

Youth, Racist Violence and Anti-racist Responses in the Nordic Countries

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Preface

The phenomenon of violence aimed at ethnic minorities and immigrants has become increasingly evident throughout Europe during the 1990s. The northern parts of Europe seem to be no exception to this trend. Any discussion of racist violence needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the nature of the problem. The present volume raises several important questions. Who are the victims and perpetrators of racist violence? How may the media be involved? Are the crimes reported to the police properly handled? What do the intervening bodies, if anything, try to do about it?

The Nordic countries under study, which were previously relatively ethnically homogenous, have in the last two decades or so become increasingly multiethnic. In particular, refugees from the Third World have changed everyday life to a colourful experience throughout the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, the proportion of residents with a foreign background among the total population varies a lot in the countries under study, from 1.6 % in Finland to 10 % in Sweden, the first figure being the lowest in Europe. On the other hand, while Sweden with a liberal immigration policy has the highest immigrant population, in Finland the number of immigrants has started to rise dramatically during the 90s.

Racist violence represents violence in which the victim is chosen according to ethnic, religious or national origin considerations, when the victim believes that the perpetrator was acting on racial grounds and/or there was evidence of racism (Commission for Racial Equality 1987). Thus, racist violence may take many forms, ranging from relatively rare but serious incidents of murder and serious assaults to the more frequent incidents of racial abuse and threatening behavior (Virdee 1995). Examples of racist violence and harassment may include acts such as physical assault, damage to property, racist or other offensive graffiti, arson, and verbal abuse.

The phenomenon of racist violence is affected by a variety of responses from society and its actors such as institutions, the media, the general public, racists and anti-racists, and researchers. In recent years, there has been a significant change towards a greater public awareness concerning racist violence, with policies to prevent and combat such tendencies, both nationally and European-wide. In the aftermath of European actions such as the European Year Against Racism, national agencies have been engaged in placing the question of racism on the political agenda, and in strengthening the fight against racism. Thus, local anti-racist actions may be understood as a way of sharing the concern of European institutions and organizations, consisting both of official agencies and NGOs.

The articles in the present volume are based on a research project that was set up to: (a) assess the extent of the problem of racist violence among youths in Sweden, Finland, and Norway; (b) assess the possible background to the issue of racist violence with reference to the involvement of extremist groups; (c) evaluate attempts by governmental agencies, e.g., the police and the courts, community and anti-racist groups, to take measures to improve the situation. Analyses of the situation in each country are presented with a set of factors which would account for the extent of racist violence. However, the factors that are identified are not likely to be significant in one country only, and may be regarded as the kinds of factors which preventive efforts may address.

First, studies of marginalised segments of society have provided growing evidence of racist violence and harassment suffered by ethnic minorities and immigrants during the 90s.

Drawing upon existing studies on racist violence, the article by Timo Virtanen traces the origins and dynamics of racist violence. Accordingly, some forms of violence may be patterned rather than random, and may become entrenched in some localities. In particular, skinheads have turned out to be an arrogant source of racist violence, chasing victims and assaulting them in an organized manner. However, terrorist-type acts such as shootings, bombings and arson have been a rare occurrence in Finland as compared to racist incidents in the street. Other issues dealt with include racist violence in the history of Finland, political dimensions of racist violence, and anti-racist actions by governmental agencies and youth groups. Despite the fact that awareness of racist violence has grown markedly on the part of the members of majority groups and of official agencies of different kinds in Finland, in-depth studies on victims and perpetrators of violence are needed to find out the roots and social constructions of ethnic conflict

Second, media reports may be an important source on racist incidents and developments. In many cases, media reports have lifted up the issue of racism on the public agenda, producing attempts by different agencies to improve the situation. However, as discussed by Ulla Rantakeisu, Sabina Almgren and Bengt Starrin in the present volume, media scrutiny, in particular, seems to meet pitfalls with respect to source criticism.

The study by Rantakeisu and her co-workers traces the origins of racist events in a small locality in Värmland in west-Central Sweden during Easter in April 1995. According to them, a paradoxical dynamic may be found in the interpretive process of the public authorities with respect to the Easter events, since racist motives were officially rejected. The results of the study illuminate the fact that, during the last two decades, Swedish racist movements have increased their activities after having had a fairly anonymous existence after WW II. Racist groups and activists have become more visible, among other things, through the spread of white power music and other propaganda. During the 90s, violent attacks have been carried out both by members of youth gangs without any express political ideology and by more organized far-right extremist groups.

Third, the database collected by the Anti-racist Center, Oslo, sheds light on the trends of racist violence in Norway. As highlighted by Henrik Lunde, the climate of attitudes towards immigrants and the far right scene have dramatically changed over the past ten years. According to his report, the far right organizations in Norway are today more organised and better financed than before. On the other hand, organised militant neo-Nazis are very small in number, consisting of a few hundred males under 30. However, racist propaganda has crept into mainstream politics and politicians may today express statements that a few years ago only avowed racists would express.

According to the database, the perpetrators of racist violence have been to a great extent young men who have carried out violent acts as a gang. In only a few cases have the perpetrators been members of a racist or Nazi organisation. Up until recent years, law enforcement authorities in Norway have been reluctant to use the expression 'racist' in cases of violence aimed at immigrants and refugees. Thus, there are reasons to believe that claims of racial discrimination on the part of the police and other officials may reflect at least in part both inadequate police training and practices and dubious rules and routines, although there are signs that the state is starting to acknowledge the racist element in violent incidents.

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The Dynamics of Racist Violence and Harassment among Youth in Finland: Victims, Perpetrators, and Anti-racist Actions

Timo Virtanen

Introduction

Racist violence represents the most frequent, visible, and violent type of bias-motivated conduct. In recent years, racist violence has been reported to constitute one of the most rapidly growing forms of crime throughout European society. Racist violence has been seen as an expression of racism which flourishes in societies where racism has become respectable or at least is not widely and consistently condemned (Gordon 1991). Racist and xenophobic manifestations seem to be embedded in different levels of society and cultural development, and thus, need to be considered from the point of view of past and present events and manifestations.

The key role of racism has been the denial of social, political and economic participation to certain collectivities and the legitimisation of various forms of exploitation: racism means hatred of the different (Guibernau 1996). The Nordic countries, while having no history of colonialism, have conquered northern areas with groups of indigenous peoples such as the Sami, and carried out racist practices towards old ethnic minorities such as the Jews. More recently, expressions of racist violence do not seem to be less extreme in the Nordic countries than elsewhere in Europe. On the other hand, migratory movements set new requirements for the Nordic countries to adjust in a more positive way to ethnic groups from Southern European countries which, paradoxically, have figured as conquistadors in the history of Western supremacy.

Racism and nationalism offer radically different messages. While racists want to dominate the territory they occupy, nationalism wants to regenerate the nation, and make its culture flourish (Guibernau 1996). However, certain formulations of nationalism have been in the past and still are associated with racism. Thus, the strength of nationalist discourse lies in its dual nature to seek to strengthen and weaken rights to exist as a nation or as a minority. Nationalists see in the 'Other' a potential enemy, but above all someone inferior. More or less extreme cases, leading to overt violence or to more covert forms of discrimination, may be found in European history, or in contemporary nation-states throughout Europe. A certain brand of nationalism is at the core of the fascist discourse. According to Guibernau (1996),

the cult of the elite, of youth, of maleness, of force and violence, the revolt against the nationalism of the Enlightenment and the advocacy of political authoritarianism are the elements that comprise the portrait of fascism. Fascism's essence, Dandekar argues, "is the attempt to abolish political disputes; it is the (unsuccessful) final solution of the problems of politics". During the 1920s, fascism was a basis of a revolutionary movement attempting to overthrow the existing order. However, when successful, it proceeded to assume a reactionary and oppressive character.

The concept of racism has been developed by Blauner (1972) to include institutional processes and the chains of unwilling actions. Thus, while popular racism refers to the experiences of racism in daily contexts, some forms of racism operate within institutions, placing their subjects in a subordinate position (Back 1996). Miles (1989) sets out to make a case for the use of the concept of racism, objecting to the tendency in which "the concept of racism has come to be used to refer not only to imaginary and assertions, but also to practices, procedures and outcomes, often independently of human intentionality and a specific ideological content". Many forms of racially insulting and threatening behaviour are not considered criminal events as such, and low-level racial harassment has been neglected, in particular, in attempting to understand the nature of the phenomenon (Virdee 1996). However, minor assaults and 'nonphysical' actions such as jostling, spitting, verbal and written abuse – unprovoked and repeated – constitute racial harassment that more forcefully contributes to the everyday racism that affects victims' lives (Oakley 1996).

Lexically, racial abuse denotes a rude and offensive way of expressing one's ideas, or cruel or violent treatment, and racial attacks denote acts of deliberately using violence against someone, or verbal statements that criticize someone strongly (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1995). According to the Commission for Racial Equality (1987, 8), racial harassment is violence which may be verbal or physical and which includes attacks on property as well as on the person, suffered by individuals or groups because of their colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins, when the victim believes that the perpetrator was acting on racial grounds and/or there is evidence of racism. Similarly, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1994) has defined the term racist violence to include not only physical attacks upon a person but also verbal and nonverbal intimidation, harassment and incitement to racial hatred. This would include intimidating phone calls as well as threatening insults and gestures. Oakley (1996) formulated a practical working definition of the term xenophobic violence as referring to: "any hostile act directed against a person or a group on account of their racial, ethnic or national origin". The basic definition was elaborated by noting that although such acts often involve physical violence, the term should be understood to refer also to threats, verbal abuse, damage to property (including graffiti) and any other form of harassment which is motivated by racism or xenophobia.

Accordingly, it is important to understand the term 'violence' broadly, i.e. the violation of peace of mind and rights. Although physical injury is obviously damaging and sometimes life-threatening for victims, and is generally seen as the most serious type of action from the criminal point of view, other nonphysical actions may cause equivalent or even greater psychological harm. Oakley states that, thus, it is often more appropriate to speak of 'racist' and xenophobic violence and harassment. It should always be understood as implied within the word 'violence', which is here employed as the generic term. According to Bjørge (1997), the concept of violence connotes behaviour that is in some sense considered illegitimate and unacceptable. Violence comes closer to the experience of the victims of violence than that of the perpetrators. Perpetrators of what others consider violence usually try to avoid the term violence, preferring fight, struggle, self-defense, or war in their

rhetorics. Some perpetrators also place their acts of violence in the context of more or less elaborated political ideologies or discourses within which their violent actions appear not only acceptable but even commendable (Bjørge 1997). In its extreme form, this kind of language is represented by the Holocaust deniers (Young-Bruehl 1996).

The concepts of racist/racial violence, right-wing extremist violence, anti-immigrant violence, and violence against immigrants/asylum seekers have been used interchangeably in studies on racist violence (Bjørge 1997; Witte 1996). Certain elements of these definitions point to similar characteristics of the violence discussed here, but the use of a particular definition serves to emphasize certain elements at the expense of others. Thus, violence against political opponents is included in notions of right-wing extremist and neo-Nazi violence, but excluded from the other notions. 'Racist violence' and 'right-wing extremist violence' may connote a stronger ideological motive and consciousness than what is usually held by the perpetrators. Another example is the fact that the notions of anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner violence do not include violence perpetrated against people who are not immigrants or of foreign nationality. In multi-cultural European societies, however, racist violence is perpetrated against people as representatives of ethnic minorities based on their phenotypical characteristics or religion, who have lived in their new home country for generations.

Racist violence and harassment form a special kind of relationship between victims and perpetrators of violence. Fattah (1991), while integrating empirical findings, formulated such categories as opportunity, risk factors, motivated offenders, exposure, dangerous times/places, high risk activities, defensive/avoidance behaviours, and structural-cultural proneness. Luckenbill (1977) described violence as a situationally determined process, beginning with a verbal or symbolic conflict, in which the parties involved try and fail to influence each other's behaviour. The next stage includes attempts at mediation, avoidance and threats that also fail. The final stage, then, is physical assault, often seemingly unavoidable because the parties involved have no other way to save face. According to Fattah (1991) violence may be considered from the point of view of both victims and perpetrators, and the outcome of the encounters is left open. Moreover, it is evident that the vicious circle of violence needs to be considered from the point of view of the whole society. Racist violence develops as a process of multifaceted circles in which the actions of individual actors may be detrimental to ethnic relations, or they may produce positive results.

Hate language is a central part of racist violence and harassment. Typically, insults used in racist incidents are meant to be pejorative: "You are a nigger, fuck you" etc. The epithets may be used to point out the target for violence, to raise hatred against the victim, to humiliate the victim in the eyes of the audience, or to damage the victim's self-esteem (Greenawalt 1995). Racist insults may be deeply offensive to the victims. According to Matsuda (1989), the negative effects of hate messages are real for the victims. Victims of vicious hate propaganda have experienced physiological symptoms and emotional distress ranging from fear, rapid pulse rate, nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder to psychosis and suicide. Garnets et al. (1990) noted that victimisation interferes with perception of the world as meaningful and orderly and leads people to self-devaluation.

Greenawalt (1995) has spoken of words which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of peace, thus, either supporting or combating prejudices. The accounts presented by Virtanen (1996) showed that mixed couples with a Finnish woman and a Black African man experience hateful reactions from encountered Finns, in particular. Thus, it is important that various officials and community workers have knowledge of reactions to racist attacks, and different intervention methods are available in managing the

stress of racial violence. Since both individual and couple systems as a whole are involved, studies on group indicators are essential in the assessment of the victimization processes.

Nationalism as a Source of Racist and Xenophobic Violence

As Guibernau (1996) has put it, nationalism employs the faces of Janus; it has been used by minorities seeking self-determination and nations willing to develop their own cultures as well as in association with various forms of discrimination. Thus, those who display racist, xenophobic and fascist attitudes may invoke nationalism and it may frequently involve the use of several forms of violence. On the other hand, Michael Billig (1995) has stressed that nationalism does not automatically lead to such extreme means of action, with its typical forms in everyday life. However, in many cases nationalism has been built on the concept of race, as a way of naming the difference between members of a particular collectivity and the 'Other'. The idea of race has been crucial for nationalist discourses, although it is highly problematic to decide who belongs to a particular race, given the constant mixing of the gene pool. Nonetheless, the classification according to physical differences maintains an indisputable strength, which derives from the visibility of physical traits. Racism, more generally, is an ideological discourse based upon the exclusion of particular collectivities because of their cultural or biological make-up. Consequently, racism attributes superiority to one group and favours the growth of hostile feelings towards 'Others' (Guibernau 1996).

The roots of Finnish nationalism may be traced back to the end of the 18th century, to the time when the nation-state of Finland was built (Luostarinen 1989). Historically, Finland has been an underdog with respect to its sovereignty – first during more than 300 hundred years as an underdeveloped part of Sweden, and subsequently, in a forced union with Russia. The emerging Finnish nationalism in the early 19th century (and even before) was predominantly a national liberation movement linked to the development of democratic values and institutions. Similarly, the roots of Finnish youth work may be traced back to the times of agrarian society, when the traditions of Christian, national idealism and political youth work took shape (see Nieminen 1997).

In the wake of Finnish nationalism, the strength of Finnish nationalism was inhibited by the struggle over language between the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking populations in the end of the 19th century, but in particular, by the political division between the White and the Red Guards that lead to the Civil War in 1918 (Virrankoski 1994). However, only recently some reports have become available on the actions of the White Guards with respect to Russian soldiers, who were killed in cold blood in their barracks. The winner of the war, the Whites, adhered to the concept of the nation in its contents, meaning and interpretation and fundamentalized the means of action and the rituals of Finnish nationalism. On the other hand, the Red Guards, who lost the war politically and ideologically, were not allowed or did not want to use the term 'patria' in their discourse. Nieminen (1997) has noted that the young republic resorted to forms of extreme power in preventing Communist youth work, for example.

Karemaa (1998) describes the emergence of anti-Russian sentiments and prejudices as a common feature in European society, dating back to the 16th century. In Finland, she claims, early sentiments towards Russians were directed against the Russian administration and its representatives, not against the Russian people in general. However, among the activist movement, the actual hatred of Russians was the rule rather than the exception. In everyday life, Russians were chosen for the role of rival, scapegoat, and enemy. This hatred was by no means directed solely against Russians, but also against native-born friends and mates of

Russians; victims of harassment may have included Finnish women who were known to consort with Russian soldiers.

In 1918, stronger manifestations of anti-Russian sentiments followed with the return of the German-trained Jaeger corps to Finland. Alongside the activists, the Jaeger troops were the fiercest preachers of deliberate anti-Russian propaganda. The branding of Russians as scapegoats for every and any form of evil that needed explanation served at the same time as a rallying point round the White battle flag. In the 20s, the ideology of hatred against Russians finally spread widely among the masses of the Finnish population, regardless of age. The motives for younger people to incite ethnic hatred was manifested in the new Finnish Army – in the hope of finding a good status in society. By the 1920s, the Finns had become quite inclined to adopt the idea of ‘Russky hating’, specifically the seeds for racist thinking, and ancient Western stereotypes connected with Russians. However, it was the domestic scene – the independence struggle – that was needed to instigate the generation of a genuine racist hatred. Russians had become, in the Finnish view, foes forever, fiends eternal, and filthy vermin.

In line with European developments in the 1930s, political emotions gave rise to fascist movements in Finland (Schot-Saikku 1998). Typically, they tried to capture the term ‘nation’ and the use of it for nationalist purposes in a one-sided way, and social identities and classifications were formed by using negative labels concerning possible enemies. Enemies were found to be where they have always been, in the East (Luostarinen 1989). At the same time, Finnish nationalist figures established relations southwards, where Estonia was regarded as a useful partner in the toughening climate of the 1930s.

According to Guibernau (1996), one of the most prominent and distinctive features of fascism was the use of symbols, ceremonies and rituals. The world of sacred objects was created and their worship efficiently organised in most European countries. Moreover, emotional participation in the mythically constructed nation had the power to demand the supreme sacrifice: the willingness to give up one’s life for the common ideals signalled by the leader who embodied the whole nation. During the first decades of national independence in Finland, nationalism was celebrated at schools, in the army and in different nationalist organisations, movements and political parties, while national identity was emphasised through various symbols, signs, flags and clothes (Virrankoski 1994). Extreme expressions of nationalism also implied a new style in politics and everyday life. Many of the international youth movements that became established in Finland soon acquired a strong nationalistic character. In the thirties there were also youth activities on the extreme right (Nieminen 1997).

WW II was the event that has had tremendous impact on the development of nationalism and cultural identity in Finland (Schot-Saikku 1998). The wartime experiences and defeat had a deep effect on expressions of Finnish nationalism. Although German troops were fighting in Finland as brothers-in-arms, at the end of WW II Finns forced them from the country. On the other hand, although the Soviet Union never occupied Finland, it had the possibility to set requirements with respect to everyday life in Finland. For example, a variety of organisations were disbanded, including sport clubs and women organisations in addition to the Civil Guard Organisation in which sports were closely connected with military training (Vasara 1997). Some of the most anti-Soviet elements were removed from study books and mass communication. The Finns got accustomed to curb their words in order not to provoke any accusation of anti-Soviet sentiments (Schot-Saikku 1998). However, no purges of Nazi sympathisers in the field of art, science, and education took place; people who had worked in close connection with Nazis were allowed to stay, but their days were nevertheless over

(Luostarinen 1989). On the other hand, not much is known about nationalistic fevers in the Finnish army, for example.

Youth work was put at the service of reconstruction and it became more firmly established as part of public administration in the 40s and in the 50s while, on the other hand, youth work was criticised for neglecting less active and socially disadvantaged young people (Nieminen 1997). Later on, as a result of a national debate on juvenile delinquency and youth groups, which were becoming particularly visible in urban centres, local youth work began to include activities for young people in youth centres and youth cafes. However, in the 1980s young people began to lose their interest in youth organisations, and in the late 1990s only 2 per cent of the age group belonged to political or student organisations. Lifestyles based on alternative movements began to gain ground among young people (Nieminen 1997). On the other hand, as Paakkunainen (1997) has pointed out, in particular, young people's readiness for protest has grown, while all means of protest, from boycotts to unauthorised graffiti, may be prevalent.

After WW II, Finland was a 'closed' society with respect to migration movements, in particular, across the Finnish-Soviet boarder. In fact, Finland has been ethnically highly homogenous with the lowest proportion of residents with foreign backgrounds among the total population in Western Europe, being 1.7% in 1999. However, the number of residents with foreign backgrounds has been increasing from 17,000 in 1987 up to 88,000 in 1999. The growth of immigration in the beginning of the 1990s was largely due to the immigration of refugees, and ethnic Finns from the Soviet Union. At the end of the 90s, out of about 17,000 refugees approximately 5,500 refugees from Somalia and 3,800 refugees from the former Yugoslavia represent the first sizeable refugee migration to Finland. In recent years, mixed marriage has become a growing reason for immigration to Finland. Besides American and Western European men, Finnish women more often marry foreigners coming from African, Arabian, and Southern European countries, while Finnish men marry Russian, Estonian, Thai, American, and Philippine women (Jaakkola 1999; Statistics Finland 1998).

Sources of Data on Racist Violence

Recently, studies have highlighted why tendencies towards racism and xenophobia manifest themselves specifically in forms of violence both from the point of view of perpetrators and victims. Some studies have analyzed statistical data on immigrants as victims of violence as well as perpetrators of violent crimes. Moreover, statistics provided by the police have shed light on trends in racist violence. However, one of the major difficulties in determining the extent of racist and xenophobic violence in Finland, for example, is still that information on such incidents is not systematically collected and reported on a national scale. Another concern is that data on perpetrators of racist violence are not shared among agencies that are not able to identify perpetrators of racist violence.

It is well established that the real level of crime is not accurately reflected in statistics recorded by the police, and police statistics need to be treated with caution. First, official statistics on racist incidents have been either lacking or – at best – of a rather uneven quality in Finland due to the fact that the police have not systematically followed the instruction of the Ministry of Interior to collect data on racist incidents (Jaakkola 1999). Furthermore, police efforts to encourage victims to report such crimes to them have been few and far between, and thus, changes in police statistics may indicate changes in the behaviour of the police and victims as much as increases or decreases in the actual number of incidents (Virdee 1995). Second, studies suggest that the rate of reporting racist incidents to the police is low (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind 1997; Virtanen 1996).

Media reports, on the other hand, may have effects that work in quite opposite directions: they may facilitate violent tendencies as well as inhibit them. For example, media coverage may focus solely on racist groups, while the experiences of victims are ignored (Jaakkola 1999). In some countries, media coverage has turned otherwise marginal figures from the extreme right into something akin to media stars (Kaplan 1999), without any connection to racist violence. Moreover, media reports tend to be focussed on 'spectacular' events, while low-level harassment is neglected, leading to a one-sided picture of racist violence (Helminen 1996). Thus, victim surveys are often used as a measure of the 'true' extent of racist incidents, when compared with either public perceptions, 'official' or media-based accounts. In general, while victim surveys may be affected by a certain degree of 'subjectivity', fear of labelling, and an inability to remember past events clearly, they have been shown to produce certain and detailed accounts of racist violence (Virtanen 1996).

Methodological Issues in Research on Racism

The organisation of research on racism raises a lot of methodological issues. First, the choice of a survey method depends on general criteria such as the characteristics of the target population and local criteria such as the geographical and structural context. Typically, general population surveys on victimization due to violence include comparatively small numbers of people from ethnic minorities, if ethnic background is considered at all. On the other hand, the face-to-face interview has been used only in a few Finnish studies on the experience of racism (Virtanen 1996; Ylänkö 1996). Although this method allows a great deal of flexibility, it is expensive and time-consuming, leading to a small sample size, while the setting where the interviews are done may also influence the answers. Furthermore, Finnish studies on racism may be criticized because of partly biased formulations of questions (Virrankoski 1994), omission of racist acts (Jaakkola 1999), low response rate (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 1997), bias in study populations (Reinboth 1997), and missing descriptions of data collection (Kaplan 1999).

Sampling procedures in studies on racism among ethnic minorities often reflect administrative practices in a given country, which may exclude immigrants that have arrived in a country only recently (e.g. Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 1997). Similarly, multi-ethnic or mixed origins may not have been taken into consideration in Finnish studies on racism. According to Bhubal and Donaldson (1998), careful description of the characteristics of each population studied to make clear the basis of racial or ethnic classification (e.g., ancestry, geographical origin, birthplace, language, religion, or migration history) is an essential starting point. This approach does not solve the problem of how populations perceive themselves, however. On the other hand, while convenience and street samples may produce shortcomings in data comparability, and bias in a non-randomized sample, they may reach groups that may be left unnoticed in studies on racist violence, such as students and tourists (e.g. Virtanen 1996).

The Emergence of Racist Sentiments in Finland

In the early 1990s, a number of factors constituted circumstances favorable to the emergence of racist sentiments in Finland. One factor was the evolution of negative attitudes towards refugees, in particular (Jaakkola 1999). According to some views, in the early 90s a one-sided emphasis on the control of borders and on 'illegal' asylum seekers transmitted a negative message to the people that asylum seekers constitute a threat more than anything else (Bjørgero 1997). Intended or not, the problems were addressed largely in terms of the asylum issue by the state authorities. For example, in Finland the number of asylum seekers dropped drastically after the New Aliens' Act in 1992. At the end of the 90s, Finnish politicians seem to be acting in concert when stating that the refugees to be received from Kosovo should, for the most part, consist of disabled and old people. Furthermore, xenophobic attitudes as well as the rise in racist practices may be coupled to what is

perceived as a 'Muslim threat'. While Finns' attitudes towards refugees, foreign job seekers, and other immigrants seem to have become more positive along with the economic recovery and the decrease in unemployment occurring at the end of the 90s, about one fourth of the Finns surveyed in a recent study stated that Islam is a threat to Finnish culture (Jaakkola 1999).

According to the study by Jaakkola (1999), one fifth of 15-17 -year old Finnish boys accepted the anti-immigrant activities of skinheads "totally or partially". The acceptance of the skinheads' activities was higher among those living in the countryside than in cities. Nearly every fifth Finn considered it at least partially acceptable to take part in a demonstration against immigrants. However, attitudes towards immigrants do not necessarily reflect behaviour, and, thus, measuring racist acts would be needed in survey studies (see e.g., European Race Audit 1997).

Second, there was widespread social frustration due to unemployment and economic recession throughout the Nordic countries. Although unemployment seems to have intensified fascist influences to a limited degree in Finland (Pekonen 1999), in some local communities such as Joensuu, a clear and marked increase in racist activities has taken place among those laid off at timber industries, along with the general public of the town. On the other hand, those Finnish regions such as Pohjanmaa with the strongest traditions of national socialist organisation before WW II seem to have managed the refugee issue without heightened overt racist manifestations. Overall, Finland has not witnessed a wave in cases of bombing, arson, or shooting against immigrants, and terrorist-type acts have been a rare occurrence as compared to Sweden, for example. Nonetheless, incidents of racist violence in the street increased during the first half of the 90s, although the rise of the street violence seems to be over for the time being (Pekonen, Hynynen & Kalliala 1999). According to clinical data from Helsinki University Hospital, the severity of attacks in the street is still a Finnish peculiarity with wounds to the head area of victims of violence, in particular.

Victims and Perpetrators of Racist Violence

European studies have found considerable diversity amongst the various ethnic groups and their experience of racist violence and harassment. The most victimised groups may include refugees and asylum-seekers that have newly arrived in Europe (Human Rights Watch 1995). Other groups may include those who have lived in Europe for centuries or decades such as Roma, Afro Caribbeans, Africans, and Asians (Gordon 1991; Virdee 1995; Brah 1996). During the 90s, some old ethnic minorities such as Jews may have seen themselves more as secondary victims of racist violence (Epstein 1993). However, antisemitism is still virulent in many countries with such overt manifestations as the drawing of swastikas and vandalism of churchyards (Antisemitism World Report 1997; Wieviorka 1997).

In Finland, there is evidence that among Black Africans experiences of physical violence may be even more common than experiences of everyday racism, ranging from aggravated assaults, illegal threats, to assaults and violations of home privacy (Ministry of Interior 1998; Ylänkö 1996). Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (1997) explained their finding as a sign of prejudices towards the latest immigrant groups, in particular. On the other hand, the risk of victimization seems to be markedly connected with the visibility of the origin of the immigrant (Virtanen 1996). However, bias-motivated violence is by no means directed solely against immigrants and ethnic minorities, but also against anti-racists and native-born friends of immigrants; victims may include tourists, businessmen and well-to-do travellers as well (Krell, Nicklas & Ostermann 1996).

A study by Virtanen (1996) showed the importance of dividing our understanding of racism into popular and institutional variants. The study was based on interviews among immigrants

of Southern European, South American, Black African and Arabic origin (n=62) in Turku, which is a city of 150 000 inhabitants on the southwest coast of Finland. Details of the sample and sampling procedure have been presented elsewhere (Virtanen 1998). The accounts of the study showed that in most cases racism was talked about in the context of lived everyday events and experiences. Institutional forms of racism were bound up with encounters in educational, occupational or leisure spaces or in the official system of justice. The importance of contextual influences on racial inequality was particularly salient in encounters with the police. Black Africans and Arabs, in particular, felt that exposure of violent attacks to the scrutiny of the police lacked in effectiveness.

According to the study, the low-level racial violence and harassment that men experienced was mostly in the form of threats, obstruction, and jostling; women reported that they had been victims of insulting comments and name-calling. With respect to severe racial violence and harassment, about one third of respondents had experienced assault without any visible damage and one sixth had experienced assault which resulted in bruises or wounds. Africans, in particular, were struck with visible sign of damage. Skinhead violence, typically, took place in public places in a group of 5-10 young Finnish men. Violent acts on the part of skinheads were fuelled with threats and hate phrases, and some cases of skinhead violence occurred in a series of related attacks. One reason for the cruelty of skinhead violence may lie in the fact that Finns siding with the victims of violence were rather few (Virtanen 1996).

In Sweden, Lodenius and Wikström (1997) reported cases where persons who have taken a stance against racism stand the risk of being exposed to threats, and Tiby and Lander (1996) reported cases where sexual minorities have fallen victim to violence by racist groups. So far, sexual inclination is not mentioned as a source of incitement against a group of people, although the Swedish authorities have planned changes in the law since the beginning of the 90s. In Finland, no statistical data exist on the victimization of sexual minorities due to violence by extreme groups.

In Sweden, immigrants have been found to be more exposed to violence and threats of violence than the native population, and the most victimised groups were Iranians, Chileans, and Finns (Martens 1997). In particular, second generation immigrants were most exposed to violence. Immigrants as an age group are quite young: 37 per cent are between sixteen and twenty-four years old as compared with 16 per cent in the whole population. If age is controlled, the difference becomes less pronounced. Moreover, it should be noted that the victimization rates presented here include cases where immigrants have fallen victims to violence on the part of their countrymen or other immigrants.

In a Swedish study by Martens (1997), North Africans (Algerians, Moroccans) and Iraqis, Turks, and Lebanese had the highest offending rates in street violence. The offending rate denotes that a person has been suspected of or committed a crime at least once a year. With respect to lethal violence, Ethiopians, Moroccans and Finns had a high involvement in violence, i.e., more than double that of any other minorities. Both immigrant boys and girls reported more often than their Swedish counterparts that they had committed a violent act. In general, 15- to 17-year-old youngsters have the highest rate of offending, and the rate decreases with age. However, Latin Americans, Asians and stateless persons have the highest annual offending rate in the ages 21 to 24. For Africans, the offending rate increases up to the age of 39.

In a Finnish survey by Reinboth (1997), all cases processed in court involving physical violence were investigated. The number of cases in 1996 was 2,047 in ten district courts. Most cases were from the Helsinki Region (47.1 %), Tampere (11.4 %), and Oulu (8.2 %). However, those cases where the perpetrator was sentenced because of several violent acts were excluded since it was not possible to determine which part of the charge was due to a

specific incident. According to the courts only a handful of violent incidents had racist overtones. Besides Black Africans and Arabs, Russians fell victim to violence on the part of Finns, the reason being that they had spoken Russian in a public place. However, charges were more often made in cases with racist overtones; out of the dozen Finnish perpetrators every third was left without a sentence, while less than 10 percent of all cases were rejected.

According to Reinboth (1997), the most common reason for the rejection of cases with racist overtones was the fact that the victim was not able to recognise the perpetrator. The similarity of the looks and clothes of the skinheads, in particular, seemed to protect them from charges. The occurrence of racist incidents involved nearly always a public place, a street or a restaurant. Only one tenth of the immigrants were attacked at home, while the figure for the Finns was twice that. On the other hand, the sentences of immigrants were a bit milder than those of the Finns. Day charges that immigrants were sentenced to were about at the same level – 30 – as the Finns, but they were sentenced to a clearly lesser degree to imprisonment. In cases of imprisonment, the charges against the immigrants were milder on average than those against the Finns. The average imprisonment of the Finns lasted four and a half months, versus two and a half months for the immigrants.

The milder sentences of the immigrants were explained, at least partially, due to the fact that they were only seldom guilty of severe violent acts. Furthermore, they had less often used weapons than the Finns. Two thirds of the incidents where immigrants were considered to be responsible occurred in the Helsinki Region. Two thirds of the immigrants that were considered to be involved in violent incidents came from the Middle East or from the Arab countries in North Africa, the next biggest group being of Black African origin and from the former socialist countries of Europe. Out of all the cases investigated, about one tenth had a female perpetrator. More often they were victims of violence; every fourth victim was female. Violent acts by women often took place at home, and their crimes were often connected with domestic relationships. Nearly one half of violent attacks on the part of immigrant women were carried out using some weapon, while men typically used their hands or feet in violent acts (Reinboth 1997).

A variety of reasons may lie behind these results. Jackson, Brown and Kirby (1997) proposed that stressors such as unemployment and downturns in economic conditions will influence the perceptions of both dominant and subordinate group members in a given country. Among dominant group members, stress will directly increase racist sentiments toward a subordinate group, and among subordinate groups, the racism of the dominant group would be reflected in increased experiences of racism. Moreover, immigrants may be less able to adapt their behaviour according to the laws of a new country than native counterparts. Furthermore, racist violence may be affected by generational and other time-bound factors as well. Thus, racism as a potential community-institutional stressor may create chronic psychological and physical health risks for both the perpetrator and victim. However, no studies exist on crime rates among second generation immigrants, nor on the dynamics of racist violence among the native and immigrant youths in Finland.

Youth and Racist Violence: Sources of Motivation

As such, racial incidents are reported to be provoked by a range of perpetrators, from members of organized groups to individual persons. Among young people, sources of motivation to commit acts of racist and xenophobic violence have been reported to vary from group hatred, community defense, and rivalry to interpersonal tensions (Oakley 1996; Virrankoski 1994). Young people, in particular, seem to be strongly influenced by the culture and concerns of their immediate local community, and may be those who carry out racist and xenophobic acts 'on their community's behalf'. Second, in the transitional and formative world of young people, individuals with strong personal motivation may also be able to

exercise undue influence. Finally, for the same reason, organized extreme-right groups may be able to exercise influence on young people, in particular.

The role of organised extreme right-wing groups in relation to racist and xenophobic violence has received extensive attention throughout Western Europe (see e.g. Pekonen 1999). The policies of such groups typically oppose civic and social integration for groups of migrant or refugee origin, on grounds of national or ethnic purity, and they frequently call for the cessation of the immigration and the repatriation of those of immigrant origin (Oakley 1996). They include groups which openly support or do not condemn Nazism, and which deny the occurrence of the Holocaust. Such groups and their leaders do not for the most part directly advocate violence against racial, ethnic or national minorities. However, such groups may play a significant role with regard to racist and xenophobic violence either by influencing the more general climate of opinion and perception, for example, among young people. As Young-Bruehl (1996) has put it, they make the victims out to be victimizers.

Oakley (1996) singled out economic circumstances as the kinds of variables which impact on the attitudes and feelings related to particular social groups such as young people. Thus, economic conditions may lay the foundation for rising racial violence by increasing anxiety and competition between groups. According to psychologically oriented explanations, foreigners as unknown and strange arouse deep-seated, primitive, unresolved hostilities, which were originally directed against younger siblings or against anyone else who was suspected of wanting to infiltrate spheres regarded as the exclusive domain which was theirs by right (Arlow 1992).

In a Finnish study by Virrankoski (1994), written responses of young people were elicited to a picture depicting a Black boy and White girl hand in hand. The thoughts of the boys were embedded in stereotypes of the imagined sexual abilities of the black man and the situation of the Finnish girl in the pair relationship. Stereotypes do not normally contain arguments, and discriminative strategies were partly based on mere affective reactions. Accordingly, hatred and hostility were unconscious, uncontrolled and irrational. On the basis of the results, Virrankoski (1994) stated that there might be a danger implied for black and white mixed couples in Finland. Nevertheless, the uncontrolled and unreflective hostile attitudes of 15-year-old youngsters was explained by the fact that their own personalities are still developing.

Skinhead Violence

Skinheads have been typified as the most arrogant source of racial violence and harassment, and there have been a number of cases in which immigrants have been beaten severely by local skinheads in the Nordic countries (Bjørge 1997). The skinhead phenomenon has been traced back to the early 1970s, when gangs of youths in combat boots began to be seen in the streets of England (Anti-Defamation League 1995), or even further, to Jamaican Blacks in the 1960s (Donaldson 1996). In the 1990s, skinheads are found in almost every country whose majority population is of European stock, from East to West (Hockenos 1993).

Despite the fact that skinheads have drawn public notice for their bigotry and taste for violence throughout Western society, skinheads may not be classified as a coherent and universal category as such (Anti-Defamation League 1995). For example, the use of skinhead attributes, clothes and shaven heads varies to a great extent from one country to another. Furthermore, some skinheads may denounce neo-Nazis as 'boneheads', who have no respect for the long tradition of racial integration, which in fact has characterised the skinhead movement. In New York City, for example, skinhead music events may include Black, Hispanic, Oriental and Jewish skinheads, and 'skinzine' publications may have a determined non-racist look (Donaldson 1996). Similarly, anti-racist SkinHeads Against Racial Prejudice

(SHARP) have evolved in Finland in the skinhead movement. In some countries women have become increasingly active in some racist skinhead groups, whose members tend to be younger and less bound by the male-exclusive practices of many earlier racist movements (Blee 1996).

During the 90s, skinheads in Finland have come to take part in the international network of skinhead groups, loosely allied through the White Power music scene (Kaplan 1999). The popularity of White Power music seems to have waxed and waned rapidly in local communities. Furthermore, Finnish skinheads may have experienced more problems in gaining alliances and crossing borders than could be expected – if that is at all planned by the skins themselves. One reason for this may be the fact that the violent acts of skinheads as street fighters and nationalists are typical only for some minor segments of local youths.

In Finland, the first skinhead generation emerged at the beginning of the 70s (Luukka & Muukkonen 1997). The skin ideology gained its fame by opposing the culture of those favouring money, consumerism, and Americanisms. The skins cherishing the fatherland, the army and a strong leader found their ideal in the most famous Finnish neo-Nazi, Pekka Siitoin. A subculture of violence and white power music emerged in Naantali, which, however, lost much of its attraction towards the end of the 90s. In the 80s, the antipathies of skinheads were raised by hip hoppers and rappers and the popularity of ‘Negroes’ and ‘black’ music, leading to gang brawls. The Somali refugees who came to Finland at the beginning of the 90s were the cause for skinhead perpetrators, targeted at anybody “at the wrong place at the wrong time”. Typically, skinhead violence has ranged from threats to serious violence with knives and other weapons towards victims who are alone or in a small group (Virtanen 1998).

During the 90s, the activities of skinheads have evolved according to local conditions. In Joensuu, the rise of the skinhead problem may be connected with deteriorating economic conditions, yet it also took a considerably long time to start counter actions. In Mikkeli, the skinhead problem was placed on the public agenda in 1997, two years or more after the problem was first raised. Due to the fear of being labelled as a hotbed of racists, counteractions were initiated by the police and city officials, to curb the basic problem of racist violence. In Turku, racist violence on the part of skinheads evident in the early 90s calmed down considerably by the mid-90s, perhaps because of the rising number of immigrants in the city. However, Black Africans, in particular, still run the risk of falling victims to racist violence in Turku (Forsten-Lindman 1998).

In Helsinki, more organized skinhead activities evolved at the beginning of 1997. In one highly publicized case, a mob of 40 skins headed for Konala during the football match of 25 to 30 Somalis, attacking them armed with baseball rackets, bats and hammers. The police were called to the place, however, without being able to prevent the fight. Some of the skins told the court that they were under the influence of alcohol and drugs. According to the skins, the aim of the attack was to retaliate for earlier events. The attack led to a counterattack by the Somalis, in which two skins were injured, one with a knife. Although the Konala incident represents a rare occurrence, it may be interpreted as an attempt to ‘racialize’ social relations and the environment, as Willis (1978) has put it. The role of the police has been taken by young men, who want to keep the area ‘clean’ of ‘niggers’, and ‘Black heads’. Among other things, such racist practices involve attempts to humiliate these Others through physical assaults and verbal abuse, which ‘prove’ the masculinity of the attackers and ‘reduce’ the victims to ‘sissies’: a form of emasculation and effeminization (Willis 1978).

Siltala (1995) has considered skinhead violence from a psychoanalytic point of view. Accordingly, hate against the bad, weak, and dirty is expressed through the transfer of one’s own weakness, although violent actions may be determined by societal conditions such as

rivalry over status. Thus, the youngster who is rejected by society may direct his or her anger against refugees, holding those others guilty for his or her own degradation. Paradoxically, the excluded had internalised the ideology of the right of the stronger, who actually had marginalized them.

Spectacular violence has traditionally compensated for the missing power of the disadvantaged. By being cool, a youngster wants to show that he masters the rules of the hard world, no matter how marginalised or perplexed he may be. He does not want to be a victim, as Siltala has put it (1995). Similarly, violence gives a sense of control, although violent acts may define the fate of the perpetrator forever (Bjørngo 1997). Violence is horrible but everybody understands its language. The perpetrator of violence becomes acknowledged and identified as somebody of influential authority, somebody in charge, to say the least (Miedzian 1992). In addition, the opposition to feminine values arises partially from the desire for independence and the testing of boundaries among youth. The occurrence of horror and angst in videos and rock lyrics illustrates a resort to primitive ways of coping, the most popular styles being the skinhead and raw punk style, Viking rock, white noise and Oi-punk (Bjurström 1997).

The Skins need to fight to relieve aggressive feelings, as they indeed themselves may explain their behaviour. From the psychoanalytic perspective, skinhead violence may be seen as an expression of childhood traumas and conflicts (Siltala 1995). Thus, failure in society threatens to trigger the helplessness experienced in childhood, and joining a fearful group defends self-respect. On the other hand, the group is not a transit state that leads to independence but a structure that prevents it. Personal inferiority is easily interpreted as political violence and personal relations may be objectified to be a fight between different races, nations and other abstractions. Thus, a borderline milieu is needed to divide the world into parts, and to control the nihilation through continuous waging of the war.

In a society full of risks, the fate of the class does not meet the human being in a homogenous way, instead the risks are individualised (Beck 1993). The victory lies not in the development of one's abilities, but in the exclusion of a rivalry. Similarly, heightened nationalist feelings and discrimination toward minorities may be used as a way of defending one's own power status (Liebkind 1996). The restless group is kept together by a devastating force transference to the out-world on the parts of the ego that are experienced as shameful or aggressive. Thus, the weak part of the ego is transferred to groups that are in similarly marginalised positions such as migrant youths or anti-racists, while disgust requires that others have to bleed in order to notice what kind of suffering and anger they produce. Lost, without direction or hope, skinheads try to create order which is composed of the experienced inequality (Siltala 1995).

Political Dimensions of Racist Violence

On the whole, Finland has been no exception to other European countries with respect to outbreaks of racist violence. However, the question remains whether such racist violence may be directly attributable to some extreme right organisations, and furthermore, what kind of elements in the history of Finland may have promoted or prevented manifestations of violence. It has been pointed out that it is too limited to perceive only those incidents as racist in which the perpetrators support an 'openly' racist ideology (Witte 1997).

In recent years, radical far-right parties have been remarkably successful in their political campaigns to gain electoral significance in many European countries. Typically, these parties have focussed on the issue of immigration in their political discourse. According to Liebkind (1996), it has again become fashionable to mix nationalist values, stronger border controls and problems associated with lax immigration and refugee policies. In Finland, only a few

politicians have been able to play on the issue of immigration in their campaigns achieve a position, whether in communal or national politics (Jaakkola 1999).

A majority of far right groups have remained small in size; 5000 persons would be needed for an organisation to be registered officially as a party. Nevertheless, the parliamentary extreme right in Finland has taken on new forms and ideals in the 90s, with new leader figures following Pekka Siitoin, who managed to evolve a form of neo-Nazism in the 70s and 80s (Pekonen, Hynynen & Kalliala 1999). For example, in Turku, Olavi Mäenpää, a communal delegate, has achieved a position in local politics by calling refugees 'Black heads', murderers and perpetrators of violence. In January 1999, Mäenpää was fined due to racist incitement against an ethnic group, and was removed as a candidate from the governmental election. By June 1999, over ten cases of racist incitement had been raised against Mäenpää, leading mostly to day charges.

Taken as a whole, some aspects of racist violence may assume political dimensions, although violence may not always be in accordance with the programmes of far-right parties. For instance, the leader of the Isänmaallinen Kansallis-Liitto (IKL), which regards itself as an heir to the Finnish Nazi Movement active in the 1930s, claims that the party expels members who accept violence. However, this may give legitimacy to more extreme groups who strive for the same audience to propagate their extreme ideas and methods towards marginal social groups such as refugees and immigrants.

Racist violence is a wider issue than just the existence of extreme groups or organizations. If cases of violence may be connected with extreme organizations, the causal chain may still, however, remain unclear. In Helsinki, a 22-year-old Finnish man carried out an arson attack against a strip joint. According to the man's girlfriend, the reason for the attack was that the man had expressed disgust for 'the sinful life of the place'. According to court testimony, the man had been a member of an extreme right-wing organisation, admiring the political ideas of Hitler, Mannerheim and Zhirinovski. In court he had not regretted his act: "The act was an effective way of spreading the message."

Overall, a xenophobic mentality and nationalism has offered a narrow basis for right-wing parties in Finland, despite the fact that there has been a profound xenophobic streak running through Western European society. The question remains how long this positive development will last since there are many people who – if they do not belong to the hard core of racists – form a wide basis for a xenophobic political alternative. The reason for this would be deep economic problems and growing social exclusion in Finnish society.

Anti-racist Actions by Governmental Agencies and Youth Groups

The 90s have brought about the emergence of various governmental bodies, committees, and actions aimed at dealing with ethnic minorities, racism and xenophobia in Finland. However, in the absence of consistent state policies on issues connected with racism and intolerance, a great deal of anti-racist responses has depended on the awareness and consciousness of local authorities in Finland (ECRI 1999). The local response has varied from the denial of a racist nature of violence to recognition of racist problems. Only at the end of the 90s, a nation-wide follow-up system of reporting racism and ethnic discrimination has been taking shape (Laakkonen 1999). So far, the representation of ethnic minorities in different bodies and civic organizations has been modest, which seems to necessitate the participation approach as a tool for empowerment among ethnic minorities. Signs of change may be seen in the fact that minority groups are increasingly trying to introduce their perspectives into the public debate.

While the streets of Europe have witnessed the emerging division of people along ethnic, political and ideological lines, the number of different groups seems to be perplexingly large,

and it may be asked whether common factors may be found behind anti-racist actions, which, nevertheless, encourage young people throughout Europe. The street is a place, site, thoroughway, medium, territory as Hearn (1992) has put it, combining the past and the present into a mixture of feelings, actions, groups and boundaries. For example, anti-racist organizations such as Antifascist Action (Antifa), with young people as the most frequent age group and core activists, have rallied to the support of victims of racist violence and against the passivity of the police motivated by the fact that the law enforcement authorities have not been taking racist manifestations, rock concerts, and other racist symbols seriously, which has often created a public image of violence and disorder for some of these groups. However, contrary to their violent image, anarchists, for example, represent young people who oppose the right of the civil society to use force (Friedrich 1996).

Social movement theorists have emphasized the role of emotions in initiating and maintaining commitment and that activists feel themselves to be part of a collectivity. As defined by Peterson (1995), the anti-racist movement is a system of social actions against racism carried out by loosely organised individuals, groups and associations. Within the framework of general conflict theory, youth movements may be defined as movements which are structurally based, i.e., when young people as a category organise in reaction to older age groups. However, as a research object, new social movements are difficult to define precisely, since they are often fragile and network-based organisations without fixed boundaries (Gundelach 1995).

In Finland, open violent confrontation between racists and anti-racists has not been typical. One reason for this may have been that extreme groups in Finland have not been able to organise mass demonstrations. In Kuopio in 1995, while the IKL organised a demonstration, violent confrontation was avoided, perhaps because the fascists had contacted the police beforehand in fear of being attacked during the march. In Helsinki, a rock concert was organised by neo-Nazis in December 1995. The anti-racists were able to find out the locality of the concert a day before, and about 80 anti-racists took part in counteraction. Some of the racists attacked the anti-racists, but were repelled. According to anti-racists, the police were more worried about the security of the fascists than about anything else. In December 1997, anti-racists marched against a White Power concert in Helsinki. However, the police prevented confrontation by keeping the counterparts away from each other.

Another concern is that Finnish youngsters may attend racist concerts abroad, such as in Stockholm, where counteractions by the police have been rather rare. In January 1998, the police arrested a hundred neo-Nazis at a rock concert in Stockholm, some of which were Finnish citizens. Nevertheless, in some Swedish municipalities, law enforcement authorities have chosen to prosecute everything from flags and Nazi emblems to Hitler hails and Nazi insignia, which has had clear anti-racist effects in neighbouring countries as well.

The spread of sports related racist activity from abroad to Finland has remained small, although Nazi salutes, slogans and symbols were common during trips by British football fans to Sweden in the beginning of the 90s (Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, 1998). In recent years, however, there have been cases of abuse of black and ethnic minority players in Finland (Jaakkola 1999). In Helsinki, racist groups have tried to use the venue of the football field as a platform to project their 'nationalist' views.

Ethnic Affiliation and Gangs: When Violence Turns into a Fight over Turf

In European cities, the racialization of localities may happen through the staking out of territorial claims, and policing by young working-class males to keep the area 'clean' of 'wogs' and 'niggers' (Willis 1978). Accordingly, violent acts often take place in the streets, in bars and cafes, or in other public places. Although the victims of obstruction, jostling and

hitting are mostly immigrant men, it does not mean that women do not face physical violence at all (Virtanen 1996). Nonetheless, while men's domination of the public domain is obvious in most cultures, it is often ignored in social and political analyses.

Skinheads, in particular, have become a source of racist violence in many Finnish communities. It has become evident that skinhead gangs' activity waxes and wanes in an international, national and local context (Bjørge 1997). Ethnically organized youth gangs may act as protection in a hostile environment, often contributing to learning such attitudes and skills as may lead to crime (Spergel 1995). In one highly publicized case, Somali youngsters in Helsinki resorted to large scale gang attacks against Skins, other immigrant youths, and the police in the Summer of 1998. The incident started with minor quarrelling with passers-by. In addition, a plain-clothes policeman was attacked with a knife. According to media reports, later on, about 50 Somalis attacked Albanian youngsters. Despite the fact that anti-violence actions have been sponsored by a coalition of city youth offices and nonprofit organizations, in particular, no youth clubs were active during the summer.

The city of Joensuu forms a special case with respect to the intimidation of a whole community. The city was faced with a multiracial reality in the early 1990s when about 200 Somali refugees were settled in the city. The settlement of the Somalis was carried out without precautions on the part of local or governmental officials, nor were they able to answer to the allegations in local newspapers of the 'luxurious' life of refugees – young and healthy men – who had made a coward escape from the war, and who were able to buy new cars and live at a hotel.

Violent confrontations between the Somalis and the skins had started at once. During the spring and the summer of 1993, a new wave of violent attacks took place. In 1994 the counterparts started to fight each other with weapons. The visible core of the perpetrators was formed by approximately 20 skinheads, who were followed by about 100 'junior' skinheads. Some headlines in local newspapers read like this: "Three neo-Nazis were sentenced for six assaults on two victims of foreign origin". (Karjalainen 2.8.1994). "A silent demonstration in remembrance of the Crystal Night by Antifa with 30 neo-Nazis observing." (Karjalainen 10.11.1994); "Joensuu is getting a bad reputation. Where are the police?" (Karjalainen 11.11.1994).

The attitudes of the adult population seemed to be behind the actions of the youth, carrying out racist acts 'on their community's behalf'. According to a report by Makkonen (1996), about 20 youths started an ultra-nationalist patriotic movement that aimed at sheltering Finland from foreign cultures. The leader of the movement admitted that it was difficult to control the behaviour of its members. The members were allowed to use youth locales organised by the city, and later on the meeting spaces were occupied by hard-core skinheads who quit the movement. According to their classmates, these youths were a mix of Satanists and fans of heavy metal music, who adopted an ideological facade without deeper insights. However, their teachers did not seem to be concerned about their openly expressed extreme ideas. Negative attitudes of the local youth were indicated in a questionnaire study that showed that nearly forty per cent of the boys thought that too many foreigners lived in the city.

With respect to violent acts, dozens of attacks with knives, guns and Molotov cocktails against the Somalis and other immigrants were recorded by the police. The issue of racist violence and harassment was not taken seriously by local authorities, until a well-known Black American basketball player had to go home because of threats and maltreatment from gangs of youngsters in the town. Not surprisingly, most of the Somalis have moved away from the city. In a newspaper article a 15-year-old Finnish boy tells that his half-year prison sentence is a hard ordeal for a first offender, but he will not change his views about the 'skin'

ideology, although abandoning violence. Another skinhead with a one and a half year prison sentence tells about his difficulties in starting a new life: "You are left without support, expelled from school, and you are not allowed an apartment because neighbours say they're scared. I have no future here, and I have to move somewhere else." In the beginning, the court gave some perpetrators unconditional sentences, which were later transferred to public service.

Some court processes have turned out to be farces, with mild results. According to some media reports, the perpetrators of racist violence have shown their disgust of the system of justice and police with disorderly behaviour even in courts because of the inaction of the police. Furthermore, the decisions of the courts leave many questions concerning the equality of skins and immigrants. Some cases have conveyed the powerful message that the crimes involved were not serious or threatening to society. In December 1997, the state authorities considered it necessary to investigate some racist incidents with respect to the police investigations, which showed that legal actions may take considerable time.

By 1995, anti-racist projects had been started in schools, in local communities, and between adversaries (Kalliala 1997). However, it remains to be seen how effectively the issue of racist violence, in particular, will be tackled. In 1996 and 1997, the skins gained political momentum with a new organisation called Carelian Survivors, and started to organise concerts in a new clubhouse in co-operation with Helsinki Skins. Some of the older skins joined the activities of the Patriotic Right (former Aryan German Brotherhood). Thus, it seems that the skins have been able to mix nationalist ideals and symbols in their racist actions. With respect to violence, more organised incidents have taken place since the political mobilisation of the skins in Joensuu. According to police statistics, violent attacks between the skins and the immigrant youngsters have not shown signs of disappearing, but instead have led to a vicious circle of violence (Laapio 1999). It may be asked whether political motives are found behind these actions. Nevertheless, the course of actions seems to follow earlier cases of racist organization. According to Bjørge (1997), it has been typical for petty-criminal youth gangs to hold no explicit ideology nor to have any direct relation to political organization in the beginning of their career; however, racist activists have frequently become interested in such ideology after violent attacks against immigrants.

Laapio (1999) underlines the need of taking the responsibility to challenge racism within the perpetrator community as a whole. This seems to be a promising strategy, since the identification of perpetrators of racist violence and harassment has been a neglected issue, for example, in youth agencies. In general, it has been pointed out that anti-racist interventions are more likely to be effective if the professional is willing and able to identify the issues which underlie the individual's behavior or attitudes, and to engage constructively with them (Sibbitt 1997).

The Police, the System of Justice and Racist Violence

While violence may be the only form of collective action that poses a challenge for some groups, it is the most trivial of actions (Tarrow 1994). While the organisers of a peaceful demonstration need a plan of action and they must gain the approval of the authorities, perpetrators of violence need no more than the solidarity of the gang and suitable targets. According to Tarrow (1994), most forms of collective actions have centred on violence because it is the easiest form of collective action for local groups. However, violence has several limitations as a political weapon. It gives authorities a mandate for repression (Eisinger 1973), and turns away nonviolent sympathisers. Furthermore, violence has a polarising effect on alliance systems (Tarrow 1994).

Racist violence may be considered a serious threat to civil society, since it represents a new form of violence that may be induced by a large mob. Thus, violent confrontations between racists and anti-racists form a totally new level of action for the state authorities in Finland. Once violence has begun, it legitimates repression by the state authorities, polarises the public and binds a group of militants (Tarrow 1994). Evidently, this development has characterised skinhead movements and anti-racist movements in Finland. While the skins have openly resorted to violent actions, anti-racists have stressed tolerance in their message. Violent clashes between these movements have been rare, but there is some evidence the skins have been forced to restrict their movements in certain areas in Helsinki at least, because of often violent opposition on the part of anti-racist and immigrant youths.

The minority communities that have been at the centre of the immigration control debates have been subject to special police control throughout Europe (Gössner & Ness 1996). According to Reiss (1968), behaviours that are most likely viewed as police brutality may include, e.g. the use of abusive language, stopping people on the street, and actual use of physical force or violence. In Finland, the police have been reported stopping and checking persons who are foreign in appearance (Finnish League for Human Rights, 1996). Winkel (1991) hypothesized that the difference in the degree to which targets make a suspicious impression on the observing officer is the main determinant of differential treatment. According to Witte (1996), the breakdown of relations between young blacks and the police is one of the main consequences of the process of criminalization among blacks. The most serious form of police brutality is the improper use of deadly force (Friedrich 1997). Typically, the pattern of lying the victim on the ground and applying some form of pressure on the chest is repeated in many of the reported cases in Sweden (Amnesty International 1997).

In Finland and elsewhere, some youth demonstrations have led to riots with clashes between anti-racists and the police. In Tampere in December 1997, a meeting of anarchists and anti-racists ended up in a riot with violence on the part of the police, which was, however, not prosecuted. On the other hand, the youths were portrayed as criminals with a web of international connections in the police investigation. In contrast, in 1999, the police and anti-racists were active in joint preventive efforts, which had a positive effect on the gathering.

Racist Violence and Anti-racist Actions: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Nordic countries as such are no exception to the trend of racial violence and harassment aimed at ethnic minorities and immigrants throughout Western society. Although a wide variation exists in racist violence, racist manifestations seem to escalate in due time from one locality to another, across borders and generations. Typically, some forms of violence may be patterned rather than random, and may become entrenched in some localities, and may be persistent and long-term.

As regards the escalation of racist incidents, local communities seem to differ in how alert they are to the dangers of racist violence and harassment. Some communities seem to succumb in the beginning to problems, while others are more effective in their counteractions, be they legal, social or cultural. Typically, counteractions consist of a mixture of actions by different agencies and organisations to promote tolerance and anti-racism, while the fear of being labelled as a hotbed of racists has produced large anti-racist campaigns and projects. In recent years, a range of anti-racist actions have been initiated by the European Commission (1998). However, less data is available on the effectiveness of anti-racist actions, while the basic problem of racist violence seems to have been addressed only in a few cases at the grass-root level.

Racist violence could be expected to be treated in a fashion similar to many other forms of crime. Experiences of the phenomenon of racist violence in Finland and elsewhere, however, do not seem to confirm this expectation. According to the study by Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (1997), the most common populations victimized by racist violence in Finland consist of immigrants from the Third World and from Russia. However, more detailed information is needed as regards a variety of racisms directed at groups defined as 'non-white' or non-native as Brah (1996) has suggested. Furthermore, more research is needed on young people's experience and rates of victimization and perpetration of racist violence.

Clearly, more elaborated models of racist incidents are needed in order to find possible solutions, in particular, with respect to racist violence. With respect to young people, the practical question is how youth groups and activities are or how they should be organized across the spectrum of racial and ethnic groups. For example, more research is needed as to whether peer modelling may be used to influence violent encounters as a situationally determined process (Liebkind & McAlister 1999; Luckenbill 1977). Furthermore, other studies show that it is important to divide between popular and institutional forms of racism, when considering how to locate the understanding of racism both spatially and institutionally (Virtanen 1996). Thus, training immigrant youths as well as native citizens, actors and authorities in the area of anti-racism to improve skills and measures in redirecting the escalation processes off the violent track may offer the potential for enhancing ethnic encounters.

Typically, 'hot spots' of racist violence seem to be linked with the geography of cities. Characteristics of living in the urban centres include the fact that social control is looser and there are greater chances of having contact with many types of people, which gives rise to different situations, both in terms of exposure to the risk of violence and exposure of violent encounters to the scrutiny of police and other intervening bodies. With respect to racist violence in the street, the possibilities to reduce exposure to the risk of victimisation may be somewhat hampered (Graham & Bennett 1995). However, the potential for violence may be reduced by decreasing the availability of guns and other weapons (Rosenbaum 1988), or by increasing surveillance by personnel at amusement places or by privately employed groups of guards.

In some Finnish communities, the violent settlements of accounts between the skinheads and the Somalis have represented a persistent cycle of attacks: the skinheads have worked in an organised manner, pursuing victims and assaulting them in some suitable place, which appears to be consistent with conventional definitions of social terrorism denoting an attempt to create fear and terror among a special population (Gurr 1989). However, skinhead violence in Finland does not seem to be as wide-ranging as in other Nordic countries, where violence ranges from arson attacks, robbery to shooting and to the destruction of property and graffiti (Björge 1997).

Furthermore, the actions of the skinheads have certainly been less significant in Finland than the widespread political demonstrations of skinheads in Germany, and other European countries, where they are supported by substantial segments of the "good" citizens of various communities. As such, the low level of violence and confrontation still seems typical for political demonstrations in Finland, in particular (Siisiäinen 1990). Moreover, in Finland less evidence of organised and coherent neo-fascist ideologies of "race" may be found, which, however, have been typical of a collective criminal form of behaviour involving skinheads and far right groups in other Nordic countries.

In recent years, the public debate has focussed on the question of whether criminal sentences for racist violence are appropriate. So far, Norway and Sweden have made changes in their criminal codes regarding violence, threats and vandalism which explicitly make racist

motivation an aggravating circumstance which should be taken into consideration in the apportioning of the sentence (Bjørgero 1997). In Finland, the perpetrators of racist violence have mostly been sentenced for fines, even in cases of aggravated crimes. Quite evidently, the lack of effective legal sanctions as an expected outcome of racial incidents needs to be taken into consideration.

In addition, the victims of racist violence have felt in many cases that it is in the institutional context of the police and the system of justice where racist practices are prevalent (Virtanen 1996). Overall, the issue of confidence in the police as a mediating factor in the reporting of racial harassment is important because it has the potential to offer an opportunity for intervention. Thus, programmes are needed to determine effective methods by which confidence in the police might be improved.

To sum up, the present study highlighted that state and local authorities should pay attention to the following points in their actions. First, actions may be initiated by monitoring and reporting racist incidents, in order to shed light on the multifaceted issue of crime and victimisation among immigrant populations, and among youth, in particular. Second, issues of importance may include monitoring the types of sentences imposed on those convicted of committing crimes against foreigners. Third, the training of the police should yield new insights in more professional police methods and more creative strategies for responding to racist violence. Finally, in-depth studies on marginalised segments of society such as victims and perpetrators of racist violence are needed to better understand the social constructions of ethnic conflicts.

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Racially Motivated Violence or Just a Common Disturbance

Interpreting the Underlying Meaning of Events in a Small Community in Sweden

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Introduction

This study has its origins in some concrete and very remarkable events in a small locality in Värmland (a county in west-central Sweden) during Easter in April 1995. Vålberg, a community about 20 kilometers from Karlstad, became the object of major press coverage. An immigrant family had, according to the first mass media interpretation of the events, been attacked by a gang of racist youths. According to one press report, the mother in the family had tried “to protect her five small children and save her husband who had been hit on the head with an iron pipe in their own yard”. According to the immigrant family, the “terror” had been going on for some years (Expressen, 17 April 1995). In June 1995, despite the fact that the preliminary investigation by the police was not complete, the prosecutor made public an interpretation of the Easter events. According to the prosecutor, the Easter disturbance in Vålberg was not racially motivated (Göteborgs Tidningen, 12 June 1995).

In the first wave of mass media interpretations, Vålberg was characterised by such headlines as “Village of hate” and the tabloids stereotyped both the “victims” and the alleged “perpetrators”. The scenario that was served up was one of the peace of a small community being disrupted and the normality of the community being threatened by terrible racist violence, a pure “race war”. This pattern of interpretation was common. The first mass media images of the family as victims and youths as perpetrators, however, changed fairly quickly after the Easter events and became more difficult to comprehend, according to Brune (1996) who reviewed the mass media coverage of the Easter events. The racist perspective lost currency not because it was necessarily incorrect at the core, but because credible sources provided other interpretations. The statements made by local representatives of public authorities and organisations possibly contributed to the reinterpretations. Local authorities, especially the police and justice authorities, became the most important interpreters in

the media. The immigrant family was no longer described a “just any Swedish family”.

The prosecutor maintained in the media that it was not the family’s immigrant status that had irritated the youths but rather their “differences” and the fact that the father in the family, because of his hot temper, was fun to tease (Brune 1996). The immigrant family’s hot temper was emphasised and the new dominating interpretation in the media of the Easter events focused on tumult and disturbance, old grudges and a squabble between neighbours (Brune 1997).

The trial resulting from the Easter events was held in October 1995. The judges identified one family member as a contributor to the Easter events. Several young men were convicted for lesser crimes, for example, molestation. Exactly who had placed a dangerous fragmentary pipe bomb at the front door of the immigrant family’s home, however, could not be determined. Fortunately, this bomb did not explode. According to the National Crime Laboratory, the bomb was capable of causing potentially fatal injuries. The safety radius for the device was estimated to be 200-300 metres. Furthermore, the question of whether or not the violence was racially motivated was not addressed by the court (Karlstad County Court 1995).

This article focuses on the question of whether the Easter events of 1995 in Vålberg can be linked to other similar events in the community. It also seeks to describe and discuss the experiences and interpretation of local actors of these events. Do the interpretations of the events reflect the dominant Swedish milieu: the relations between immigrants and Swedish people and interpretations of these relations?

This research has been conducted through interviews with selected individuals in Vålberg. Above all, three groups and related aspects were of interest. These included the reactions of immigrants and their interpretation of events, the set of values among the youth involved in the Eastern events and their interpretation of events, and finally, the descriptions and interpretations of the events by the local authorities, mainly local police authorities. The analysis is also based on police material which includes, among other things police reports and information from the preliminary investigation of the Easter events.

The data collection was conducted during the period September 1995 to January 1997. The materials were of two types: qualitative interview data and documents. Regarding the qualitative interview data, 125 interviews were conducted during the course of the study, of which 11 were conducted by telephone. More than one person was interviewed simultaneously during some interviews. Also a number of persons have been interviewed more than once.

An analysis of various police documents raises questions concerning the reliability of sources. The documents reflect a multifaceted interpretation of events which we, in turn, have examined. To eliminate to some extent doubts concerning using secondary sources as research material, we have employed source triangulation by acquiring data from both the interviewees as well as documents so that our data is in various “positions” with respect to each other and in relation to the research question.

However, before results of the investigation are reported, some of the previous research on racially motivated violence is presented below.

Attitudes towards Immigrants and Racists: Some Empirical Studies

Has xenophobia increased in Sweden? The national surveys concerning attitudes towards immigrants and immigration point to changes in the public position regarding immigrants during the 1990s. Among Swedish citizens there is a growing dissatisfaction with the extent of immigration and especially regarding immigration policy (Westin 1995). On the other hand, the surveys do not suggest that pronounced xenophobia and associated values are more common than earlier.

However, those who expressed xenophobic or racist opinions in the generational survey of 1993 were simultaneously opposed to immigration, especially the immigrants that phenotypically – by appearance – diverged from Nordic residents. Still, this cannot explain the dissatisfaction with immigrant policy that was indicated by the survey (Westin 1994). Compared with middle-aged people, younger people expressed a somewhat more xenophobic sentiment, but it is nowhere near the sentiment expressed by older people. The main result of the 1993 study concerning the attitude of youth concerning immigration is, according to Westin, that there is both a criticism of immigration and an exception taken to prejudiced and ethnocentric assertions. Ottar Brox has captured this sentiment outlined by Westin in the phrase, “I am not racist, but ...” (Brox 1991). This *but* is a new feature in the attitudes of youth (Westin 1994).

How can this change in the attitudes of youth be understood? In part it may be that although immigration has been the subject of lively debate in Sweden the nuances of the subject have not emerged. The number of asylum seekers in Sweden during the first half of the 1990s was high, coinciding with an economic crisis and rising unemployment. In times of mass unemployment the young are hit hard, youth that in order to find work and a residence must compete in the same market with refugees. Also, young people follow trends and tendencies more obediently than older people (Westin 1994). According to Löwander (1997) the main explanation for the change in attitudes can be found in a more restrictive immigration policy during the 1990s which favour Swedish national economic interests above that of international refugee conventions. That is to say that political decisions have changed public opinion, which has given signals that immigration must be stopped, but also that there exists desirable and undesirable refugees.

During the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, racist movements have increased their political activities after having had a fairly anonymous existence after the Second World war. They have become more active, among other things, through the spread of white power rock music and other propaganda (Lodén & Vikström 1997; Löw 1995). In addition, a number of smaller localities in recent years have been shaken by violent events that have focused intense media scrutiny and which have become connected with deeds of racist violence, such as Klippan, Kode, Örbyhus and Vålberg. Racist violence has a tendency to come in waves (Bjørge & Witte 1993). According to Bjørge and Witte, racist violence is violence in which the victim is chosen according to ethnic, religious or national origin considerations. The victim is attacked in the capacity of representing various groups which are minorities because of their number and their weaker position in societal power structures. Buildings and property can also be the objects of attacks because they are associated with these minority groups. This paper subscribes to this definition of racist violence.

At the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s violent activities from far right extremist groups increased in Sweden. Most of their criminality can be defined as ideologically motivated even if no racist organisation is behind these co-ordinated activities. Usually it is youths under the influence of alcohol that are behind these events at the local level (Bjørgero 1993). A large part of the violence and harassment has not only been focused on immigrants but also on Jews, homosexuals, anti-racists and so on. These groups appear to represent important hate objects for far right movements (Lööv 1995).

In Sweden an increase in racist violence seems to have occurred while at the same time the latest report from the national Security Police (1997) suggests that this trend has been broken. The increase can possibly be ascribed to better routines for reporting the incidents by the local police. The hidden number is likely greater because of two reasons: partly, the attacks which are never reported to the police and, partly, the attacks which are reported to the police but which may not be properly classified as racist.

There is a pattern in violent racially motivated attacks, according to Bjørgero (1993, 1997), who has studied armed racist violence in Scandinavia. Armed violent deeds, involving explosives and firebombs, have been common against immigrant targets. In recent years these attacks have also been carried out by members of youth gangs that have not had any connection with far right extremist groups. They have been carried out by gangs without any expressed political ideology. However, they often use the symbols, slogans and arguments that originate from anti-immigrant organisations. Contact between the perpetrator and far right-wing organisations is usually made after the violent act has occurred. The perpetrators, although relatively few, often have a criminal background (Bjørgero 1993).

Despite the fact these disorganised gangs have no appreciable expressed political ideology, their actions, according to Bjørgero (1993), nevertheless have a political dimension. First, often the victims are chosen because they are immigrants or asylum seekers. They are attacked not because of their individual characteristics or actions but because they are regarded as representatives of minority groups.

Second, the political dimension is strengthened by the fact that anti-immigrant groups have been successful in actively spreading propaganda about immigrants. They identify a target group as a cause for diverse societal problems and thus justify the racist violence politically. Often the perpetrators are consumers of this propaganda.

Third, when marginalised youth gangs turn to violence against immigrants, they often find that they receive the support of their contemporaries in the local communities and from individual adults. This has been known to be a contributing factor for the violent incidents (Bjørgero 1993).

A number of incidents in Sweden during the beginning of the 1990s pushed racist violence to the top of the national agenda because attacks of this type comprise a serious threat against legal security, to which everyone in society has a right, regardless of origin or background. The prohibition on racially motivated violence has, among other aspects, been introduced into the law as a way to sharpen punishment (Proposition 1993/94, 101). The society's political goal, that every actual expression of racism will be forcefully opposed, will be realised at the local level by local politicians and civil servants.

According to Witte (1993) there are many reasons to study racist violence at the local level. First, social problems most often arise at the local level. Second, it is for authorities at the local level such as the police and justice system that political decisions have real consequences. Third, local public reactions are central because they to a large extent will affect developments at the local level. The public reactions can find expression in local society, for example, in the form of mobilisation of the population in various counter groups or the lack of them.

Case of Vålberg: What Happened?

Vålberg, with a population of about 3500, is a relatively new community with a settler quality. The establishment of industry led to a major expansion in the area after the Second World War. The population, of which a major portion was immigrant workers, grew rapidly. The immigration of labour into the area's main industry – a chemical factory – is clearly visible in current statistics. Two-thirds of immigrants were from some other Nordic country, of which the majority were Finns. Half of the Nordic immigrants today are 50 years of age or older (Statistics Sweden 1994).

From a social point of view, the first decades after the Second World War was an exceedingly turbulent time for the area, characterised by optimism over the prospects for the area but also by foreignness and social unrest (Magnusson 1993). Workers streamed through the dirty and noisy chemical factory, which had relatively low status compared to other industries in the area (Fabriksarbetaren [The Factory Worker] 1961). Even if the political life of the area has been dominated by the labour movement, neither the union nor political activities were especially strong or vibrant. Shift work at the factory came to be an obstacle for a well developed club and cultural life in the area. The population of the area seems above all to have lived their lives within the private sphere of the home (Magnusson 1993).

Despite the fact that the powerful expansion of the area occurred relatively late, there is view among many area residents that it is a traditional industrial community in which the residents all know one another and have their given places in a known social hierarchy characterised by close relationships. However, it is not possible to detect any spirit of Vålberg or industry. Vålberg's modern development has been characterised by new arrivals from near and far and there has been a high rate of streaming in and out of the area. The quick expansion and the problems which resulted can with difficulty contribute to the descriptions which can exist in older, traditional societies with close social networks.

From the mid-1960s onwards the developments have been relatively negative for the area; among other things, the area has suffered under the constant threat of industrial closures (Magnusson 1993). During a spate of years the developments were almost exclusively negative; a declining population and a merger with the larger municipality Karlstad has meant that societal services in the area have continually worsened. Almost two-thirds of the area's paid employment are blue collar workers. The area is therefore an exceptional example of a worker community. The level of education is low and unemployment is high in the area in comparison with the Karlstad municipality as a whole (Statistics Sweden 1990, 1996).

Another concrete sign which can conceivably indicate insufficient social cement in the area is the fact that two-thirds of the working population commutes from the area to

work elsewhere (Statistics Sweden 1993). A major portion of the population, therefore, spends their active, waking time in another area. This situation likely does not leave the local culture unaffected.

Thirteen Immigrant Families: Their Experiences and Interpretations

The immigrant family that was involved in the violent events during Easter 1995 was originally from Jordan. They had lived in Sweden for some decades and in Vålberg since 1990, in a fairly centrally situated house. According to the family, they had been subject to racist harassment over the years in Vålberg. Before the Easter events, family members had already filed 20 formal police reports concerning crimes of varying degrees of severity to which they had been exposed. For example, there had been reports of four bicycle thefts and four reports concerning damage to automobiles. There are also formal police reports about damage to other property, molestation, abuse and one concerning attempted murder by arson. For example, the following may be read in one police report the family filed in 1994 concerning damage sustained by the family car as well as attacks against the family dwelling and property: "A gang of youths have attacked the family by throwing eggs at the windows. On the same occasion the back window of the car was partially knocked in. This was the third evening in a row in which eggs were cast on the house." (Police authorities in Karlstad 1994.) After Easter the family was again exposed to attempted murder by arson as their house as well as their summer house just outside of Vålberg was burned down in the summer of 1995. After the burning down of their house, the family moved from the area. A number of the police reports concerning the events indicated that they were of a racist character. One example of such an indication is a police investigation of the attempted murder by arson which occurred in November 1994 in which Molotov cocktails were thrown at the immigrant family's house. Several young men from the local community were interrogated, of which one provided the following account (Police authorities in Karlstad 1994):

[He] denies the crime. He says that he understands the charges against him. He does not like foreigners and says so openly. [He] further admits that he knows who visited the family that evening, but because he sympathises with them he will not tell who they are. "A person must begin somewhere", [the young man] says. He says that he wants to work for a "white Europe".

Most of the police reports did not result in a preliminary investigation by the police because surveillance reference was missing. According to the police documents, two cases of assault were substantiated but other preliminary investigations were discontinued because a crime could not be shown to have occurred.

The immigrant family attacked during Easter 1995 had attempted to get help over the years from the authorities through various ways and to put a stop to the harassment. These attempts included contacts with various authorities at the school and the police. According to the family, the contacts did not result in any concrete actions.

As the harassment continued, the family saw no other way than to try to take matters into their own hands in order to solve the problem. The harassment only escalated. Most likely the reasons were that the family did not give in nor did the local authorities take any concrete measures against the gang of youths.

However, the harassment was not only directed at one immigrant family. In addition to the immigrant family involved in the events of Easter 1995, interviews revealed that at least 12 other immigrant and refugee families in the area had been attacked because they represented another affiliation than Swedish. Racist harassment and deeds do not seem to have been sporadic nor do they appear to be limited to only one family. How did the immigrants and refugees themselves react and interpret the harassment? We

have chosen to illustrate their experience with one case: that of Maria. Her experiences are presented in their entirety; her story well represents a whole in which she comprises a part.

Interview with Maria – “Now I’ll Pay the Price!”

Maria and her family had lived for a number of years in Vålberg. According to her, she and her family were exposed to harassment almost on a daily basis by a gang of youths with shaved heads. She was prevented from parking her car near her house. Her son could not ride his bicycle in the yard and the family’s bicycles were vandalised.

Maria told of mailboxes that had been destroyed and mail that had been stolen or ripped apart. Often they received a threatening letter in the mailbox or which was affixed to the car. The notes read, “F----- niggers. Get out. Sweden is for the Swedish”. Once when she was standing in line at the grocery market, the youths ordered her to go to the end of the line. “And it was merely to do as they said, to say, yes, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean anything”. On the weekends it was even worse because the youths were often drunk. They cast bottles, dog excrement, wooden sticks, “everything possible against the house”.

According to Maria everyone around knew that they were being harassed. Everyone knew but no one did anything. When asked how the racists acts affected her, Maria answered:

I wonder how I survived it. All that stress and chaos. If you had asked me then, I would have just cried and cried. I don’t understand how I made it but I talked with colleagues where I worked. They know. And I know that I was a very strong person with confidence but, but now I am weak. I was weak, and it was chaos. It was as if – I was so scared. But now I’m paying the price. It is now that I’m paying the price. It is more psychological. Many dreams, nightmares. I wonder how I dared. My son is still afraid. And we tried to protect him. We lost the will, the self confidence. He doesn’t want to go out in public today, he just says that “he wants to stay home”.

She concludes by telling how more refugees are harassed and that working immigrants that still live in the area are harassed because they are foreigners:

But they don’t dare to tell the truth. They can lose so much – employment and everything. It is just to survive the harassment but a person can’t say anything. A person just says “oh” when they do something and hope that they stop. If a person says anything it will be like that family [that was attacked during Easter 1995]. They didn’t accept it and one may not do that. It only gets worse. If I was strong, as they had been, but I wasn’t so strong. I was afraid.

From the immigrant’s perspective the racist acts are terrible experiences. Fear, dread and worry about the children were common consequences of the harassment. Another pattern which emerged during the interviews with those who admitted being attacked is that harassment may have serious health consequences. Their freedom of movement was curtailed because they feared certain places at certain times when the places were occupied by the antagonists. In some cases they did not dare to allow the children out of eyesight. In addition, the consequences of the attacks – and the fear of new attacks – spread in the family to the children, relatives and to other minority groups in the area because they quickly learned that the victims were not chosen because of individual characteristics or actions but because they represented “foreigners”.

Ten of the 13 families reported that they had experienced sustained attacks that lasted from a few months to several years. Most of the interviewees reported that they called the police on more than one threatening occasion but only three written complaints had been filed for three attacks (not counting the complaint filed by the family involved in the Easter 1995 occurrences). Damage had been extensive and especially vehicles that belonged to immigrants appeared to be a popular hate object. Except for the family attacked during Easter 1995, no one in the households who was interviewed dared directly oppose the harassment for fear that it would only get worse.

The interpretation of the families that the attacks were racially motivated is based on the message in the attacks. Racial epithets and racist slogans were common and there had been threatening letters with racist slogans. Some even described how the perpetrators appeared – they had shaved heads, were dressed in bomber jackets and steel-toed boots, that is to say that they had a style that could be linked to far right extremism.

The Easter events of 1995 can therefore be linked to other events in Vålberg. The harassment in the area had been systematic and routine. In addition, it had continued from the middle of the 1980s onward. The actual number of families harassed is possibly very high as we were not able to systematically contact those immigrants who had lived in the area but had moved. After the events of Easter 1995 and the major press coverage of the events, all the refugees moved from the area, both those who have been harassed and those who feared that they would be attacked if they remained in the area.

Descriptions and Interpretations of the Young Men

It is young men who were involved in the Easter 1995 events and other similar events. From our interviews some patterns emerge: it is a fairly loose gang of youths that have attacked immigrants but most have contact with each other in various ways. The composition changes constantly as immigrants have been harassed in the area since the latter half of the 1980s. The pattern of action is assumed by younger ones when the older youths transition into other (adult) arenas. Most of the youths had a marginalised position in Vålberg – a petty criminal background was common. Most were born and raised in the area and enjoy living in Vålberg. Their relatives and friends also lived in Vålberg. An overwhelming number have a working class background, of which some are children of immigrant workers from Finland. The younger ones in the group were studying of which the majority were focused on vocationally-oriented studies. None of them who had left school in a graduating class had a permanent job. Social welfare payments, unemployment insurance or cash unemployment support, combined with working occasionally without being registered with the employment office or paying taxes, provided their support and the possibility to have their own residence.

Some wore clothes that were linked to the far right extremist lifestyle. Older skinheads had fulfilled the role of transferring values, clothing styles, language and behaviour. However, there was also a relatively large number of young men in the group that did not display any outward attributes or had shaved heads. Some had contact with far right extremist underground networks but most of the youths were unorganised.

Some individuals referred to themselves as “racists” but most considered themselves to be patriots, nationalist or lovers of the motherland as part of a process of normalising their own values. During the interviews they often referred to others in

the group as “racists” but when it came to describing their own positions they distanced themselves from the “racist” designation.

Harassment of immigrants was confirmed by the youths’ own admissions even if they themselves often described the events as “fighting”. All of the youths had one thing in common: they had taken a position against immigrants. This was a necessity if they were to be included in the gang. It was not possible to be “neutral”. A person was either a “racist”, “patriot” and so on or a person was an “anti-racist”. Those who were not for them was against them.

The attacks had been a means to achieve a precise concrete goal – to scare immigrants away from the area: “They are foreigners and they must leave”. The argument expressed by the youths was often simple and disjointed. Often it was about the fact that “they” – the immigrants – had qualities that “we” Swedes did not have. One youth explained the harassment:

I think that there shall be white power. Blacks and whites do not go together. They are disgusting. I don’t like them and I’ll never like them.

Their descriptions indicate that the attacks had a routine quality. Several youths in the group could conceivably have passed the home of the immigrant family involved in the Easter 1995 events, thrown apples, shouted “Sieg Heil” or performed the Nazi salute and thereafter moved on. One youth who on one interview occasion was dressed in a T-shirt emblazoned with the text “White Power” told of how he and his friends would telephone the immigrant family involved in the Easter 1995 events in order to scare them from the area: “Leave niggers or something will happen”. It was, according to him, “mostly a fun thing”.

The youths in the group appear to have had several motives for their actions and it is difficult to determine any clear border between them. To the contrary, they seem to have coincided and strengthened each other, that is to say the immigrants were attacked partly to scare them away from the area and partly because the harassment was a way to create excitement in their lives. A hope of being recognised, of achieving “respect” within their own gang but also outside their group appears to have motivated the racist harassment.

That is not to say that, in their view, all immigrants should be scared away, but the youths – who like to talk in terms of “foreigners” – mainly were referring to the dark skinned or immigrants that had come to Sweden in recent years. The victims did not need, in other words, to be different phenotypically from Swedes in appearance. Even if most of the harassing youths were not well versed in racial ideology, strictly speaking, the actions were intended to convey a message to the harassed. To force “foreigners” to move from the area was the goal and the attacks were the means to accomplish this.

The most serious attacks occurred more often on weekends or after dark, usually in connection with the residences of the immigrants. The night-time attacks seemed to have been planned to a greater extent than the daylight attacks. Sometimes it was only a few individuals and sometimes it was a large group which went on the attack. In a number of serious armed attacks, such as the fire bombs which were thrown at the residence of the immigrant family involved in the events of Easter 1995, certainly only a few individuals were involved.

The usual way of carrying out the actions involved getting together as a group for a party and listening to White Rock music. The aggressive music built up a violent mood that was further strengthened with alcohol consumption, racist slogans and “boot tramping”. Alcohol served to loosen up the inhibitions or doubts. Then the youths could see to it that “something happened in Vålberg”. One young man described how the Easter events unfolded:

We were just going to go by and check in case they [the immigrant family] were fighting. (...)We went down and checked. [The family] had a party there – oh we can certainly take a swing by there. Then before we went we just sat and drank and I got pulled into it.

This resulted in a fragmentation explosive being placed at the outer door of the family’s home. It did not explode and gradually a large number of youth gathered at the family’s house. A hostile and aggressive atmosphere developed which among other things led to tangible contact between family members and some of the young men. One young man described what happened next:

Then everyone began to shout slogans and stuff: “fucking immigrant”, “fucking nigger”, “get out”, “scram”, “go home” and such things.

There were also young women in the periphery of the group. They were not active in the harassment but they encouraged the violent acts with such expressions as “Are you a coward or what?” When the young men had shown their courage they could receive confirmation of their own masculinity – a masculinity in which strength and action were central ingredients.

In addition, a couple of adults in the area also actively encouraged the youths’ behaviour. Even other adults, among them relatives to the youths, knew about the attacks against immigrants and refugees but an absence of counter-strategies, weak responses and even a kind of passive support made it possible for the attacks to continue. The youth gang interpreted also the absence of counter-strategies as a support for their values and actions (see also Bjørge 1993).

Descriptions and Interpretations of the Authorities

According to the police and justice officials, the Easter events of 1995 which had attracted the intense media scrutiny were not racially motivated. The descriptions by the police of the preliminary investigation of the Easter events clearly show that the events were reduced to only sporadic and isolated events. When confronted with the question of why it was not possible to read anything about the possible motives of the youths in the violence, a police investigator answered:

You mean this thing about racism. We do not study such aspects. We investigate a crime. We cannot choose sides. We must be neutral, we must determine if there has been an illegal threat, preparation of such and so on. This thing about motive, you can ask the prosecutor about that. He is the one who looks into what we have brought out into the open. We cannot take sides in the case.

The connection between the youths’ actions and intentions do not seem to have been investigated. The motives for the actions have been left behind. The attacks to which the immigrant family were subjected during Easter 1995 were regarded by the police and justice officials as separate events. Such a conclusion was, according to our views,

wrong. Partly the deeds had a great deal to do with each other, and partly they had a long history which not only can be connected to the violence to which the immigrant family was exposed during Easter 1995, but even to a fairly large number of other immigrant families. Information that other immigrant families as well had been subjected to violence was reported in the media just after the Easter events. Did the police pay attention to this information? One policeman answered:

I don't know what we should do differently. Every policeman knows that threats will arise between Swedes and foreigners. A whole lot even. But there is as much from one side to the other, there is no difference in my opinion.

The representatives for the police and justice authorities presented a range of different interpretations for the events outside the immigrant family's house during Easter of 1995 to explain why the events were not racially motivated: 1) the immigrant family provoked the youths, 2) the attacks were minimised as "boyish activity", 3) in order to classify the actions as racist, it must be shown that the youths had knowledge about racist ideology, 4) the youths were innocent tools of racists who were in the background, 5) in the language used by the youths (racist threats) there were no opinions etc. At the same time it did not seem that the police and justice officials had investigated as to whether the youths' actions had a racist motive. If the question of whether or not the youths had a racist motive had been posed by the police investigators, it is still possible that the police would have been misled. The youths involved in the Easter 1995 events would probably have denied being racists because the categorisation as "racist" or "racist values" would have had the result that they would be outside society's common values. The young men were conscious of what was necessary to do in different ways to seek normalised descriptions of their own behaviour. They described themselves in such terms as patriot, nationalist or lover of the motherland and their actions as fighting.

Some expressions and symbols of racism are nevertheless described in the preliminary investigation of the Easter events. These forms of expression however must be analysed carefully. A careful description and analysis of racist forms of expression requires that which at first glance appears to be coincidental and separate episodes are indeed part of a pattern. The central question for police work must be to investigate the various forms of racist expression in connection with harassment, for example, of immigrants and refugees (Brune 1996). Which expressions are used during the attacks? How are racist and similar motives expressed? Are slogans employed? Are they racist in character? What does the Nazi Sieg Heil salute or Swastika symbolise? What do clothes and shaved heads symbolise? What does aggression express?

The events of Easter were nevertheless a few in a series of attacks that have gone on for a relatively long time. The deeds have been concentrated on specific groups such as "foreigners"; and the perpetrators have been a special group of people. The police and prosecutors are thought to have investigated this concrete case represented by the events of Easter 1995 separately from the other events. Therefore, they have not succeeded in uncovering an underlying pattern. As studies of racist violence in other countries have shown, racist harassment in reality is a process of attack (Bowling 1993; Hesse 1992; Gordon 1990). Bowling (1993), who has studied racist violence in the United Kingdom, describes it as a dynamic series of events, a process to the extent that it partly encompasses several episodes and partly has a social, political and historic background. In this sense, violence of this type can be compared with wife abuse that often occurs over a long period of time (Bowling 1993).

There were early signals that not everything was right. Among other things the school and youth centre personnel had been working before Easter 1995 to counteract an increasing hostility towards foreigners with increased information in school about racism and xenophobia. Refugees that were harassed and who had contacted the immigrant administration received assistance with moving from the area. No sanctions, however, were introduced by local institutions to stop or to curtail the actions of the young men before Easter 1995. White Rock music was not forbidden at the area's youth centre with the justification that to forbid it would simply attract more younger listeners (Minutes, area group meeting, 8 March 1994). The Easter events illustrated with regrettable clarity that the preventive effort on the part of the local authorities had been in vain in that the perpetrators were not deterred.

Interpretative Precedence and its Consequences

The Easter events of 1995 were initially interpreted by news gathering organisations in racist blaring headlines which portrayed the problem in simple black and white terms. The media abandoned this interpretation of events fairly quickly because the representatives of the local authorities, who were police and justice officials, among others, presented their interpretations (Brune 1996). This pattern is not uncommon for police as is shown by studies of racist violence from, among other places, the United Kingdom (Witte 1993). According to interpretations by the police and justice officials, there were other more central elements to the attacks than the racial. Our study shows that the first interpretative pattern by mass media – racist attack against an immigrant family during Easter 1995 – was closer to the truth than the interpretation by local authorities, particularly police and justice officials. Attacks on immigrants and refugees had become commonplace in the area.

Local authorities possibly had a couple of reasons for not interpreting the perpetrators as racist. Partly, they possibly did not wish to classify the behaviour by the young people as racist. The perpetrators were the sons of the village. Even if some of them were relatively marginalised, they did not look nor did they behave like dangerous far right extremists. They were for the most part simply young men. Partly, they probably wished to restore Vålberg's and perhaps Karlstad's and Värmland's reputation in mass media. Societal togetherness would return and order would be restored. The interpretations by the authorities collided with the first mass media interpretive pattern. Even other studies of racist violence show that worry about the reputation of the local community is an important explanation as to why police quickly go out and deny that racist motives lie behind such deeds (Bjørngo 1994). These constructions of reality can possibly also depend on the fact that the victims had a marginalised position in society. Their problems are individualised. Arguments alleging that the immigrant family which was attacked during Easter 1995 had "provoked" the attacks and that refugees "did not like the area" were stressed by the authorities. Racist violence was transformed into an individual concern and an experience for individual persons. The authorities' interpretation of events as individual trouble can be related to the victims' position in Swedish society. The harassed families belong to minority groups with marginal positions in society – politically, economically etc. Their position in society means that their circumstances – even though they tried to draw attention to their situation – were not observed in full by those in power to do something.

The authorities in turn focused on solutions at the individual level. The most important and possibly the most terrifying aspect of the racist deeds is that they were shown to have achieved the desired effect of the perpetrators. The immigrant administration

transferred refugees and Vålberg became free of “foreigners”. This does not seem to be an unusual pattern. In the United Kingdom a common recourse has been to move or transfer victims of racist violence. According to Husbands (1993), the practical measures to halt racist violence can be categorised into three groups. The first method is to move or transfer the victim(s). The second is to protect those who are attacked or possible victims. The third is to – if possible – punish the perpetrators. These three measures, of course, are not mutually exclusive.

The interpretation of the events in the mass media offered by the public authorities gained quick currency. It seems as if many local residents quickly accepted these interpretations because they minimised the blame felt by Vålberg residents (Rantakeisu, Almgren & Starrin 1997). The interest in fighting racism in its concrete form waned in the area soon after the Easter events. Possibly the support of the local population for immigrant families and for other direct and indirect victims of racially motivated attacks also waned (Rantakeisu et al. 1997). The motives of the youths for the attacks stood unchallenged because their racial motivations were toned down. The representatives of the public authorities who offered interpretations of the events possibly may have contributed to fulfilling a legitimising function both among this group of youths and in a broader context in which there were a multiplicity of media effects resulting from their interpretations. In addition, the emphasis of the authorities on a non-racist perspective in interpretation of the Easter events may have sent signals to potential victims in a considerably larger context than that of the local society. Moreover, the events may have functioned as an inspiration and a model for other racist groups of similar character in which the youths succeed with the goal of driving the “foreigners” out of the area without determining the actions as being racist. In addition, the actions by the youths resulted in a decision by the municipality of Karlstad to devote major resources to be focused above all on the youth of the area. Viewed from the perspective of the youth, this may have possibly been regarded as confirmation that their political values gave good results.

Still, the municipality’s investment was praiseworthy in that it possibly can result in young people being offered an alternative to the far right extremist lifestyle and serve to stop new recruitment.

When the events are considered afterwards, a pattern emerges which shows that the authorities at an early stage banded together for an interpretation which made it considerably more difficult to later raise the problem to the proper level – that is to say to the level that is considerably more serious than that of individual trouble, namely, that of a societal problem.

There are some relationships which suggest that racist violence in Sweden is a serious societal problem. First, this study shows that in a small community – that received media notoriety on the basis that an immigrant family resisted – systematic harassment of immigrants had been going on to an extent that the local authorities only partly recognise. Second, Värmland, according to the Security Police (1997), is a county which is exceptionally characterised by right wing extremist-coloured crimes. This ought to infer that there is a large hidden number of racist crimes, because most of the attacks covered in this study were never brought to the attention of the police. The question also is whether the crimes which were reported to the police by the immigrants of Vålberg, in which the perpetrators were youths from this association, were classified as racially motivated.

A Dynamic Process of Interpretation

There is a paradoxical dynamic at work in the interpretive process of the representatives of the public authorities. Early on, local institutions band together for a decided official interpretation of events which made it much more difficult to regard the matter as a serious (societal) problem rather than isolated instances of non-racist violence. Their interpretations came to shape the platform for a general way to interpret the events among the local residents (Rantakeisu et al. 1997). At the same time there was interference in this pattern of interpretation. There was no doubt that the public authorities condemned and in different ways had worked against racism and racist violence. Individuals from the public authorities have not given the official interpretation undivided support during interviews and in daily conversation. Unofficially the view that the Easter events of 1995 were racially motivated exists, despite the fact that officially the motive in the concrete case – which is probably one of the clearest examples of a racist attack – was officially rejected. How could this disparity have come about?

First, it may have to do with the presence of a hidden discipline within these institutions (Mathiesen 1980). The paternalistic nature of the public authorities, in which two fundamental characteristics are being superior and subordinate and a far-reaching division of labour means, that no individual persons or more peripheral institutions tried to offer alternative interpretations to counter the interpretations which were adopted by the representatives of the most central public authorities involved in the case – the police and judicial institutions.

Second, there is a further aspect of rejecting racism, according to van Dijk (1992). The denial fulfils a function in public life because it gives a positive representation and strengthens the association in the dominant culture. van Dijk maintains that the allegations of racism quickly tend to be regarded as more serious social violations than the racist attitudes or actions in themselves. This is because the allegations of racism run against the dominant culture and inhibit a frictionless co-operation within it as these allegations are regarded as destroying the “good atmosphere”. van Dijk (1992) holds that the denial of racism is most damaging in the public debate because the denial reaches a large number of people and has significance for forming public attitudes.

The question can be asked if essentially everyone, including journalists, was affected by the second interpretation of the local representatives as compared to the initial media interpretation. The attempt to reject the racist motivation, to restore Vålberg’s reputation and create order, may have been a societal interest.

In addition, the public representatives tended to talk about racism as a general phenomenon of the locality rather than to localise and identify concrete cases. This was, despite the fact that it is the concrete cases that are the clearest examples of racism and racist attacks. The localisation and sanctions of individuals might have ameliorated the social offences and possibly have cleared (some of) the local population compared with an interpretation in which racism is only discussed as a general phenomenon of the locality.

Third, this can be understood through the control function of the public authorities. The strategy of these institutions against the first mass media descriptions of chaos, a “race war” and similar terms came to downplay the youths’ racist motivations. An understanding is thought to have existed in which downplaying the events did not hurt

the situation because the authorities simultaneously came with a range of measures to combat the problem. There is, however, a possibility that the measures have been less effective because the reasons for the measures were toned down.

Two Disintegrating Tendencies

Finally, the question remains how the connections can be understood in such a complex occurrence as the systematic racist attacks in Vålberg. How can a racist movement develop in an area such as Vålberg? Possibly it can be tied to both institutional as well as socio-cultural conditions. Here institutional conditions refer to, among others, school and work, while socio-cultural refers to a spirit of citizenship, horizontal relations, popular movements and social networks. In Vålberg two disintegrating tendencies are evident, both of which point in the same direction. The first concerns the institutional, i.e. that education and training are not enjoyed by all. Education in this sense can be a source of frustration to those who cannot complete it or those who afterwards discover that it is not enough with a trade to find work. Work in this sense can be a source of disintegration because a large share of the people are left without paid employment. Failed attempts to establish themselves on the labour market can confirm feelings of exclusion. This is possibly the experience of many regardless of the area in which they live (Lindhbladh & Bustos Castro 1999).

The second tendency is that some trends in the community appear to reinforce exclusion – the weak role that the socio-cultural dimension has had in the area. The absence of collective movements and social networks in the area that provide a sense of civil connection and togetherness – in combination with institutional exclusion – can mean that there is a gap, a collective void that could be filled with a racist movement. Partly, the racist movement provides scapegoats for a quick and negative societal development for the area and partly it provides a collective structure and vehicle for association for the people who might become part of it. Perhaps this strong group can – from which all else can be determined – be a product which fills the void caused by the lack of collective associations and movements in the area. This hypothesis needs to be tested. The next step to explore this would be to test it in other studies of racist violence in local communities.

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Racist Violence and Harassment in Norway

Henrik Lunde

Introduction

Norway has been culturally and demographically a relatively homogeneous country, but there have always been minority groups like the Sami, Roma and a tiny Finnish population in the northeast of the country. Immigration from third world countries started relatively late in Norway, and it was not until the mid-seventies that people who were visibly different from the ethnic Norwegians became an element in daily life.

At the start of 1998, Norway's immigrant population totalled 244,700, or 5.5 per cent of the population (Statistics Norway 1999). The immigrant population increased by 12,400 in the course of 1997. First-generation immigrants (206,900) are those born abroad to parents who were also born outside Norway, while second-generation immigrants (37,800) are those born in Norway to foreign-born parents. Persons with one parent born in Norway are excluded from this definition. The same applies to foreign adopted children and those born abroad to Norwegian parents. The main "third world" immigrant minority groups are Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Turks and Iranians.

According to a survey conducted by Statistics Norway (1997), there is still a long way to go before immigrants enjoy the same living conditions as the rest of the population: Immigrants have an unemployment rate that is three times as high as for the majority, 60% (40% of the majority) suffer from physical problems due to their working conditions and twice as many as for the majority experience fear of losing their jobs. One in five have experienced discrimination when trying to rent a house and 7% have been victims of violence and threats in the past year. Many live in crowded conditions and a high percentage have major problems entering the workforce. Worst off are the immigrants who arrived in Norway after the recession began in the early 1990s. Immigrants are more accepting of living conditions that Norwegians would find unsatisfactory.

On average, their disposable household income per consumer unit is only 58 per cent of the average Norwegian's. As a result, about three in ten immigrant households fall under the line that the EU regards as the cutoff point for low-income. This is defined as being half of the median disposable household income per consumer unit for the population as a whole. In 1994, the line was at about NOK 52,000.

Norway's immigration policies have gone through decades of a continuous tightening of the borders, since 1975 when Norway introduced a ban on immigration, with some exceptions. The development has been parallel to the rest of Europe, but Norway has had a much stricter policy than, e.g., Sweden and Denmark. The past few years, the criticism has been harsh from human rights groups of the revisions of the immigration policy which have made it more and more difficult to apply for asylum or to get a tourist visa if one is from outside Europe, and have caused problems with family reunification etc.

This strict policy on immigration has, in this author's opinion, had an impact on the public by declaring that "the others" are a problem.

Racism and Xenophobia

The climate of attitudes toward immigrants in Norway has changed dramatically over the past ten years (Bjørge 1997). Up until the mid-eighties, the typical asylum-seeker came from behind the iron curtain and was considered a hero by the public and the media. In 1986 the number of asylum-seekers that came to Norway rose to 2,000 causing a heated debate about immigration as such, and immigrants became the targets for many political groups. Public opinion grew more hostile towards immigrants.

Nevertheless, attitudes towards immigrants and refugees have showed a positive development in the past few years. In a survey conducted by Statistics Norway, ninety-two per cent of the population agreed that immigrants should have the same job opportunities as Norwegians (Blom 1998). This is an increase of six percentage points from the previous year. The percentage that disagrees dropped three percentage points to five per cent. This is the only significant change in attitudes since 1997.

Those surveyed were also asked for their opinion on the following statements: "Norway should (in the future) grant residence permits to at least as many refugees and asylum seekers as today;" "immigrants have too easy access to social assistance compared to Norwegians;" and "immigrants are more criminal than Norwegians". Opinions had not changed much since the previous year. Sixty-nine per cent agreed that Norway should grant residence permits to at least as many refugees and asylum seekers as today while 23 per cent disagreed.

Fifty-three per cent agreed that immigrants have too easy access to social assistance, while 32 per cent disagreed. 43 per cent believe immigrants are more criminal than Norwegians are. The percentage that disagrees with this claim remained unchanged at 39 per cent. In 1998 the respondents were asked whether Norway should take in more, fewer or about as many refugees and asylum seekers as it currently does. 13 percent said Norway should take in more, 31 per cent said fewer and 55 per cent think Norway should carry on as now (Blom 1998).

Racist myths and stereotypes paint, however, a different picture of the immigrants as living better than Norwegians and being heavily involved in crime, especially violence, rape and drug trafficking. They are both scapegoats and a powerful enemy at the same time. The term racist refers here to the definition by the UN in the International Convention of on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD 1997).

In the political debate, there is no other topic that attracts so much attention and causes such heated debates as immigration. Examples are numerous, but one incident deserves special attention. In 1995 the government agreed to make an economic analysis of the cost of immigration. This was decided after a proposal from the Progress Party which estimated the annual cost to be 36 billion NOK. The proposal was labelled as “the most thorough scapegoat-racist-document ever made”, where, e.g., immigrants were blamed for causing millions in expenditures for Norwegian companies due to the “fact” that Norwegians got socio-psychomatically ill from seeing too many immigrants on the streets.

After the general elections in September 1997, a minority coalition government, led by the Christian democrat, Kjell Magne Bondevik, was formed. The government declared that they will practice a more liberal asylum policy than that of the old social democratic government. The right-wing opposition in Parliament, Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party), has gained politically from disseminating propaganda for an even stricter asylum policy. Combined with their hostile attitude toward immigrants in general, this position has given them a rise in the polls. In this climate, one should not be surprised that attitudes are transformed into actions and racial harassment started to become an everyday problem for non-Norwegians living in Norway.

The Extreme Right in Norway: Historical and Current Issues

Attitudes and images of “the other” have a long history in Norway, as in the rest of Europe. Tales from missionaries and the slave trade, in which Norway played a part, are among the many events that have played an important role.

Pseudo-scientific racism and anti-Semitism have had proponents in Norway since the beginning of the century. However, their writings did not go unchallenged and, in several instances, was the subject of court cases. In the 1930s the Nasjonal Samling (National Union Party) led by Vidkun Quisling and other minor political groups advocated Nazi ideas. When Germany invaded Norway in April 1940, Norway’s Jewish population numbered 1,800. Altogether, 760 Jews were deported from Norway and only 24 survived.

After the war, advocating racist or anti-Semitic ideas was rarely to be seen or heard, but after a spate of swastika daubing in early 1960, measures were introduced to combat anti-Semitism. The Ministry of Church and Education instructed schools to keep a close watch on anti-Jewish teachers. In 1963 parliament approved legislation outlawing actions or expressions offensive to a minority faith or ethnic group and in 1970 the legislation was strengthened, but has rarely been applied.

In 1975 the racist group Norsk Front attempted unsuccessfully to enter mainstream political life. It disbanded in 1979 and reorganized itself as the Nasjonalt Folkeparti (NF, National People’s Party). In 1985 members firebombed a mosque in Oslo and sprayed Nazi slogans on a synagogue. The party disbanded in 1991. From 1987 on, racist groups and parties were founded around the country, and from 1993, militant youth groups started to pop up. These groups flourished especially in 1994 and 1995. The far right is today more organized and better financed than before, but the key factor to its success lies with Fremskrittspartiet, which after a split have returned to their success recipe of making immigrants and refugees their main political subject. The extreme right in Norway can be divided in two categories; the so-called parliamentary groups and the non-parliamentary groups. This is done with regard to the means they use to achieve their political goals.

Parliamentary Groups

There are two registered political parties in Norway that can be labelled racist. Fedrelandpartiet (The Fatherland party) consists primarily of elderly men. They are strongly opposed to immigration, and nationalism pervades the entire party program. In the parliamentary elections of 1993, the party got 11,546 votes, or 0.5% of the electorate. In the local election two years later, it did not win more than 5,004 votes. In 1997, the number of votes was even lower (3,775 votes, or 0.15%). In 1995, four of the party’s 1993 parliamentary candidates were arrested after Nazi riots in Oslo.

Hvit valgallianse (The White Electoral Alliance) became infamous for having demanded the forced sterilization of adopted children and foreigners married to Norwegians. In the summer of 1997, the party’s leader, Jack Erik Kjuus, was convicted for these statements to a 60-day suspended sentence and a penalty of 20,000 Norwegian kroner. He appealed to the Supreme Court, which upheld the ruling from the local court and also confirmed the conviction of Kjuus for his statements on forced abortion for Norwegian women getting pregnant by foreigners. These events caused

big headlines in all the major newspapers, as many liberal intellectuals supported Kjuus' right to express his opinions.

There are also a few groups that use democratic means, such as writing reports, letters to the papers, arranging local petitions etc, in order to promote their harsh anti-immigrant views. These groups include all racist, fascist and extreme-right movements that share one thing in common: they do not, as organizations, participate in elections. Many of their members are active in different extreme-right groups and parties. The contradictory alliances between persons and groups are numerous, overlapping and changing all the time.

Den norske forening (The Norwegian Association) tries to present itself as a legal think-tank concerned with problems linked to immigration. They have cooperated closely with the Progress party on several occasions; most known is the work behind the Progress Party's proposal for an immigration balance sheet in 1995.

Folkebevegelsen mot innvandring (The Popular Movement against Immigration) was the first racist organization with some public appeal. At its peak it had several hundred members. They produced hundreds of leaflets, arranged more than 30 open-air meetings and were very active in the late 80s. This, however, did not last long. Its leader, Arne Myrdal, was arrested and later convicted for planning to bomb a refugee camp at Tromøya in the south of Norway. Myrdal was subsequently expelled from the organization and its public support vanished. Almost every member of any Norwegian racist and fascist group started their "career" in this group that, today, is almost practically non-existent.

There are also several minor groups on the fringes of the parliamentary side of the far right movement in Norway, like Norges nasjonalsosialistiske bevegelse (National socialist movement of Norway, the Former Zorn 88) and Forente nasjonalister (United nationalists). The purpose of the latter movement is to affiliate all the different Norwegian groups with one organization and co-ordinate their work.

There are today just a handful of organized militant neo-Nazi groups that are active, but in the past ten years approximately 30 such organizations have come and gone. It would be a rather accurate estimate to say that the total membership is just a few hundred with a hangers-on-fraction of maybe up to one thousand. Their membership is almost exclusively males under 30.

In Norway there is a quite large black metal/Satanist environment. Satanic rock in Norway has attracted the same groups as Nazi rock has, for instance, in Sweden and Germany. Many of the bands have declared themselves nationalist or racist. For some of the bands it is unclear whether they are Satanists or Odinists. Many of their texts are anti-Christian or anti-Semitic. Norwegian Satanists have burned a number of churches and vandalized graveyards. One of the leading figures in Norwegian black metal is "Varg" Kristian Vikernes, also named "Count Grishnak", now serving a 21-year prison term for murder and arson. Vikernes has become a cult figure for young black metal fans. After being imprisoned, he declared himself a neo-Nazi and an Odinist. His book, Vargsmal, is a racist, anti-Semitic, Nietzscheian pseudo-biography that has become very popular among youths in Satanist/neo-Nazi circles. One member of a Satanist group was convicted of killing a homosexual man who "made a pass" at him.

In the last couple of years the Norwegian extreme right has adopted the strategy of using concerts and music to recruit young members. One consequence of this strategy has been an increase in the number of Nazi bands, as well as efforts to organize mass concerts. Because of public pressure, and anti-racist demonstrations, they have never been able to organize big concerts. The only reason why they have managed to arrange their concerts at all is that the police have protected the events. Critics say that this might turn Norway into a free zone for European Nazis, and the government is now discussing how to deal with the problem.

Norwegian Nazis are also operating a few Internet pages. The contents are highly abusive and offensive. Some domains have shut down the Nazi pages after pressure from anti-racist groups, but they are often moved to another domain in the USA, where they can promote their hatred under protection from the American constitution.

Nevertheless, on the whole, the number of active neo-Nazis and organized racists in Norway is still small. Some figures illustrate this: 12,000 persons are willing to vote for the two extreme racist parties (White electoral alliance and the Fatherland's party). Still, around 1,000 persons are willing to run as their candidates for elections. None of these two parties made any headway in the September 1997 general elections. The Fatherlands party got 0.2% of the vote while the White electoral alliance only managed to present candidates in three counties.

As for the militant youth groups, they count, altogether, less than 300 members. After having some growth in 1995 and 1996, the Nazi movement has been diminishing these last two years. Several activists have been arrested and convicted, weapons have been captured by the police and local communities; schools and local police seem to have taken the problem of their existence seriously. Furthermore, public exposure of their activities, internal quarrels and untalented leaders have helped facilitate this decline in the movement.

An overview like this would be highly incomplete without mentioning the Progress Party. This party has in the past 20 years constantly played the immigrant card whenever it had the possibility to attract voters. The party has been labelled right wing, populist, racist etc, and although the program claims that the Party has a strong anti-racist policy – the politics tell a different tale. On numerous occasions the party's spokespersons have launched attacks on immigrants on a variety of subjects like the proposal for forced education for immigrants in family planning (to reduce their birth rate), fines for parents who don't teach their children Norwegian, etc. An important fact is that the Progress Party has adopted much of the rhetoric used by the far right, and thus pushed the limits of what kind of words and arguments are being used in the public debate. The Progress party's close links with racists became evident in 1995 when one of its MPs was exposed in a racist strategy meeting.

As revealed by the present author in the anti-fascist magazine SAMORA, most of the party's proposal for calculating the cost of an immigrant was taken from old propaganda material from the anti-immigrant Den norske Forening. Members of the Nazi group VIKING infiltrated the party's youth organization but were reluctantly thrown out. The reluctance and lack of support in this process made the chairman of the youth organization resign.

A typical example of the Progress Party's rhetoric is a statement by the party's representative in Stortinget (Norwegian Parliament), Fridtjof Frank Gundersen, who said "that Norway will experience suicidal attacks if more Moslems are allowed into the country". Gundersen believes that Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland is carrying out a policy which "makes Africa a delivery room for Norway". Gundersen was nearly crowned the Progress Party's new ideology führer at the Party's annual meeting when the question of immigration was raised. The fundamental idea in Gundersen's immigration philosophy is that "Norway will experience Bosnian conditions if the borders are not closed for the so called distant cultures." He also stated that "poor people from Africa and Asia are being tempted to come to Norway to get their share of the oil and gas incomes."

The Progress Party was outraged when it became public that the UNCERD committee expressed concern over the party's racist politics, and the party's leading figures were unable to understand how the UNCERD committee could have been so misinformed.

The far right do not consider the Progress Party as theirs, but several leading activists insist that the Party's candidates are not to be trusted when it comes to immigration politics, and that they only use this in a populist way to get votes before the election and then soon after forget all their promises.

Still an Impact

There is no race war going on in Norway based on the biological concept of race. The parties and organization on the extreme right do not represent a serious threat to democracy, but that does not mean that their activities are without consequences for those concerned.

The far right is still active in Norway. New organizations spring to the surface and violence against immigrants and antifascists continues. Racist propaganda has changed its approach, from attacking social benefits for asylum-seekers to issues such as race, blood and nation. There has been a significant radicalization of the extreme right in Norway in recent years and this was most clearly proven in the program of the party White Alliance, which proposed sterilization and abortion in order to reduce the number of ethnic minorities living in Norway.

The mass-distribution of racist propaganda has played an important part in emphasizing anti-immigrant attitudes in the Norwegian public. Although Norway is being seen as a very rich country, 1.2 million of a population of 4.3 million are living on welfare. The level of unemployment is low, but young people face many problems in getting their first jobs. According to a survey by Gulloy et al. (1997), ethnic minorities in Norway suffer from bad housing, low income and high rates of unemployment. 20% have experienced racism in the housing sector. This cannot be explained by racism alone, but it can neither be neglected as a factor.

Racist propaganda have crept into mainstream politics and politicians can today express statements that a few years ago only declared racists would express. This urges the hard-core racists further, and weakens the impression among the general public that ethnic minorities are to be treated as equals in Norwegian society. In this climate racists and neo-Nazi organizations recruit young people with an easy explanation for today's troubles: blame it on the immigrants. The solution is equally

simple; get the immigrants out. Combined with a complete youth culture package of music, symbols, magazines and concerts, the extreme right has become a fascinating area for young people in search of something to believe in and somewhere to belong.

Even though Norwegian neo-Nazis are few, divided and miserably organized, they have always had some potential for violence. Every time their dream of parliamentary success is shattered, they turn to physical force. Their history is full of killings, bombings, arson, assaults and shoot-outs. There is a possibility that out of electoral frustration, they will try to escalate their assaults against immigrants, anti-racists and leftists. For the time being, they seem content to occupy themselves with running hate pages on the Internet and ordering Nazi music and paraphernalia from mail-order companies.

Today one can say that far right organizations do not play a key role in Norwegian society, and they seldom pose a direct threat to the ethnic minorities of Norway, but this does not mean that organized racist groups do not have an impact on people's lives. The past years have shown many serious violent incidents instigated by the far right, and that the recruitment of young people into militant neo-Nazi organizations has caused a lot of worries in the general public, especially in local communities. It is with regret that we notice that the police still lack understanding of the potential danger posed by the far right, and on several occasions has protected them.

It is interesting to note that the Government's report to CERD in 1996 states that "the Government do not have a complete list of organizations promoting racial discrimination. Such a list might give rise to concern in relation to other human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, privacy, freedom of religion etc." This statement shows that the government's concern is not primarily for the victims of racism, and more than indicates the lack of emphasis that the government puts on the victims.

Racist Violence and Harassment in Norway

Immigrant and minority communities and organizations have vast experience of racism and racial discrimination as manifested in Norway and have been dealing with this problem for decades. We emphasize that there has, as yet, been no systematic attempt at cooperation between the organizations that represent minorities and the Government to consider how racial discrimination should be monitored and dealt with. The Ministry of Local Government and Labor received in December 1992 a report regarding "Systematic collection of data on racial violence and harassment", prepared by a broad working group. The report included nearly twenty recommendations, which could alleviate the lack of knowledge, but hardly any of these have been acted upon, and there are no improvements in the knowledge situation. The main problem with an analysis of violence and harassment directed towards immigrants is, therefore, the fact that the official criminal statistics have no information at all about the origin of victims.

The discussion concerning racial violence and harassment in Norway has sidetracked into a debate on whether it should be called ethnic discrimination or racism. The Anti-racist Center's view has been to see the incidents from the victim's point of view, and thereby concentrate on the result rather than the motives of the culprit. By making the perspective clear, the definition of racial violence and harassment evolves: Racial violence and harassment are incidents in which the victim feels that the incident happened because of the victim's religion, race, colour of skin or national and ethnic origin, or where other circumstances indicate that these were the main reasons.

Racial harassment could be described as violence which may be verbal or physical and which can include attacks on properties as well as on the person, suffered by individuals or groups because of their colour, race or ethnic origin. Examples include acts such as physical assault, damage to property, racist or other offensive graffiti, arson, causing an affray, verbal abuse of a racist nature or threatening or abusive behavior.

There are many problems in analyzing crime in general, since official statistics only tell a part of the story. A survey showed that less than 10% of violence in Norway was reported to the police (Levekårsundersøkelsen 1992). The most significant tendency in crime in Norway the past ten years is that severe violence has tripled, less severe violence has risen by 84% and rape and assault on children have risen by 93% (Haslund 1993). These tendencies changed in 1998 in Oslo, where the police reported a drop of 3.3% in complaints regarding violence, but the violence has grown more severe. There are more weapons, knives and severe physical injury than there has ever been before.

According to the survey, few of the victims actually report the violence to the police, for various reasons and there are several reasons as to why immigrants would not press charges or report to the police:

- They fear revenge from the assailant if they go to the police.
- Bad experiences with the police will make them less likely to report a case.
- They do not want any trouble, but to be left in peace.

There are indications that immigrants feel less safe than Norwegians and a survey in 1991 asked people if they found their neighbourhood safe. 44% of the Norwegians said yes, while 1.6% of the Pakistani and 12.9% of the Tamils asked could say yes to these questions (Levekårsundersøkelsen 1992). In a survey from 1996, 12% of the immigrants interviewed worry about being victims of racial violence or harassment in their neighbourhood. In the same survey, 7% of the immigrants interviewed had been victims of violence in the past year (Gulloy et al. 1997).

Statistics and experience from other European countries show that there are no indications that immigrants are less likely to be victims of violence than other citizens are. There are no surveys or official statistics that can give information about the immigrants as victims of violence and harassment in Norway.

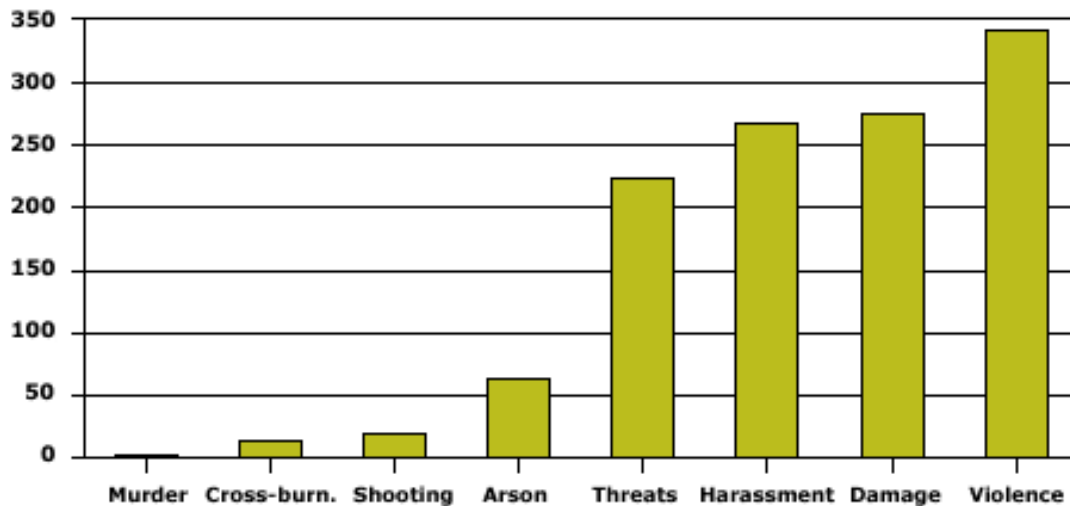
Incidents of Racist Violence and Harassment

Norway's veteran anti-racist NGO, The Anti-racist Center, established in 1987 the "Emergency help for victims of racial violence". The experience and the general opinion from staff members is that there is a significant problem with racial violence and harassment among all ethnic groups in Norway, and that very few of them want to report cases to the police.

The Anti-racist Center conducted a study and collected the material that was to be found on racial violence and harassment in Norway. The sources are the Center's own files on violence and harassment that come from the "Emergency-help" files for the past decade and stories collected from the Center's media archive. The Center launched a project in 1994 that analyzed the files of the emergency office and the archive of press cuttings from 1986 till the present (approximately 130,000 cuttings). These two sources are the basis for the results presented in this article on Norway, and are the first data ever presented on such a broad scale. There have been other surveys and Tore Bjørgo (1997) has presented data on the most severe types of violence, but the material presented here is the first attempt to present the primary facts about the nature of racial harassment and violence in Norway.

Figure 1: The collected data on racial violence and harassment showed 1207 cases in the period 1987-1997.

Number of Racist Incidents in 1987 - 1997



Murders

The most known case was the murder of two young men of Pakistani origin, and another murder by running over the victim with a boat. The double-murder gained lot of publicity and the murderer was urged on his actions by his two friends who shouted racist abuse.

Cross-burning

Fourteen incidents of cross-burning occurred evenly through the period, but there were two clustered events, which indicates that the perpetrators could have been inspired by each other. There is a small group in Norway that claims to be an official branch of the US-based Ku Klux Klan-network, but the geographical variety of crime scenes indicates that there are many different perpetrators. A few have been arrested, but it is unlikely that these burnings have been made in the true (at least from their point of view) Klan-style: "The lighting of a cross is a religious ceremony, performed in reverence to the Lord Jesus Christ, in recognition of his sacrifice. The burning of a cross is an illegal act of violence against a person or a person's home, while invading their privacy with the intent to harass, intimidate, or do bodily harm. This act of burning a cross is usually performed by irate citizens who do not understand the rules of the Klan, but wish to use the influence of the Klan to scare their victims, by burning a cross usually less than ten feet tall in the person's yard or against the home" (America's Invisible Empire on the Internet 1998).

It is therefore safe to conclude that the cross-burnings in Norway have been done to intimidate the victims by spreading the image of the Klan. Eleven of the fourteen cases were directed against immigrants and refugees; from asylum centres to private homes. These incidents were stand-alone-incidents, in the respect that the cross burning was not followed up at the time of the even with any other actions from the perpetrator.

Shooting

Norway has been a country where the use of firearms has been rather rare, and this is reflected in the material. Nineteen cases have been directed against buildings (shooting through the windows where immigrants/refugees lives) or at anti-racists on the street.

Arson

Although Norway has become infamous for the church burnings carried by Satanists, it would not be fair to say that this is a common thing to occur in Norway. Nevertheless 64 incidents have been registered in the period. There have been six waves of arson where the most extreme series was directed towards a housing complex for refugees at Dalane in Rogaland County in 1989. Few of these incidents have been investigated successfully by the police so it is not easy to say anything for certain about the perpetrators, but in some of the attacks on asylum centres the arsonist turned out to be one or more young men who were under the influence of alcohol.

Threats

The threat category consists of a vast variety of forms, but here only more serious threats will be discussed. Twenty-nine bomb threats were made in the period and of these were ten against anti-racist activists and nineteen against asylum centers. The serious threats, which include the presence of some sort of weapon used during the threats, were against anti-racist activists and against immigrants. Once again, few of the perpetrators have been identified, but the ones who have been, are young men.

Harassment

Harassment is a category in which it is likely that few of the real number of cases are represented in the material. Many people in general, and immigrants especially, will be reluctant to go to the police, the media or an NGO to report such cases as they may seem too small to bother other people with. Nevertheless, as found in several other studies, these are the kind of incidents that could have the most devastating effect on the victims. Of the 268 reported cases, several are serial harassment, in which there is a series of various forms of low-scale harassment, which as isolated incidents may not seem so significant, but when it comes in a row, the threat becomes more obvious. The fact that many of these take place in or outside the victim's home makes the feeling of insecurity even worse. The perpetrators are also in this category mostly unknown but 64 of the cases were committed by a gang of youth (3 or more), which seems to be a typical modus operandi of these perpetrators.

Damage to Property

This is also a category where the shadowy figure of incidents unknown to the police and media is believed to be rather large. It seems probable that the incidents are more likely to be known to outsiders the more serious they are. The use of explosives to damage property was registered in 14 cases against asylum centers, 3 against immigrant-owned shops and 2 against an antifascist autonomous movement's house. Thirty incidents have been registered which include damaging windows and these were mostly against immigrants and asylum centers. The other cases include a vast variety, from graffiti on the home of an immigrant family to damaging a car belonging to immigrants or anti-racist activists. Many of these cases involve a combination of means like smashing the car and leaving a racist message on the wall of the house.

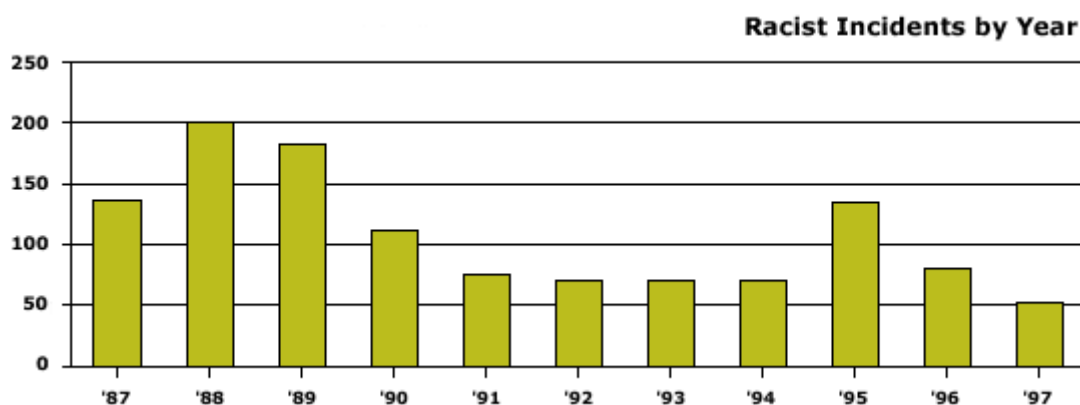
Physical Violence

301 cases of violence with a racist element have been registered. Of these victims, 301 were immigrants and 39 anti-racists. Few of the perpetrators are known, but the pattern of one or more young men is strong. The violence was mostly done with fists and kicks, but in 30 incidents bats and sticks were used, 24 involved knives and 6 incidents involved physical injury by deliberate use of a car. Most of the violence occurred on the streets and restaurants; pubs came second with 40 cases.

Trends

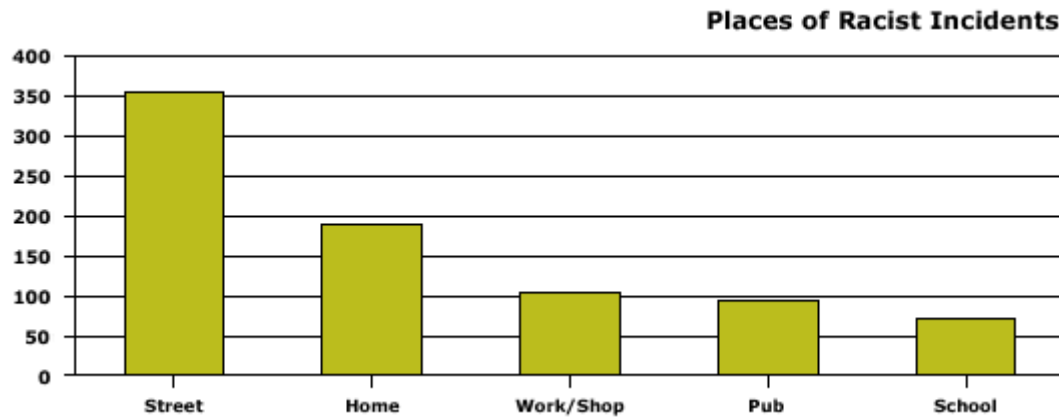
The material used for this project does not cover every incident that occurred in the period, and one should therefore be careful in drawing too firm conclusions. There are nevertheless very distinct patterns that evolve. The material as a whole tells a tale of waves of racial violence and harassment.

Figure 2: The development in the late eighties dropped dramatically during the nineties, with a small peak in 1995.



The events occurred evenly all throughout the year; most of the incidents took place during weekends, and evening/night was the time of day which holds the number one position for acts like these. Geographically, most incidents took place in Oslo, but then one has to remember that a lot of the cases come from the Center's "Emergency help" and therefore this will influence the geographical distribution. The northern and west coast of Norway are the places where the least number of incidents have taken place.

The incidents took place in a variety of places as the figure 3 shows.



In the recent statistics of the Oslo police, private homes were the primary location, with “street” at the other end of the scale. This difference could be explained by the fact that domestic violence rarely has a racist element, except when outsiders attack the victim in his/her own home.

Victims of Racist Violence

There are many factors to consider when discussing victims of racial violence and harassment. For many immigrants it is a very important issue to be believed as a victim; that the society recognizes your suffering and treats you properly. It has to do with being accepted as a member of the society.

The emergency office at the ARC has years of experience with immigrants who have not been permitted to submit a complaint at the police stations; pressure from ARC staff had to be very strong in order to force the police into making a report.

In 1992 the Norwegian government published a document concerning better protection and support for victims of violence. In the voluminous report, many groups in the society, such as the elderly were mentioned as groups who needed special protection. Immigrants were not mentioned in the report at all (NOU, 1992).

For analytical reasons it could be useful to divide the victims into the minority and majority (Lunde 1993a,b,c). People in the minority category are immigrants, refugees and adoptee children, and have all the same risks as anyone else in the Norwegian society of becoming a victim of violence and harassment. But they have an additional factor, because they can be victims due to their ethnic origin. There are about 10,000 persons in Norway from third world countries who have been adopted by Norwegian couples. They are in a position that is different from both immigrants and Norwegians. If they identify themselves, and feel like genuinely Norwegians, this notion can be seriously violated by racial violence and harassment (Dalen & Sætersdal 1988).

Attacks on members of the majority by racist groups should also be included in a picture such as this. Even though the victims of such attacks are white, they are being targeted because of their actions in favor of immigrants, or against racism. They are seen as symbols of the immigrants and as a hindrance to the racists' access to the immigrants. Therefore they are being attacked and the effect could be just as devastating on the immigrants. The immigrants will see that the people who defend basic human values and the immigrants in Norwegian society are being attacked, and may therefore experience this as an indirect attack on them.

It is also important to note the different forms the attacks can take. It does not have to be on a personal level; it can also be on material objects belonging to the victim, or objects viewed by the perpetrator as symbols of the "enemy" such as a synagogue or a mosque. In such cases, the message in the attack is of more importance than the act itself.

Figure 4:

Victims of Racist Incidents among the Majority and the Minorities

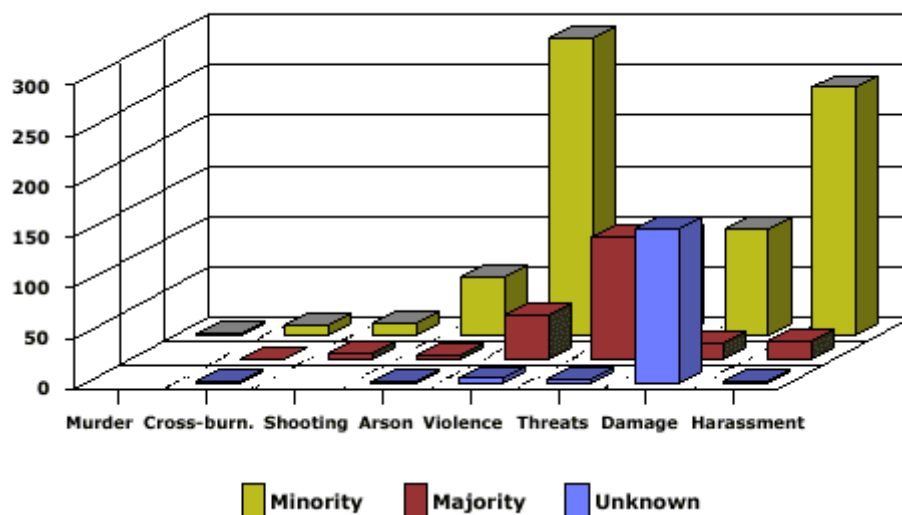
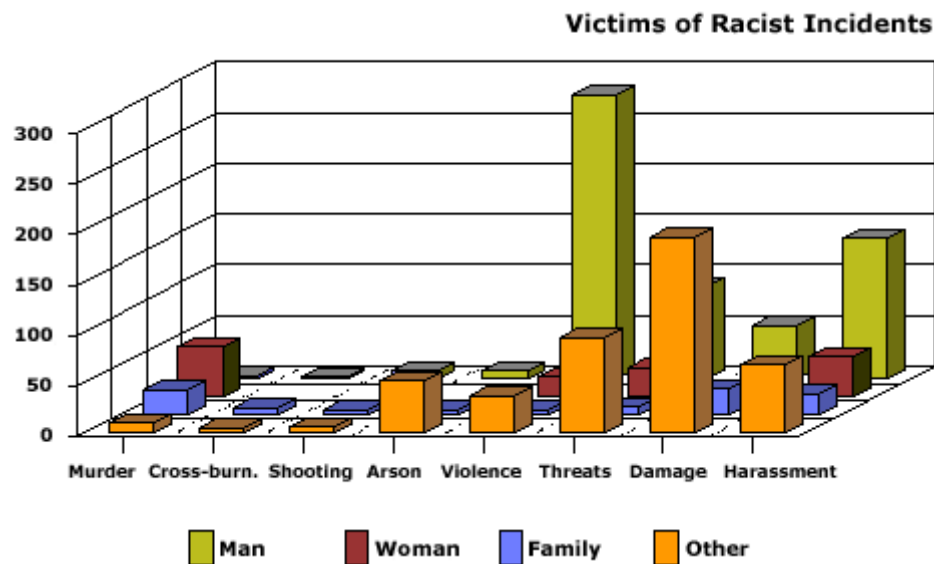


Figure 5:



When looking at the results from the Center’s survey, one can find the following results regarding the victims: 79% belonged to a minority group while 21% were members of the majority, 86% men and 24% women. There were 79 incidents in addition to these that were directed towards families.

These results can also be studied by category. The pattern of male dominance among the victims is in line with all other criminal statistics, but the number of female victims is higher than for other types of violence. The number of families involved also signals that the effects of, e.g., harassment cause disturbance for many people. The “other” -category consists of attacks on buildings; schools and belongings that are not directly linked to a specific person.

Threats is the category that is dominated by majority members, but this could be explained by the fact that many of the receivers were anti-racist activists. These are often people who know how to deal with such matters and also have access to the media and thereby have a better chance of letting outsiders know about what has happened. Nevertheless it indicates that this is a serious problem for people who dare to take a stand against racism and fascism.

In a 1998 report by the Oslo police, the typical victim of violence is a male aged 20-29 and this pattern can also be found in the victims of racist violence.

It is important to bear in mind that although racist violence may seem “blind”, it is not color-blind. The victim became a victim due to his or her origin or this was an important element in the incident. Racist violence also contains a message to other members of the minority or the anti-racist majority, that this could also happen to them. The effect of the message in racist violence is an important factor to bear in mind when analyzing the effects of these crimes.

The consequences of racial violence and harassment can be analyzed in two categories: direct and indirect. The victim and his friends/relatives experience the direct

consequences. This can be all kinds of physical and psychological damage from a wide range of events, from physical assaults to cross burnings.

The rest of the society experiences the indirect consequences. An attack on an anti-racist member of the majority will be experienced by the rest of the society as a warning to others to not engage in such work. Members of the minority can also feel that an attack on a minority member also could easily happen to them, because of the racial element in the incident.

Perpetrators of Racist Violence

Since the information is so limited concerning racial violence and harassment, there is likewise little information on the culprits of these attacks. The data available shows that of the known perpetrators, 490 were male and only 12 were women. For the cases of racist violence, the known perpetrators were in most cases a gang (n=161), two men (n=28) or a single person (n=81). The number of passive bystanders is not taken into account here.

A small number of cases included an offender who was a member of a racist/Nazi-organization, which is a known phenomenon in these kinds of offences. Bjørge (1997) claims that this is the typical trait of perpetrators of racist violence. This does not by any means imply that a racist motive is not present, like a convicted arsonist said: "Everybody hated the asylum-seekers, but it didn't seem that anybody had the guts to do something about it".

Violent activities against immigrants by organized racist groups are a rare sign in Norway. The racists have instead had a rather massive campaign against Norwegians who work against racism, and who have gone public with their views. Mayors, union-leaders, priests and bishops and journalists have all got their share of threats, dead animals in the mail, racist graffiti on their homes etc. It seems that the racists are trying to smooth their path by trying to scare their enemies from taking a stand against them. The side-effect is to prevent others from following in their footsteps. Violent attacks take place nonetheless and it is the neo-Nazi skinheads that have attacked anti-fascists on several occasions.

The lack of membership in an openly racist organization has in many cases made the police neglect the racist element in the offense, and alcohol has instead become the major explanation (and in some cases an excuse). It is important to note that even though alcohol plays an important role as a catalyst for violence, it is not the explanation. There are a lot of young men that are drunk on the weekend in Norway, but only a very few commit racist violence.

Extreme Right and the Context of Racial Violence

There are numerous factors that could influence racial violence and harassment such as the "climate of attitudes" that existed in the society at the time when the attack occurred. As mentioned earlier, the government's policies on immigration signal the official view on immigrants and asylum-seekers. When the government stresses that the minority is a "problem" and adds the ethnic variable to other problems in society, as, for example violence, it is likely that this will affect the majority.

Racist propaganda also plays an important part in establishing, through myths and strengthening prejudices, an image of “the other” as a threat. This image of the other is necessary in order to construct a conflict between ethnic groups in Norway, and when such a conflict is constructed there is fertile ground for violence. The extreme right have taken this further by not only fearing future conflicts, but declaring a “race war”.

These attitudes can be further strengthened if the police fail to interact when minor incidents of racist violence and harassment take place. This was the lesson of the small town of Brumunddal some years ago, when the violence escalated dramatically and the police showed very little interest in interfering. The perpetrators may have (wrongly) sensed this as a form of silent acceptance by the local authorities, and as they received few signals that their actions was unacceptable, they continued.

A typical pattern when it comes to young perpetrators in general, and racist violence is no exception, is that many of the incidents are committed by a gang of young men. Willems (1993) divided the perpetrators in four categories: The ideologically motivated right-wing extremist, the xenophobe or ethno-centrist, the criminal and marginalized youth, and the fellow traveller. There is not sufficient data to classify the perpetrators in the material presented to say which one of these categories fits the most here, but it would be safe to say that all four categories are represented.

While in the 80s the typical gang which committed racist offences was a gang which already had broken the law on several occasions, the typical gang of the mid-nineties was much younger and the politics of hate came before the illegal actions. If the minority is not accepted as a part of the society, then one does not have to apply the same norms and behavior towards them as for the rest of the society, and violence could therefore be an alternative way of behaving. It is therefore a huge responsibility for other parts of the society to make sure that the climate of attitudes and the signals being sent to the youth do not leave any doubt as to what kind of behavior is accepted.

Attempts by Governmental Agencies, Community and Anti-racist Groups to Improve the Situation

Government Measures against Racism

The Norwegian government has launched two action plans for combatting racism, and has financed three nation-wide campaigns against racism. This is all very well, but when it comes to taking steps to ensure that racism is being combatted in a way that makes a difference to those affected, there is not much to applaud. The action plans concentrate on information, seminars and general well-wishing, but have been criticized by anti-racists and human rights NGOs for not taking any active steps in order to accomplish the goals. The authorities have accepted that racism is a problem in Norway, and have also (at least partly) gone along with the victim-oriented approach, which, in this author’s point of view, is a very basic first step in order to make any progress.

On the other hand, Norwegian immigration policies have become tougher and tougher; the focus on immigrant perpetrators of violence and blowing crimes and problems within the immigrant community out of proportion have done more harm than good.

The government's measures against racism when presented in international forums tend to focus to a large degree on "The Brumunddal Plan of Action" for mobilizing local communities against racial violence and harassment. The Government should be reminded of one sad lesson to be learned from the Brumunddal experience: that failure to respond to racial tensions before racial violence erupts may lead to irreparable damage to local minority communities. Many of the minority population in Brumunddal have virtually left the community as a result of racial tension, despite all subsequent attempts on the part of local and central authorities to contain the damage after the fact.

The Anti-racist Center worked hard in Brumunddal with advisory meetings with the mayor, helped local youths organizing demonstrations, action groups etc. The government spent close to 10 million NOK on Brumunddal and surely some important lessons were learned. The Center aided the victims of the racist violence campaigns, not least the immigrant shopkeeper who was firebombed several times. He was completely forgotten by the Brumunddal Plan and went bankrupt due to the bombings. Neither the state nor the local community of Brumunddal gave him any assistance, and it was the Center which tried to help him out of his legal and financial difficulties. We emphasize that this is the most forgotten and yet most important lesson from Brumunddal: those who suffer from racism must not be forgotten in all the campaigns, balloons and fancy buttons.

The Police and Racist Violence

A problem with racial violence and harassment in Norway has been the police neglect of the racial aspect. In several of the most serious cases in the late eighties, in which asylum centers were set on fire, bombed etc., the local police would not recognize that this had anything to do with the asylum-seekers, but explained the incidents as "drunken foolishness", and expressions such as "boys will be boys". This caused strong criticism, because by giving such statements, the police demonstrate a lack of recognition of the racial aspect. The victims will feel that they are not seen as full members of Norwegian society, because they are not given the status of "proper" victims.

The police have more or less neglected racist activities. Since the mid-eighties over 700 complaints have been made to the police on racist hate material and none of these have ever come close to court. The skinhead activities that have taken place in the past few years show that it is wishful thinking to hope that the Norwegian police are to be reckoned with in the fight against the militant racists. The passivity that the police demonstrate when confronting skinheads is very alarming and does not indicate that the growing skinhead movement will be met by any reactions from the police.

The Attorney General has supported the police in dismissing the cases while stating that if the racists were not allowed to write and distribute their propaganda, they might turn to violence. This is the steam-cooker theory which does not have any empirical backing.

Over the years, the police have been criticized by anti-racists and human rights NGOs for not taking racism seriously, and this seems to still be the case, but some local police forces have done a good job in both tackling racist incidents and establishing contact with minorities. Recruitment of members of ethnic minorities to the police

academy is one of the key issues for the state, but anti-racists are afraid that this will not solve the problems minorities face with the police.

The government report to the CERD committee states that “the Norwegian police give high priority to this issue” because the relationship between the police and ethnic minorities was discussed at a seminar. This is an important, positive development, but it is hardly proof of police priority, if ethnic minorities feel that the police do not take them seriously when they seek protection or file a complaint at a police station.

There are reasons to believe that claims of racial discrimination on the part of the police, customs officials, etc. reflect at least in part both inadequate police training and practices (e.g., lack of knowledge of the minority communities) and dubious rules and routines (e.g., selective control of the identities of persons “who appear to be foreigners”). For minority individuals it is difficult to distinguish between discriminating behavior that is the result of individual prejudice or the result of discriminatory rules.

The police in Oslo have announced that they will give higher priority to incidents regarding racial discrimination, and we have every reason to believe that Police Chief Killingreen is sincere in this matter. The first action taken by the police was nevertheless disappointing. All racially motivated crimes should now be reported to the Aliens Office, and not police stations. This gives a signal, especially to youths, that they are not considered “regular citizens” but “aliens”.

Anti-racist Organizations and Local Communities

The anti-racist/antifascist work in Norway is divided, but well. There is a strong stand against neo-Nazis and racist groups in the Norwegian public, and the massive turnout of people to confront the racists shows that these forces will have a long way to go before they can have any real impact on Norwegian politics.

Organizations like the Anti-racist Center, have worked for twenty years on these issues, and there is no doubt that many local communities have done a terrific job in order to set high standards for what kind of behavior is accepted. The declaration of local communities as “anti-racist zones” has played a part in raising the consciousness of the inhabitants that racism is a problem that affects us all.

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