborhood with an undecided direction. I tell you that we don't know each other yet, but you don't seem to believe me. The sunset over the highway colors the apartment pink every evening in spring. What the headlines don't capture is the comforting ease that is gone in the rest of the city. An election on the computer in bed before we sleep. You are here now but I will miss you tomorrow. I don't know where we are going but I am part of the movement.

Jelena Rundqvist, 2017

