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Early Intervention with Violent and Racist Youth Groups

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[Abstract] The present book provides insights into the processes and motivations invol-ved in group formation and joining, as well as into group cohesiveness and dis-integration, and the processes whereby individual members disengage or are unable to do so. Various forms of interaction between the group and the social environment will also have great impact on the fate of the group and its members. These are all processes and mechanisms that can be influ-enced through prevention and intervention measures – and more effectively so if action is based on knowledge of both the general phenomenon as well as of the local situation.

The text provides a detailed description of several intervention methods and programmes that have been developed to address problems of violent and/or racist youth groups and violence, and that have been demonstrated to have some success in that respect. The main target groups are youth workers, social workers, teachers, police officers, municipal administrators, policy mak-ers and other practitioners who are in positions where they have to handle emerging problems of racist and violent youth groups, as well as stu-dents to these professions.

Content

Preface

Racist groups and skinhead gangs usually recruit among very young people. In most cases, such adolescents do not join racist groups because they are racists initially. Racist ideology is usually adopted as a consequence rather than being a cause for joining the group. These tight-knit and secluded groups are attractive to some youths because they fulfil several of their social and psychological needs in terms of providing identity, community, protection, and excitement – quite normal needs that they have not got fulfilled in ordinary contexts. However, joining such a group has severe consequences in terms of being socialized into an extremist worldview and a violent and criminal style of behaviour. In its turn, this may lead to victimisation of others as well as to their own social marginalisation.

Fortunately, most of those who have joined the racist scene do disengage sooner or later. Our goal should be that they quit *sooner* rather than later – before they hurt others; before they have internalised a racist worldview and a violent pattern of behaviour; and before they have ruined their own future by getting a criminal record and a Nazi stigma. How can this be accomplished?

The present text provides insights into the processes and motivations involved in group formation and joining, as well as into group cohesiveness and disintegration, and the processes whereby individual members disengage or are unable to do so. Various forms of interaction between the group and the social environment will also have great impact on the fate of the group and its members. These are all processes and mechanisms that can be influenced through prevention and intervention measures – and more effectively so if action is based on knowledge of both the general phenomenon as well as of the local situation.

It also provides a detailed description of several intervention methods and programmes that have been developed to address problems of violent and/or racist youth groups and violence, and that have been demonstrated to have some success in that respect.

The main target groups are youth workers, social workers, teachers, police officers, municipal administrators, policy makers and other practitioners who are in positions where they have to handle emerging problems of racist and violent youth groups, as well as students to these professions.

About the Authors

Tore Bjørgo, Dr., is a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and (from mid-2004) professor of police science at the Norwegian Police University College. He is a social anthropologist by training, and received his doctoral degree from the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Leiden (1997). His most recent main works are *Generalized Hatred, Polarized Communities: On Conflicts between Youth Groups in a Norwegian City* (in Norwegian, with Yngve Carlsson, Oslo: NIBR Pluss 4/2001), *Violence, Racism and Youth Gangs: Prevention and Intervention* (in Norwegian, Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1999, with Yngve Carlsson), and *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators, and Responses* (Oslo: Tano-Aschehoug, 1997). He has also (co)authored books on political communication, and terrorism (in Norwegian), and has (co)edited the volumes *Racist Violence in Europe* (Macmillan, 1993), *Terror from the Extreme Right* (Frank Cass, 1995), and *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture* (Northeastern University Press, 1998). He has served as an advisor on how to intervene with racist and violent youth gangs to local, national, and international policy makers, agencies and NGOs. He is the initiator of Project Exit, a program to facilitate disengagement from racist and violent youth groups that has been adopted in several European countries.

Yngve Carlsson is a sociologist and senior research fellow at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR). He defines himself mainly as an applied researcher, and has been engaged in several evaluations of local projects in Norway on local planning, preventive health work, preventive youth work, and interventions with racist groups. He has frequently been engaged as an advisor in practical problem solving on the community level. From 1992 until 1995 he served as an advisor for the Brumunddal action plan against racism – probably the most comprehensive local project on this topic in Scandinavia. He now serves as an advisor on a governmental program to improve the general conditions for children and youths in ten selected communities in Norway. He is member of the national advisory team to intervene with racist and violent youth gangs. His works on racist youth groups are *Generalized Hatred, Polarized Communities: On Conflicts between Youth Groups in a Norwegian City* (in Norwegian, with Tore Bjørgo, Oslo: NIBR Pluss 4/2001), *Violence, Racism and Youth Gangs: Prevention and Intervention* (in Norwegian: Tano Aschehoug, 1999 with Tore Bjørgo); *Racism in an affluent area in Oslo* (in Norwegian NIBR-report 1999:9); *An Industrial community and racism* (NIBR-report 1997:17); and *The Brumunddal Action Plan – did it produce results?* (NIBR-report 1995:13).

1. Introduction

All over Europe, neo-Nazi groups, skinheads, and xenophobic gangs of youths commit acts of racial violence, and harass ethnic minorities and other people they consider their enemies. The public frequently responds with shock and disgust, and rightfully so. Strong and public reactions against racism may certainly be of great value in itself. Demonstrations and information campaigns may be good for the public morale by reinforcing positive attitudes towards minorities and against racism. However, such responses have little effect on the youths participating in racist groups. They seem to reinterpret such manifestations of antiracism in ways that merely reinforce their world-view, identity, and group cohesiveness. If we want to influence such groups, we should try to base interventions on knowledge about the group processes involved.

Unfortunately, there is no single 'magic bullet' that alone can solve the problem of racist violence and racist groups. Policies and measures are likely to be more effective if they are comprehensive and co-ordinated rather than isolated approaches working in opposite directions. This requires collaboration at the local level between the police, social agencies, schools, youth workers, and non-governmental organisations. On the general level, interventions against racial violence should include the following:

- suppressive measures (improving laws against racism, police action, more effective implementation)
- victim support (prevent victimisation, taking care of victims, assistance to report)
- improving public awareness on xenophobia and racist violence (political manifestations, dissemination of information, campaigns, demonstrations, public declarations, etc.)
- addressing structural causes (marginalisation, discrimination, unemployment, etc.)
- reducing the size and activities of racist groups (reducing recruitment, increasing disengagement, splitting groups).

This article will focus on the last dimension, but that does certainly not mean that this should exclude the other forms of interventions.

The group dimensions of violence

Several persons together commit most cases of racist violence. The nature of these groups varies considerably. Some groups are just loose cliques of friends who happen to get in conflict with some foreigners. Other groups have more the character of delinquent gangs, often with a xenophobic orientation, but without any ideology or links to extremist organisations. Some

groups are bands of skinheads with a nationalist or Nazi orientation or style. And still other groups are parts of neo-Nazi organisations or networks.

Although many of the less organised xenophobic youth groups do not have direct ties to the neo-Nazi or right-wing extremist scene, these youth groups nevertheless represent an important pool of recruits to neo-Nazi groups and other far-right movements. And some of these xenophobic youth gangs may transform into more ideological groups because of the responses they get to their acts of racist violence. Thus, it is important to address how to prevent an escalation in racism and violence, and how the various forms of racist youth groups can be reduced in numbers and strength.

In understanding racist violence and the behaviour of participants in racist youth groups, it is sometimes useful to make an analytic distinction between *racism as motivation*, and *racism as expression*. To some of these youths, it is clearly both. They commit racist acts that are motivated by racism, xenophobia, or Nazi ideology. However, to many of the other participants in racist youth groups, racism is their form of expression whereas there are quite other considerations than ideology that motivate their Nazi and racist behaviour. This could be to show off to friends, to live up to the expectations of the group, to prove their loyalty or manhood, or getting media attention. For the majority of racist perpetrators, it is probably a mixture of such non-political motives with a loose bundle of undigested xenophobic feelings and racist slogans that determines their behaviour. To the victims of their racist expressions, however, it does not matter much what motivated the fist that struck them – it hurts the same. Such knowledge may nevertheless be highly relevant to agencies involved in developing more targeted and effective methods of prevention and intervention against racism and violence. In relation to those characterised by racism as expression rather than motivation, it is likely to have a direct impact on their racist behaviour if their ties with the racist group can be broken.

In the following, we will focus on why it is important to reduce the size of the neo-Nazi and racist youth scene, and what are the critical processes we should try to influence in order to achieve that.

It makes a lot of difference if there are close to 3,000 neo-Nazis activists, as is the case in a country like Sweden, or merely 100–150, as in Norway. With a large number of participants, the Nazi scene in Sweden has reached a critical mass, and become a movement. They also have a large number of sympathisers – several thousands – who may serve as a pool of recruits. These sympathisers also constitute a big and profitable 'home market' for White Power music, magazines, and other 'nationalist' products. There is a large pool of talent among the participants of the scene – including musicians, artists, writers, computer specialists, academics, university students, and others with a wide range of skills. This provides opportunities for specialisation among a variety of interests and tasks within the movement. Through the last decade, an elaborate organisational, economical and media infrastructure has been built up by the Swedish neo-Nazis. To some young people, it is socially attractive to join the scene. Many stay on in the movement for many years, providing experience and stability. Although they mainly recruit among teenagers, the average age in the neo-Nazi scene is relatively high. It can no longer be described mainly as a youth scene. Many activists

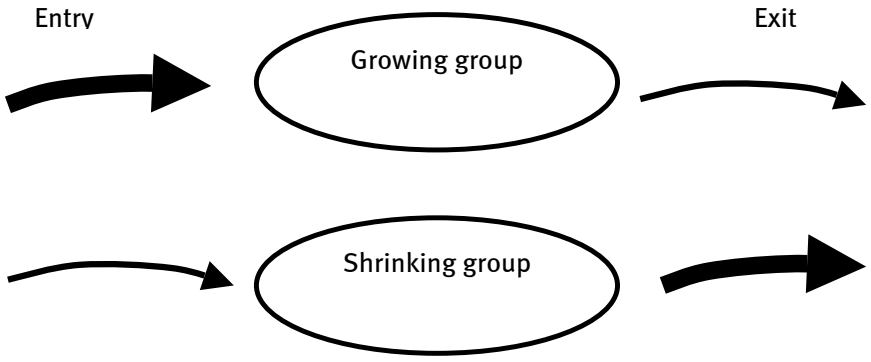
are in their twenties and thirties, and have been involved for ten years or more. Due to its size and numbers, the movement (or local group) is not very vulnerable if leaders are put in prison – there are plenty of alternative leaders to take over. The movement is also sufficiently strong and intimidating to provide some protection against outside enemies.

In Norway, the situation is different. There are merely 100–150 active participants concentrated in five to ten locations. Members are young and have relatively short careers in the movement – only a few continue to be active after they turn 20. Thus, the average age is lower than in Sweden. Few have more than basic education, and the pool of talent and skills is very limited. As a result, organisation is weak, magazines and music productions have a low quality, and the few local groups that exist are small. There is a very limited infrastructure in terms of music bands, magazines and other media enterprises. To outsiders, the Nazi scene looks like a group of losers, and it is hardly very attractive to join. The local groups are also vulnerable to arrests or defection of leaders and core members – there are few to take over. As a result, the Nazi scene in Norway lacks the critical mass it needs to flourish in the ways it does in countries like Sweden and Germany. However, even if the scene has a limited size at the national level, some of the local groups have a sufficient size and strength to have 'street credibility' – they are able to intimidate people and dominate the streets in their community. In addition, such local groups may reinforce their strength by being connected with other groups nationally or internationally.

So size matters at all these levels. And age matters as well. How can we then influence the size and career patterns of the neo-Nazi and racist youth scene?

One approach is to focus on the population balance of the group in a demographic sense. The relevant parameters here are the number of people joining the scene, the number of people leaving the scene, and the length of time they remain in the movement.

Changing the population balance of racist groups



If there are more people that join the group than those who leave, the group is growing. And opposite, if there are more people who quit than the number of new recruits, the group is in decline and may disappear unless they are able to turn the trend. However, within a larger Nazi scene, it is possible to desert a sinking group and join a more successful one.

New extreme groups emerge constantly. However, most of them fall apart after a few months or years – only in rare cases are they able to survive for a decade or more. These few 'successful' groups are more likely to keep most of their members over an extended time, and replenish their ranks with new recruits. Other groups suffer from steady defection and turnover in membership without being able to recruit a sufficient number of newcomers to keep the group strong enough to survive.

Most of those who have joined the racist scene do disengage sooner or later. Our goal should be that they quit *sooner* rather than later – before they hurt others; before they have internalised a racist world-view and a violent pattern of behaviour; and before they have ruined their own future by getting a criminal record and a Nazi stigma. The longer they stay the more difficult it is to get out. And the more long-term and experienced activists, the stronger will the Nazi scene become. And obviously, it is easier to influence a young teen-ager to quit than to get an adult veteran of the movement to do so.

So how can we influence the processes of recruitments to and disengagement from extremist groups? At least, we need to have some answers to the following questions:

- Why do young people join racist groups? What are their motives and circumstances for joining?
- What happens to them once they have become part of the scene?
- Why do most of them eventually disengage? What are the circumstances and motivations?
- And what factors and obstacles prevent the rest of them from doing so?

These processes and how they might be influenced, will be addressed in some more details in the following chapters.

Part I:

Group Processes and Dynamics

2. Why do Young People Join Racist Groups – and why do They Leave?

Introduction

Many crimes – violent crimes in particular – are typically group crimes. This may mean that the act of violence is committed by several members of the group together, or by an individual in order to make an impression on the group. Violent behaviour is often the outcome of internal group dynamics or pressure from the group towards individual members. The individuals within the group often feel a strong need to live up to the (real or perceived) expectations of the group. The group may also use violence to create or maintain a particular image of itself in relation to its social surroundings, or otherwise protect group interests, e.g. in relation to threats from rival groups. Being a member of a group where violence and other crimes are considered to be not only acceptable but also even commendable may also greatly reduce the individual's inhibitions against committing such crimes.

This means that if individual members disengage from such violent or crime-oriented groups, their propensity to commit is likely to drop. Similarly, if such groups are dissolved, or group cohesion is reduced, the numbers of crimes committed by (former) group members are also likely to decrease.

It is not the purpose to test these hypotheses here, as they have been confirmed by several other studies.[1] On a basis of a study of racist and violent youth groups,[2] this chapter will rather focus on the processes which facilitate group disengagement and reduce group coherence, preferably to the point of dissolving the violent group. However, to understand these processes, it is necessary to comprehend why some young people are attracted to such extreme groups, how they get socialised into group values and behaviour, and how group membership affects their relationships to their former social network and mainstream society in general. What kind of experiences and circumstances motivates individuals to quit, and what obstacles are there to leaving the group? How can these obstacles be overcome or circumvented, and what exit strategies are available? What can society (such as family, friends, police and other authorities) do to facilitate such disengagement?

Thus, we will focus most of my attention on groups and organisations, which cater primarily to young people, such as racist youth gangs and subcultures, nationalist youth organisations, and militant neo-Nazi groups. We

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1 See e.g. Malcolm W. Klein, *The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control.* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 12, 44–49, 145–148.

2 Tore Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators, and Responses*, (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1997, originally a doctoral dissertation at the University of Leiden), in particular Chapter 6. A shorter version (a variant of the present paper) was published as 'Entry, Bridge-burning and Exit Options: What happens to young people who join racist groups – and want to leave?', in Jeffrey Kaplan and Tore Bjørgo (eds.), *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

are less concerned here with the nationalist and anti-immigration organisations and parties, which are mainly run by older people, although many of the findings are also relevant to these groups.

In a forthcoming research project, we will expand this perspective to a comparative study of joining and leaving various types of extreme groups. In the concluding part of the present chapter, we will present in a tabular form which similarities and differences we expect to find when we start to collect systematic data on a number of different types of extreme groups.

Finding accurate labels for these 'groups', 'networks' and 'sub-cultures' is sometimes problematic because the organisational set-up is often vague and informal. To characterise individuals who have joined such groups as 'activists' or 'members' may be somewhat misleading, since many 'members' of these groups and scenes do not have formal memberships, and many have joined for purposes other than political activism.

It is useful to make a distinction between bounded and unbounded groups. Racist subcultures, scenes or milieus are generally *unbounded* in the sense that the boundaries are relatively fuzzy, and that it is not clearly defined who is inside and who is outside. There are normally a number of people at the margins of the scene, who sympathise or share some elements of opinions or style, who mingle socially with activists, and who drift in or out of the scene. Access to the inner circles, however, is restricted to individuals considered reliable and worthy of trust. Thus, there are status hierarchies within unbounded scenes, but the criteria for status and access are not clearly defined.[3] Inner circles may be seen as consisting of one or several *bounded* groups into which individuals can be accepted only after some sort of approval or sponsorship by persons with a higher standing in the group. Being accepted into such a bounded group involves trust, obligations, commitment, and – very significantly – being initiated into some of the group's secrets. Thus, inclusion in a bounded and closed group means the individual can no longer leave the group at will without being considered a security risk or even a traitor.

This study has been mainly, but not exclusively, based on interview data. The most important set of sources was a series of direct interviews we had with about 25 individuals – some who were racist activists in the past but have left the group in one way or another, others who are still activists but seriously thinking of quitting.[4] In addition to this primary group, we also have second-hand information about a much larger number of former activists. Sources vary with regard to the level of detail and reliability, ranging from published autobiographies[5] and newspaper interviews, to former activ-

3 Similar patterns of bounded and unbounded groups have been observed regarding various 'new religious movements', e.g. by Thomas Pilarzyk (see note 8).

4 Some of these interviews have been relatively brief (1–2 hours), others have consisted of a series of interviews over a long period (ranging from six months to seven years), in several cases totalling fifteen to thirty hours of conversation. My interviews with (potential) leave-takers were part of larger series of interviews with present and former nationalist and neo-Nazi activists, and with persons involved with them in various capacities (political opponents, police officers, youth workers, victims of violence and harassment, academic researchers, journalists, and others). The interviews took place in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and were mainly conducted in three periods: 1988–89, 1991–92, and 1995–96.

5 (Auto)biographies by or about racist activists which focus on why and how the individuals in question join and leave the racist group or scene may constitute useful empirical data. Taken alone, they remain idiosyncratic case stories, but by comparing the experien-

ists telling about what happened to other former members of their group. Several parents whose children had joined racist groups have also provided valuable insight. This type of second-hand data provides a basis for judging to what extent findings resulting from primary sources can be generalised.

Research on disengagement from extremist groups

There have been a number of studies which have addressed various aspects of how individuals join and leave different types of clandestine, secluded and stigmatised groups, but only a few of these have specifically discussed racist groups. However, many of the factors and processes involved in leaving terrorist organisations, religious cults and criminal youth gangs are similar. Analytical approaches and findings from such studies can be transferred and applied to the study of racist groups. This literature is discussed in more detail in Bjørgo (1997), Chapter 6.

Entry

Extreme groups fulfil certain fundamental social and psychological needs to many young people. However, joining such a group may have consequences they did not anticipate. They frequently find that it is much easier to get into such an extreme group than getting out.

When asking what attracts young people to racist, nationalist or neo-Nazi groups, one must first realise that these groups appeal to different types of persons who may join for very different reasons, or combinations of reasons. While this study concentrates on the dynamics of leaving racist groups, some brief consideration should be given to how and why young people join racist groups in the first place.

1. *Ideology and politics:* In most cases, young people do not join racist groups because they are racists, but they gradually adopt racist views because they have become part of a racist group. Some do take contact with racist groups for political reasons, though. This may have been occasioned by a general feeling of alienation from mainstream political culture or may be the result of a sudden 'conversion experience'.

2. *Provocation and anger:* Others are less concerned about ideological content but respond more to what they experience as provocative and outrageous behaviour by immigrants or by leftist anti-racists, or that they get less access to social services and other scarce goods than those offered to immigrants and asylum-seekers.

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ces of these individuals to similar or different cases, these stories may contribute to more building general insight. See e.g. Ray Hill with Andrew Bell, *The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's Neo-Nazi Network* (London: Grafton Books, 1988); Ingo Hasselbach und Winfried Bonengel, *Die Abrechning. Ein NeoNazi steigt aus* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993); Ingo Hasselbach with Tom Reiss, *Führer-Ex: Memoirs of a Former Neo-Nazi* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996); Kevin Flynn and Gary Gerhardt, *The Silent Brotherhood: Inside America's Racist Underground* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

3. *Protection:* Young people may join militant racist groups to get protection against various enemies or perceived threats. Racist youth groups sometimes actively seek out individuals who are in a need for protection and offer them security in the group. A former Swedish skinhead (18) recounts his experience:

> When I was 14, I had been bullied a lot by classmates and others. By coincidence, I got to know an older guy who was a skinhead. He was really cool, so I decided to become a skinhead myself, cutting off my hair, and donning a black Bomber jacket and Doc Martens boots. The next morning, I turned up at school in my new outfit. In the gate, I met one of my worst tormentors. When he saw me, he was stunned, pressing his back against the wall, with fear shining out of his eyes. I was stunned as well – by the powerful effect my new image had on him and others. Being that intimidating – boy, that was a great feeling![6]

4. *Drifting:* Many young people may be described as 'tasters' or 'drifters' who join and leave a series of movements, organisations and subcultures. Within the span of a few years, some teenagers make careers which include a number of very disparate groups and activities – often apparently at odds with each other, such as: religious groups, sports clubs, petty-criminal youth gangs, drug experiments, mainstream politics, left-wing militant groups, Satanism, and neo-Nazism. They are often motivated by curiosity and a search for excitement more than real commitment. However, it frequently turns out to be much more difficult to move on from a neo-Nazi or racist group than is the case with most other groups young people may drift into.

5. *Thrill seeking:* Some of those who involve themselves with extreme political groups, represent a personality type with a particularly strong psychological need for excitement, for testing their own limits and for exposing themselves to potentially dangerous situations. A considerable proportion of people with these dispositions go into more destructive activities, such as crime, drug use – or political extremism and violence.

6. *Violence, weapons, and uniforms:* Some of those joining militant racist and Nazi groups, are strongly – even primarily – attracted by the violent and militaristic aspects of these groups. Brotherhoods of arms, masculinity cults and the mystique of weapons and uniforms appeal strongly to certain types of young men. Militant nationalist and neo-Nazi groups provide a social context for cultivating such interests, e.g. by organising clandestine weapons training in the forests.

7. *Youth rebels go to the right:* Traditional leftist ideologies and role models of revolution and rebellion hold little appeal to many young rebels of the 1990s. As one young nationalist activist put it, 'if you really want to provoke society these days, you have to become either a National Socialist or a Satanist!'[7]

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6 Interview (19 June 1996) with the ex-skinhead P.K. (18).
7 Interview with former activist in the Norwegian *Valkyria* group (1 September 1995).

8. *The search for substitute families and father-figures:* Many of those joining extremist groups have a troubled relationship with their families, and with their fathers in particular. Some parents are obviously too busy with their own careers to show their children sufficient attention, concern and appreciation. Provocative and rebellious behaviour is often the child's way of getting attention and at least some response – a negative one if a positive response is not forthcoming. Older activists in racist groups often serve as substitute father-figures or masculine role models for such young boys in particular.

9. *The search for friends and community:* A considerable proportion of those joining the racist scene are individuals who have no friends and are primarily looking for friendship and acceptance. Having failed to be accepted into other groups, they enter the first door open to them. They often find that the racist group is quite forthcoming and accepting, and in some respects even more tolerant than many 'straight' youth groups are. However, to be accepted into the inner circles is much more difficult. Some individuals of this type may go to great lengths to win acceptance, and – as easy victims of group pressure – they may even carry out acts of violence and other crimes in order to be accepted as a full member or to enhance their status within the group.

10. *The search for status and identity* is perhaps the most important factor involved when youths join racist groups and youth gangs in general. Individuals who have failed to establish a positive identity and status in relation to school, work, sports or other social activities and settings sometimes try to win respect by joining groups with a dangerous and intimidating image. By donning the 'uniform' of the local skinhead group or a neo-Nazi movement, other kids who in the past used to bully them now yield to them. Although often mistaking fear for respect, by joining a racist group they perceive a clear difference in the ways others relate to them.

A similar process can be observed at group level. Local youth gangs who in the past were feared and despised for their arbitrary violence, vandalism and criminality may find that if they turn their violence and aggression towards unpopular foreigners, some segments of the local community may applaud, the national news media give their acts extensive coverage, and racist organisations may hail them as true patriots and nationalist fighters.

In more general terms, Wilhelm Heitmeyer[8] describes the process of individualisation in the modern social and economic system. Social status and identity are no longer 'givens' but have to be achieved through personal effort with a great risk of failure – particularly in times of social and economic crisis, and unemployment. The trend among many young people to define their identity in terms of such 'natural characteristics' as race and nationality

8 Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Rechtsextremistische Orientierungen bei Jugendlichen: Empirische Ergebnisse und Erklrungsmuster einer Untersuchung zur politischen Sozialisation (Weinheim and Munich: Juventa Verlag, 1988, 1992); W. Heitmeyer, 'Hostility and Violence Towards Foreigners in Germany', in Bjørgo and Witte, (1993).

– which are ascribed rather than achieved statuses – may be seen as an attempt to solve this dilemma.

The most common way youths get in direct contact with a racist group is probably by being introduced through friends or older siblings who are already members themselves. Girls frequently get involved as girlfriends. Many youths come in contact through media focus on specific racist groups.[9] Racist groups are also developing their own media in increasingly skilled ways. Magazines, local radio broadcasts, electronic Bulletin Board Systems and Internet WWW pages, White Power rock on CD, videos and concerts are reaching an increasing number of young people who may thereby get in touch with the movement.

Community-building and bridge-burning

Once a young person has established contact with a radical nationalist, racist or neo-Nazi group, what happens to him or her? To some newcomers, very little. They hang around for a while, find that it was not quite what they expected, become disappointed that they are not immediately admitted to the inner core of the group where the more secretive and alluring activities are going on, and leave to search for something more exciting. Few noticed that they came or that they left. The shorter the time they have been inside, and the less they have been involved, the easier it is to get out.[10]

Others have very different experiences, and undergo two parallel and mutually reinforcing processes: Inclusion and socialisation into a new reclusive and stigmatised community, and severance of ties to the 'normal' community outside. As these dual processes progress, it becomes increasingly difficult – sometimes almost impossible – to leave the group.

There is considerable variation in the ways newcomers are received. Some groups welcome new recruits with open arms, trying to bring as many as possible into social and political activities as soon as possible.[11] However, most groups are more careful, mainly due to fear of infiltration by political opponents or the police. New members are only allowed into some of the social activities and 'open' forms of activism. Only gradually are those who prove their trustworthiness and dedication introduced to more sensitive activities. Some of the more elitist NS groups do not even accept new members, at least not in principle. They rather tell people who want to join that they should establish their own group and prove their dedication and seriousness through political activism. Then they may be included into the network at a later stage. This reclusion may add to the network's attractiveness.[12]

9 For a more thorough discussion, see T. Bjørgo, 'Role of the Media in Racist Violence', in Bjørgo and Witte (1993).

10 A similar observation has been made concerning individuals who join a Hare Krishna commune. Fifty percent left within the first month, but only ten per cent left after having lived there for more than a month. Cf. Thomas Pilarzyk (1983), pp. 61–62.

11 The Norwegian *Nasjonalt Folkeparti* (NF) was, for instance, sternly criticised by some more ideologically oriented National Socialists for uncritically taking in kids from the streets and giving them organizational tasks. This was what caused NF's downfall, they claim (from interview with a former member).

12 Heléne Lööw, 'Racist Violence and Criminal Behaviour in Sweden: Myth and Realities', in T. Bjørgo (ed.), *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 122.

Newcomers in the group have described how they have gone through a process of socialisation. They learn from the others how to behave in order to find their place in the 'family'. One important aspect of this is to install into new members a sense of security consciousness about things to keep their mouths shut about, to be careful about what they talk about on the phone or send by mail, and where they can go and not go safely in town. There is an element of realism behind these concerns, as there have been several confirmed cases of infiltration in the past, and there is no doubt that both the police and radical anti-racists often try to keep an eye on the group, its members and its activities. However, an equally important effect of this security consciousness is to create a sense of paranoia among members, a pervasive feeling of belonging to a small group surrounded by enemies. This may serve to strengthen group cohesion and loyalty, and add to the mystique and excitement of belonging to a 'dangerous' and more or less clandestine group. At the same time, however, the suspicion that the enemies may have infiltrated the group reinforces this atmosphere of distrust and paranoia. New members are not trusted, and even long-term members may occasionally be suspected of being traitors. The fear of being considered untrustworthy or even accused of being an infiltrator is a powerful factor promoting conformity and submission to group values among newcomers. This gives leaders and core members a means of exercising power and disciplinary sanctions in relation to less senior members as well as non-conforming individuals within the group.[13]

The group thus tries to keep out not only potential infiltrators and other untrustworthy elements, but also individuals who are not willing to dedicate themselves totally to the group. So-called 'hobby Nazis' – who want to join the group because it looks cool and who imagine themselves full members just because they have bought themselves a bomber jacket and a pair of Doc Martens boots – are held in contempt and are likely to leave or be left out rather soon.

It takes time for newcomers to become accepted as full members. It is widely assumed among prospective recruits that they have to carry out an act of violence or commit another crime in order to qualify for full membership. Several cases where youths have acted on this assumption have been documented in court, the youths stating explicitly that their motive for carrying out the crime was to become accepted into a racist group or network. However, there are reasons to doubt that this is a general prerequisite for becoming accepted as a full member in most racist groups. In some other violence-oriented groups, such as certain terrorist organisations and street gangs, it is ensured that new recruits 'get blood on their hands' by taking actively part in serious crimes before they are considered trustworthy members. In that way potential infiltrators are weeded out, and the possibility of defecting from the group is made much more complicated.

Achieving a position of high standing in the group depends a lot on time and seniority. After half a year the group can in most cases see if a recruit

13 For a more general discussion of these processes of paranoia, group pressure and conformity in relation to terrorist and other clandestine organisations, see T. Bjørgo and D. Heradstveit (1992), pp. 92–104 and 155–166. Paranoia is also discussed by Katrine Fangen (1995), p. 82, and Heléne Lööw (1993).

will stay the course, and after one or two years the probability of dropping out is low. Those who have shown the stamina and ability to hang on for so many years are seen as deserving respect because they have had to go through so much.

Nationalist and NS activists often describe their relationship to the group in terms of belonging to a family. To some, this is the first 'real' family they ever felt they had, and to others it is their new family after their old family turned them away. The family metaphor is often taken almost literally, by sharing households with 'racial [or national] brothers and sisters'.

Those who have become members of a well-functioning group (some groups never take off, and will disintegrate after a while) become part of an intensive social community which occupies much of their time and energy, and fulfils many (or even all) of their social needs. Social activities often centres around drinking beer together, listening to White Rock music (or even playing themselves), physical exercise (especially martial arts), going on trips to visit other groups, concerts, political meetings and demonstrations, producing fanzines or other political material, or just hanging out. Some of the more militant activists may also be involved in more secretive activities such as collecting intelligence about political enemies (Anti-antifa), weapons training and preparing for violent actions. In the larger groups, roles, tasks and interests tend to diversify. Some are skilled with computers and the Internet, others are interested in ideology or writing, some are interested in skinhead style, music and culture, others again devote themselves to more militant activities.[14]

Sooner or later, most new members will experience violent confrontations with enemies such as anti-racists, 'foreigners' or the police. Such confrontations are significant events to those who participate, whether the battle ends by victory, defeat or arrest. Regardless of the outcome, these events tend to give the participants an experience of common destiny. Victories are sources of shared pride. Defeats give rise to hatred and bitterness against the common enemy. Even experiencing bitter defeat, tend to strengthen group cohesion. Although violence and harassment from militant anti-racists may serve to raise the costs of joining a racist group, and may sometimes scare recruits into pulling out, the effect is often the opposite, as described by sociologist Katrine Fangen:

> That young [recruits] are thoroughly beaten up at an early stage has a symbolic meaning to the group as well. If after such an experience the youths are still hanging on, they can be considered loyal members. To be beaten up is the 'baptism of fire' everyone has to go through sooner or later. To the extent that the group has initiation rites, this is certainly the most conspicuous one.[15]

To newcomers, the experience of being beaten by the police or arrested along with other group members also tends to redefine their entire relationship to the society. If such newcomers were marginal to the group until then, they may suddenly start to speak about 'we' – a change of identity, which does not pass unnoticed by the others. Another important consequence of

14 Fangen (1995), pp. 5, 83–88.
15 Fangen, 1995, p..102 (my translation).

taking part in these violent confrontations, is that these experiences tends to change profoundly how they relate to violence – both in terms of the legitimacy of using violence, and by getting familiar with the practice of it. A young female activist observed:

It is remarkable how fast I have shifted my boundaries regarding violence. I used to be against violence. Now it does not cost me a penny to beating and take out all my aggression against someone who represents what I hate. For every confrontation against the police or against political opponents, the more hardened I become, and the more I can endure the next time. From being stunned and scared by seeing and experiencing violence, I have come to enjoy it.[16]

Becoming socialised into a new community, with a world-view and value system completely at odds with mainstream society, and building bonds of loyalty to the new 'family', represent one fundamental process individuals go through when they join a racist group. An equally important process takes place more or less simultaneously: the severing of ties to 'normal' society, as well as to family and friends. Society for its part stigmatises them as despicable Nazis and racists. This experience is described by a seventeen year old activist:

> As soon as it was known to others that I was with the nationalist group, I was branded. It did not take long before everyone knew that I had become a 'neo-Nazi'. Old friends suddenly shied away from me. Some found it awkward to meet me in the street. Others I have only contact with at a superficial level. In the group, it is a collective experience that almost everybody turns their backs on us. One of the things that keeps us together is this shared feeling of isolation. I do not understand parents who cut off their children because they become nationalists. Then they cut off all connections and possibilities as well! It is a real problem that we do not get any kinds of correction from our surroundings. In the past, when I had an opinion, I could discuss it with people who disagreed with me. Now I can only discuss with people who already agree with me completely. What if I am wrong?
>
> I have read the novel *Lord of the Flies*, about a group of immature young boys, without any experience of life, left alone on a desolate island. Things go completely wrong, ending up in total barbarism. We are like them – isolated and with no one to correct us. I feel that things are going too far, and I am scared about where it will all end.[17]

Reasons for considering leaving the group

At some stage, most activists consider leaving the group and starting to live a 'normal' life. What kinds of experiences and factors contribute to this decision? Below, I try to systematise some of the more common factors. Those who quit the group are usually affected by a combination of several factors. Obviously, the more reasons, the stronger is the urge to quit. It is useful to make a distinction between 'push' and 'pull' factors. 'Push' relates to negative social forces and circumstances which make it unattractive and unpleas-

16 Interview with activist, 19 September 1995.
17 Interview with a young Norwegian nationalist 18 August 1995.

ant to remain in a particular social environment, whereas 'pull' refers to factors attracting the person to a more rewarding alternative.

Push-factors:

1. *Negative social sanctions* may make some of those who join racist groups to reconsider their affiliation. These may range from parental scolding and social isolation to criminal prosecution and harassment or violence by militant anti-racists. Such sanctions are normally more effective in relation to new recruits who have not yet established strong ties of loyalty and broken all ties to the 'normal' community. In some cases, youths who had thrown bombs and Molotovs at asylum centres felt regret, only after the gravity of their acts was pointed out to them by the police and the media. In other cases, youngsters withdrew from the militant group when the consequences of continued affiliation were made clear to them in no uncertain terms. However, some of these negative sanctions, such as branding them 'racists' and 'Nazis', may have the unintended effect of pushing new recruits further into the stigmatised group, thereby diminishing their exit options and strengthening their loyalty to the group. This is especially the case when negative sanctions are not combined with positive incentives to establish alternative identities.

2. Some activists *lose faith in the ideology and politics of the group or movement*. They experience self-doubt where they feel that what they had believed in and fought for was wrong, both morally and politically. However, it is probably more common that beliefs change *after* leaving the group, and as a consequence, rather than before, and as a cause of leaving the group.[18]

A common feeling among some activists is that *'things are going too far'*, especially in terms of violence. They may feel that there are too many violence-prone and extremist people joining the group, doing wild things they themselves cannot accept or do not want to get associated with. Some also fear that the violent conflict with militant anti-racists is escalating and getting out of hand, and that people on both sides may get killed.[19] Some of the more ideologically inclined may consider joining a more moderate or less action-oriented group. This was the case with some of the activists in *Norsk Front* (Norwegian Front) and its successor group, *Nasjonalt Folkeparti*, who – after some other NF activists had been involved in several bombings in 1979 and 1985 – pulled out and established the National Socialist organisation *Zorn 88*, which was extreme in terms of ideology but moderate in terms of violence.[20] Others left the movement altogether. For many of them, things had gone much too far.

3. Some grow *disillusioned with the inner workings and activities of the group*. One common objection is that the group is too much involved in drinking beer and having fun rather than focusing on serious political work.

18 This is a common observation in studies of defectors from religious groups, but has also been noted by Aho (1994) p. 125, with respect to racist groups.
19 Cf. Decker and Lauritsen (1996, pp. 109–110, 117,121–122).
20 Based on several interviews with *Zorn 88* spokesman Erik Rune Hansen.

This disillusionment is often experienced by those who primarily are interested in discussing ideology, producing and disseminating political propaganda, and building effective political organisations or even clandestine terrorist cells. They tend to become frustrated by belonging to a rowdy skinhead group where members get involved in drunken brawls with each others, or in senseless fights with immigrants and antiracists. Another source of disillusionment is the lack of loyalty among the members of the group, even if they are loyal to the group as such. Although comradeship is a central value to the group, many find that even those they held to be close friends stab them in the back, betray or cheat them. Pressure from outside and the fear of infiltration produce a strong sense of paranoia within the group, and this may often cause people to accuse one another of being infiltrators or potential traitors. Disseminating scandalous rumours and stories about other members is also a common practice in many groups.[21] Some new members are also dismayed by the ways veteran activists try to manipulate and control the younger ones, being protective and helpful in order to place newcomers in a position of dependence, involving them in illegal activities and trying to cut off their exit options.

> It's a give and take to spend time with the leading people in the movement, it is not for free. I get a certain amount of confidence and friendship from them, but then they expect something from me, a 'talented and promising activist'. They give me small hints and thinly veiled threats that 'since we have invested so much in you, we would be *very* disappointed if you defect and let us down...' When I began to realise what they expect from me, it was not pleasant at all. They want to control all aspects of my life, such as how and with whom I spend my time. Now and then they send me signals that they know everything about me, about my relatives, where they live and so on. I feel they try to dig their claws into me and use every trick to tie me to the movement. When I started to realise how they manipulated, I lost my illusions in relation to everyone, getting suspicious when people are nice: What do they want from me? The longer I stay, the more difficult it will become to establish a new life outside the group. They know, and I know, that if they can keep their hold on me long enough, they have got me.[22]

4. Even long-term activists are vulnerable to the risks of *losing confidence, status and position in the group*. Although most youth groups do not have formal leadership hierarchies, they are nevertheless highly status-oriented. This makes members highly vulnerable to various accusations and rumours. The pervasive paranoia and fear of infiltrators also expose people to accusations of being traitors or informers. Other forms of alleged unacceptable behaviour may also threaten the individual's status and standing. In one case, for instance, a nationalist activist was accused in a skinhead fanzine of being a homosexual, whereas a female activist was accused of having sex with non-white immigrants.[23] Leading persons may sometimes be openly criti-

21 For a revealing discussion of internal conflicts and the lack of inter-personal loyalty in Norwegian nationalist groups, see Katrine Fangen (1995), p. 89.
22 Interview held on 14 Nov. 1995 with an activist who broke with the group a few months later.
23 *Boot Boys* No. 10, Oct. 1991.

cised for running away and leaving young and inexperienced activists behind to be beaten up by attacking anti-racist militants, thereby not living up to the high expectations other members have of them. Others may be criticised for being alcoholics and incapable of running serious political activities, for being loose-mouthed with journalists, or for being self-promoters rather than real leaders. In such situations, when a person's standing and reputation in the group is low, the option of quitting is more tempting than in a period when he or she is respected and well-regarded by the mates. In extreme cases, members may even be formally (or even violently) expelled from the group. This happened with the former leader of *Danmarks National-Socialistiske Bevægelse,* Povl Heinrich Riis-Knudsen, who was also at one point the head of WUNS, the World Union of National Socialists. It was publicly exposed that he had an illicit affair with a Palestinian woman ('a white Arab', according to himself) – a major scandal in the NS world, and probably the end of his activist career.[24]

5. A common feeling among many 'front-line' activists is that after a while they *become exhausted and can no longer take the pressure*. Life in a skinhead gang or a militant nationalist youth group can be very exciting. The struggle against various enemies, whether they be militant anti-racists, immigrant youth gangs or the police, may entail violent clashes, clandestine activities and an almost constant feeling of high tension and uncertainty. The attraction of these adrenaline highs makes 'normal' life outside seem almost unbearably dull. However, few people can continue to live this kind of life year after year without becoming emotionally and physically burnt-out. The negative aspects of being stigmatised, socially isolated, always exposed to violent attacks from opponents, and consumed by intense hatred to various enemies also tend to take their toll as time pass by. A young nationalist who had been an activist for a year and a half put it this way:

> Since I was very young, I always tried out various forms of exciting and action-filled activities and groups. Being a part of the nationalist milieu gives me incredibly powerful experiences – although I am sure the [militant anti-racists] feel much the same. This excitement of hunting each other, the unpredictability – it's kind of addictive. Nothing can get you high in a better way than adrenaline! I cannot live without having action all the time. If things calm down for a period I get restless. This excitement kick is the same on both sides, I think. But unlike the anti-racists, we nationalists cannot go where we want in town without risking assault. We are considerably fewer than them, so we always have to be on guard. They restrict my life every day! Every time I experience that I cannot go where I want and do what I want, more and more aggression builds up within me. I try not to hate people – love and hatred are such powerful feelings, and my enemies do not deserve to occupy so much of my emotional life. But when they infringe on my life and dignity every day, I cannot help hating.
>
> Everyone who is part of this game, whether they are nationalists or anti-racists, becomes intensely emotionally involved. It may begin with being inter-

24 See a nasty article in Riis-Knudsen's old journal *National-Socialisten* (Vol. 10, No. 3, 1993), titled 'Familiepolitik på ar(ab)isk', where his previous followers give their judgement on the character of their former leader.

> ested in politics, but after a while the feeling that your personal dignity is violated takes over, creating fury and hatred. It's consuming you.
>
> Now I feel torn and exhausted. I don't know if I can continue this life much longer, or whether I want to get out of the group or not.[25]

Living under legal pressure and police surveillance may also be exhausting in the long run. Many activists have committed crimes for which they face or fear legal prosecution. In countries where the authorities may ban extremist organisations, the fear of becoming stigmatised by being linked to an illegal association may add to the pressure.

Pull Factors:

7. The negative aspects of life as an activist in a stigmatised, extremist group often create *a longing for the freedoms of a 'normal' life*. However, most activists are rather ambivalent about this. On the one hand, it is a very attractive idea to be able to live a relaxed life, minding their own business without always having to be on guard against enemies and traitors, without fear of violence, without being stigmatised and isolated, and without all the restrictions of a more or less underground existence. On the other hand, 'normal life' may also appear dull, flat and empty, and therefore almost frightening. Many doubt that they would be able to endure it without backsliding.

8. At some point, activists in militant nationalist or racist youth groups feel that they are *getting too old for what they are doing*.[26] They no longer have the same need for excitement. They may have less energy, and want to calm things down. When they become more mature, chasing and being chased by 'communists' and immigrant youth gangs no longer appears meaningful. Rebellious teenage members, who may even see them as representatives of their parents' generation, may also challenge their authority and prestige. After passing the age of 30, veteran skinheads tend to feel more and more out of place in the group. As Katrine Fangen aptly puts it, 'life in the nationalist group represents a kind of prolonged youth phase, a postponement of adult life'.[27] Unless they are able to redefine their roles in relation to the group, e.g. by acquiring some kind of managerial position or becoming a 'withdrawn elder', they will sooner or later leave or become marginalised. Some may join an 'adult' nationalist organisation.[28] Others try to adapt to a more normal lifestyle and leave their period of nationalist activism behind. This transition can be extremely difficult, especially for the older ones. However, most skinheads begin to think about their future and possible professional careers at a much earlier stage, usually about at the time when they turn 20.

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25 Based on several interviews with a Norwegian activist, Summer and Autumn 1995.

26 'Aging out' is also one of the most important factors in bringing criminal careers to an end; cf. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986); Barnett, Blumstein and Farrington (1987).

27 K. Fangen (1995) p. 107.

28 However, in some countries such as Sweden, there is more continuity and contact between youth nationalist activists and adult activists and groups than is the case in, for instance, Norway, where there is little co-operation and understanding between the various generations of nationalists.

9. Young activists are acutely aware that being publicly known as neo-Nazis, racists or radical nationalists may jeopardise their *career prospects and personal futures*. Few European countries have *Berufsverbot* against political extremists in a formal or legal sense (Germany is a notable exception), but it is nevertheless a fact of life that certain types of political extremists do not get certain jobs, or may even be fired.[29] Many nationalist and right-wing radicals would like to join the police force or pursue a military career. However, they are generally screened out from these forces through procedures of being judged 'unfit' or through security clearances, as most of them eventually become registered in the files of the Security Police. In Norway, several teachers have lost their jobs – sometimes after lengthy trials – because they have expressed opinions, which are considered to be incompatible with their positions as teachers of young people. Even bus drivers, shopkeepers and factory workers have been dismissed from their work due to pressure from colleagues, customers or antiracist activists. In some cases, students have been more or less forced to quit their studies because of their political activism. There is a correlation between being unemployed and being a racist activist, but the direction of causation is often the opposite of what is generally assumed. Thus, for a youth who has ambitions of obtaining a higher education and an interesting and relevant job, it is not expedient to continue as a racist or neo-Nazi activist.

10. One of the strongest motives for leaving a militant racist or nationalist youth group is *to establish a family with new responsibilities for spouse and children.* Getting a girlfriend (or boyfriend) outside the group is a frequent cause of quitting. Such situations obviously involve establishing new bonds of loyalty and setting different priorities. In relation to groups which have some kind of gang structure (such as some skinhead or rocker groups) or in other ways demand the full loyalty of the individual member, this may lead to a fundamental conflict of loyalty which can only be solved by either leaving the group or leaving the family or girl (/boy) friend. Loyalty to spouse and children will often take priority over loyalty to group and mates.

Factors inhibiting disengagement

Although an activist may have several strong reasons for leaving the group, there may still be sufficiently strong factors linked to the processes of bridge burning and community building which work to discourage them from taking such a step.

1. There are several *positive characteristics of the group*, which may be considered too valuable to leave behind. High investments have been made in terms of friendship and social support. The racist group provides community, a substitute 'family', identity, security against external threats and enemies, excitement and adventure. Even if a person has completely lost faith in the group's ideology and politics, ties of friendship and loyalty may for some individuals constitute more than sufficient reasons for staying with the group.

29 Cf. Heléne Lööw (1991c), p. 50.

2. Potential defectors may also fear *negative sanctions from the group* – sometimes with good reason. New recruits, who have been only on the periphery of the scene and not initiated into any of the group's secrets, may normally leave without any consequences whatsoever – at least if they do not switch to the anti-racists or run to the media with what they might know.

It is quite different for long-time activists who have been part of the core group. Such persons know things about the group and fellow members, which may cause serious problems with the police as well as with militant anti-racists or the media if this information got out. At best, the peer group will be deeply disappointed when a fellow activist does not want to associate him/herself with the 'family' anymore. His or her whereabouts will certainly be monitored closely. If the person in question refrains from doing anything, which may damage the group, he or she may – with some luck – not get into trouble with the former group. However, if s/he goes to the media, the police, or political opponents to reveal secrets or to distance him/herself from past political affiliations and acts, reactions may be harsh. Leading activists who defect will normally receive death threats, and some have been beaten up severely. However, although threats to kill defectors are common, only rarely have death threat been carried through.[30] Less lethal sanctions, such as harassment, verbal threats and expression of contempt, represent more realistic threats to defectors than outright violence. In one case, a very young activist who had founded and headed a nationalist youth group before his parents managed to get him out, one evening had close to 30 of his former friends besieging the family's house. When the boy – who by then was determined to stay away from extremist politics – called the police to get help, they refused to come because he was known to them as a racist troublemaker.[31]

3. *Loss of protection against former enemies:* One of the ironies involved in quitting a racist or neo-Nazi group which has been involved in an ongoing violent struggle with militant anti-racists or violent immigrant youth gangs is that former enemies do not necessarily believe that the disengagement is genuine, or may not even care. Sometimes, names and personal data remain stored in anti-fascist data banks, or are even published – frequently containing exaggerated or false information about their alleged Nazi activities. Militant opponents may therefore continue to assault and harass a person even after he or she has quit the racist group. For such persons, the act of leaving the racist group may also mean losing the relative protection they could enjoy by being part of a violent gang or organisation. Fear of being left in such a precarious situation may serve to dissuade potential defectors from quitting, and the actual experience of it may prompt others to return to the fold.

4. *Nowhere to go:* One of the main reasons why (potential) leave-takers may end up in such precarious situations is that former social relations with friends and family were broken or impaired when s/he joined the racist

30 A couple of cases of killing defectors are known from Germany. See *Der Spiegel* 20:1996; and Hasselbach, *Fuhrer-Ex*, (1996), p. 320. For a near-fatal US case, see Mark S. Hamm, *American Skinheads* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), p. 57, also recounted in Christiansen, *Skinhead Street Gangs*, pp. 221–222.

31 Interview with former leader of the *Viking* group in Oslo, 7 September 1995.

group. If the person in question tries to withdraw from the group without making a sharp and (in the eyes of the racist group) provocative breach, the defector will often be met with suspicion, without the moral support and protection s/he needs and risks ending up in a social vacuum.

5. *Fear that career prospects are ruined:* Persons who have been publicly known for neo-Nazi or racist activism, may – with some justification – feel that their prospects of getting a good and interesting job are seriously impaired, even if they are no longer politically active. They fear that their past will always haunt them.

Exit Options

Thus, members of racist groups who for various reasons consider quitting will often decide to stay because they find the alternatives even less attractive. The following overview will discuss various strategies former activists have used or may use to get out of racist groups, and outline and evaluate the pros and cons of the main options open to persons considering to leave.

1. The most obvious and spectacular strategy is to make a straight and public break with the racist movement, renouncing the attitudes and the ideologies it represents. Some switch sides completely by getting actively involved in anti-racist activities of some sort. Such ex-members may expose the dark secrets of the group, such as plans of violence, membership and other damaging information, or they may assume the role of a character who – with authority based on dearly-bought personal experience – warns young people about the dangers of getting involved with such extremist groups. In both cases, this strategy may involve a full confrontation with the group from which the person disaffiliated, as well as with former friends, and a total upheaval of values and life-style. Such a dramatic breach will therefore in most cases entail psychological strains as well as serious security risks. If the person in question goes to the media with the story, it may also be bad publicity for the group, and possibly damage the group's standing and trust in relation to affiliated organisations, especially abroad. In addition, former friends in the group will also often feel the defection as a personal betrayal. In their anger they will often make death threats towards the defector, and take at least some steps to punish the person in question.

This high-profile form of defection is the exit strategy normally associated with a few leading activists who before their defection were already well known. Such individuals have fewer alternative exit options available than the more anonymous activists, who can pull out with less fuss and less risk of being hampered by their extremist past. To well-known activists, a clean and public breach with their past offers them an opportunity to – almost literally – begin a new life. This strategy also offers the bonus of gaining social and political support from new groups and individuals, such as family and old friends.

Several of these high-profile defectors make use of the media to proclaim their dissociation from their former group and ideology for two particular reasons: By making a public statement, they hope to persuade those anti-

racists and others who doubt that their dissociation is genuine. Another reason is that when a former activist has quit the group without any ado, former peers will often try to persuade him to return – and he may even feel tempted. By making a public statement of dissociation, and expressing critical views about the movement, the defector is effectively burning his bridges back to the former group.

Rank-and-file members of racist groups, individuals who are not publicly known, sometimes choose one slightly different variety of this strategy. They may switch over to their former radical anti-racist opponents without any media publicity or public statements. Sometimes they may play the role of a mole for an intermediate period, providing the anti-racists with valuable intelligence and in the process building their own credibility. When they make the final breach, and their defection becomes known to their previous peers in the racist group, they already enjoy protection under the umbrella of the anti-racist militants. This type of crossover may also go in the opposite direction, from anti-racist to racist youth sub-cultures. It is quite common among skinheads, who may switch between being 'Nazi skins' and anti-racist SHARP skins (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice). Some individuals may even oscillate several times through their careers between the two extremes – although at the cost of getting a rather shaky credibility in both camps. Such apparently extreme transformations are not necessarily as fundamental as they may seem, since many skinheads are more concerned about lifestyle, images and action than with politics and ideology. In terms of life styles and modes of behaviour, it is no wide gap between some racist and anti-racist subcultures.

One way to begin a new life is to join a religious group or world-view, which is not too closely associated politics. Although peers are likely to express contempt for someone who turns to religion, this form of conversion is less likely to be perceived as provocative and a security risk than would be the case if the person switched over to the 'enemies' in the politically opposed camp. There are several known cases of Swedish racist activists who have converted from an extreme political to religious belief system.[32]

2. A number of activists *break more or less publicly with the racist groups* they belonged to by referring to family obligations, fear of ruined career prospects, dissatisfaction with the direction the group is moving, etc. – *but without making a complete break with the ideology and politics of the movement as such*. The break is public in the sense that they make clear to the group that they no longer want to be associated with it. This is sometimes also conveyed to the general public through interviews in the media, particularly if the person in question has been a well-known leader of the racist movement.

However, the outcome of this exit strategy is often that the person in question ends up in a highly precarious situation: They may still be exposed to harassment and social ostracism both from their former group and from former enemies, but without gaining any support and protection from a new social network. Work mates, prospective employers, friends from the pre-racist period, anti-racists, and even family members tend to consider such

32 Personal communication from Heléne Lööw.

'half-hearted defectors' with suspicion, as a person who may still harbour racist views. Attempts to establish new social networks, e.g. by joining various clubs or associations, may be perceived as 'Nazi infiltration'. Their past also tends to haunt them, hampering both their social and professional prospects – especially if their racist activism was publicly known. Such defectors therefore run the risk of ending up in a social vacuum, with a strong feeling of social isolation and loneliness. After a while, many of them long for the old group, with its sense of community and comradeship. Quite commonly, they have kept in touch with some of their old pals and not burned all bridges back to the group. However, defectors who feel rejected by society also run the risk of being rejected by their old group if they try to get readmitted. If they *do* get accepted back into the group, the status, position and confidence they may have enjoyed before their defection is now likely to be strongly diminished. In spite of this, there seems to be a considerable proportion of backsliding among this kind of ex-member – probably because it is the least rewarding of all exit strategies available.

However, this 'half-way' form of dissociation is often only a stage in a process, which might eventually end up with a full breach. One notable case was Milton John Kleim, known as the leading Nazi strategist on the Internet (see Chapter 4 by Back et al.). In June 1996, Kleim had become disillusioned with the white nationalist movement, and distanced himself from it in public statements on the Net—although still declaring himself as a National Socialist and proud Aryan. During the following months, however, he released several more statements where he gradually distanced himself completely from any racist ideology and movement, and wowed to fight them with all his means. His case illustrates that attitudes tend to change *after* a change of group affiliation rather than vice versa, and that it may take time to readjust to a new reality.

One variety of this strategy is to break with the stigmatised extremist group by opting for a more moderate and 'softer' version of (some of) the same views. For instance, neo-Nazis may distance themselves from Nazism by joining – or even establishing – a less stigmatised non-Nazi nationalist or rightwing party.

3. Group members who are *not* publicly known as racist activists have good prospects of a successful reintegration into mainstream society by taking a low-key approach, withdrawing gradually without ever making an open or public break. During a lengthy period they gradually make themselves marginal to the group, taking less and less part in political or social activities, lose interest in the group and make the group lose interest in them. By staying away from all kinds of media publicity and not involving themselves with anti-racist groups, this form of defection is unlikely either to provoke reprisals from the movement or to cause them any negative sanctions from mainstream society. Few will know that they were ever part of a racist movement, and hopefully, those who do know will keep it to themselves.

There is, however, a major problem associated with this form of defection strategy: the racist skeleton in the closet. Throughout the rest of their lives, there is always a risk that the past may return to haunt them. Paradoxically, for a person who has been involved with a stigmatised group, the bet-

ter he or she is integrated into mainstream society and the greater the success her or she achieves professionally, the higher is the risk – and the greater is the fall – if the secret past is exposed. A person who lives a normal life, as a blue-collar worker may not be much hurt professionally or even socially if someone discloses that ten years ago, he was a member of a neo-Nazi group. There is also little risk that anyone would have any interest in making such a public exposure.

It is quite different if the person in question makes a career in public life, getting into high positions where image, trust and confidence are essential qualities. With public visibility, there may well be someone who harbors a personal grudge or has vested political interest in revealing dark secrets about this character's past, particularly if the person becomes controversial – what might be called the 'Kurt Waldheim syndrome'. These stories tend to make excellent media headlines.[33]

That such successful persons have kept silent about their extremist past is often used against them in the public discourse, even if no one claims that they still harbor extremist views. Sometimes, there is also speculation about such 'closet Nazis infiltrating the corridors of power' – which may in certain cases actually be the case.[34] Although it may obviously be damaging to the image, credibility and further career of such individuals that their extremist pasts are revealed, there is another effect which may be even more problematic on a personal level – although it is difficult to ascertain or determine the concrete effects: it may be assumed that individuals who have flirted with or been more deeply involved with racist or Nazi group in their youth, are reluctant to seek careers involving public exposure. The fear that someone may reveal these hidden facts about their pasts and use it against them, affects their self-confidence, career choices, and life prospects.

One possible strategy ex-members may employ to pre-empt such scandalous disclosures is to make their past known to a number of well-disposed people. If someone is threatening to expose their past, they may at least call on such witnesses to testify that the person in question has not kept secret about these unpleasant facts.

An exit strategy based on withdrawal from the extremist group without ever making a clean and public break may be quite expedient in the short run, causing few or no negative sanctions. However, as the discussion and examples above have shown, the long-term effects may be quite damaging.

In addition to these main exit strategies, there are a number of more specific methods and circumstances, which may be of help to individuals who want to quit a racist group. One of the most important prerequisites for a successful dissociation and reintegration is that there is somebody outside who can provide the ex-member with moral support, guidance, and sometimes even a measure of control. Especially for young people, parents are often those who are in the best position to play this role, although these

33 During the mid-1990s, there were several such exposures of prominent people with dark Nazi or fascist pasts in Sweden, including a top diplomat, the lead singer of the successful pop group 'Ace of Base', and the founder of the Ikea furniture chain.

34 In its pamphlet *Nasjonalistisk ABC for unge patrioter* (undated, p. 10), *Norges Patriotiske Enhetsparti* argues that like the communists, young nationalists should get themselves well educated in order to infiltrate political institutions, positions of power, public bureaucracy, labour unions and the media in order to gain more power than could be achieved through elections.

youngsters often have a conflict-ridden relationship with their parents. One mother recounts how she and her husband literally pursued their son wherever he went in the evenings, refusing to let him be with his friends in the nationalist group, and if he still insisted on going, the parents would not let him without them being present. These persistent parents became such a nuisance that the others became less and less eager to have this boy as a member.[35]

In Norway, a 'Network for Parents with Children in Extreme Groups' was established in 1996 to provide a forum where parents can get social and moral support, share information about what is going on, bring in external expertise, and developing strategies to motivate and help their children to get out.[36] This network for parents was the first element in what, one year later became 'Project Exit – Leaving Violent Youth Groups', a program established to develop and disseminate to knowledge and methods on how to induce youths to disengage from such groups. In addition to providing assistance directly to parents and to youths who want to quit, a main target group is professionals who have to handle problems of gangs and problems of disengagement. Although originally started in Norway, Project Exit is (in 1998) in the process of being adopted in Sweden and Finland as well.

For boys, getting a girlfriend who is not herself involved with the movement is probably the most common circumstance which allows them to quit without too much trouble with the peers, and which may also motivate them to remain outside. Through stable relationships, eventually reinforced by having children and building new social networks, former extremists may establish their new lives. However, if the relationship breaks up, chances are high that they will return to the group. Whereas the typical pattern for male activists is to leave the group when they meet a girl who does not belong to the movement and return when the relationship breaks up, the typical pattern for girls is the opposite. They generally become involved with a racist group when they meet a boy who is part of it, and quit the group when the relationship ends.

In some cases, a friend or another steady person firmly placed outside the movement may provide potential leave-takers with the support and connections needed to make the leap back to 'normal' society. Such persons may also play vital roles in giving corrections and alternative views, which may induce the activist to question his own views and conceptions.

In Oslo, a preventive police unit, which has worked closely with both young people in the 'original' *Viking* group and their parents, has been successful in inducing a number of young people to quit. Their work was based on a keen understanding of the processes and motives involved in joining and leaving such extremist groups, in combination with well-developed social skills. Police officers invited young recruits to learn various forms of exciting and action-filled 'extreme' sports with some elements of risk, such as rock climbing, trial biking, and snowboard skiing. To several of the youngsters, these activities provided exactly the kind of adrenaline kicks that

35 Interview, 9 October 1995 and 18 April 1996.

36 The 'Network for Parents with Children in Extreme Groups' is attached to the organisation 'Adults for Children' (*Voksne for Barn*), which also operates a telephone hot-line for worried parents.

motivated them to join a violent nationalist group in the first place. Predictably, the leading people in the Viking group disapproved of the fact that some of the younger members and recruits mingling with the police, especially when it turned out that some even seemed to prefer the activities the police could offer to being with the mates in the *Viking* group. Several of those who 'fraternised' with the police were therefore considered defectors, and were excluded from (or at least marginalised by) the group. So far there have been no violent reprisals or serious threats involved. Needless to say, this was exactly what the police wanted to achieve.[37] By late 1996, the 'original' Viking group in that particular part of Oslo seems to have collapsed, although other groups elsewhere continue to use the name.

Another supplementary strategy is for the youth to remove him/herself physically from the group by moving to another part of the country, or even abroad. Starting school or a getting a new job may provide such an opportunity. Preferably, the ex-member goes to a place where the movement is not represented, or at least to a place where he or she is not easily approachable by the former friends, who may now have turned into enemies. In most cases it is sufficient to keep a low profile, and avoid publicity and situations where one may meet old friends from the group, or activists from related groups. However, there are also some ex-members who have considered themselves at such a high risk of reprisal that they have changed their names or even obtained new identities from the authorities. However, there may be serious psychological strains involved in choosing such a strategy, with the concern that the past may return to haunt them, that they by chance may run into former co-activists, or even the fear that the group may try to track them down.

At least two 'soft' versions of this strategy are easily available, and with some fringe benefits. Quite a few ex-members have escaped their groups by enrolling at one-year residential colleges (*folkehøgskoler*, 'folk high schools' run by private idealistic organisations). Others have used their compulsory military service as an opportunity to distance themselves geographically from their old mates. In both cases, college and military offer opportunities for new intellectual impulses as well as a chance to gain an alternative network of friends.

To some, getting a long-term prison sentence may have some of the same practical effects in terms of physical separation from the others in the movement – although the social networks available among prisoners may have some less positive aspects. Nevertheless, there have been several cases where convicted racist activists have used the time in prison to break their ties with the old friends, obtain new impulses, and re-orient their lives.[38] One of the leading Swedish neo-Nazi activists in the mid-1980s, who headed the militant *Riksaktionsgruppen* (RAG) of the *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (NRP) and was sentenced to three years in prison for a firebomb attack on a leftist bookstore and other crimes, left the group after he was arrested:

37 Personal communication from police officers at the preventive policing unit at Manglerud Police Station, and with parents of several ex-members.

38 For a discussion about the effects on terrorists of serving time in prison, see Taylor and Quayle (1994), pp. 38–39.

> I had considered breaking with NRP even before I was imprisoned, but jail gave me the opportunity to break the tie with NRP for good. However, the two months I was remanded in custody was one of the most difficult periods in my life. The NRP had meant so incredibly much to me, it had been everything in my life. But then I took the full step and broke with them. It was like falling into a huge darkness.
>
> (Interviewer:) Why did you do it? It seemed like you still held on to your beliefs and ideology and political views [even when in jail]?
>
> During the time in custody I probably did. But the beliefs and the political convictions changed gradually. Such things can not be transformed overnight. It happened during the time in prison, and after I left prison. My views changed gradually, and I also tried to mute my fanaticism. Today I am less interested in politics. I voted conservative in the last election, and I still consider myself on the right in politics. But I have become a democrat, and I am now warning young people against joining groups of the extreme right.[39]

The fact that some of the more well-organised neo-Nazi movements and networks (e.g. in Sweden and Germany) have established special aid organisations for imprisoned members, asking members to write letters to imprisoned comrades, etc., may not be for purely altruistic and humanitarian reasons. They are probably also aware that imprisoned activists may more easily break their ties to the movement while in jail unless the group outside reminds them that they are not forgotten.

When Groups Lose their Grip on Members

Thus far we have discussed defection only as an individual strategy. However, there are some situations, which encourage various degrees of mass defection from racist organisations and groups. These situations tend to reduce the impact of some of the factors inhibiting defection, in particular weakening the positive characteristics of the group, which make it attractive to be part of it, and by reducing the threat of negative sanctions against members leaving the group.

There are several circumstances, which may produce situations where groups (and leaders) lose their grip on group members. One common factor is the emergence of dissatisfaction and conflict within the group. The sources of discontent may vary considerably, from disagreements over ideology and the use of violent methods to rival claims to leadership, or assertions of disloyalty. Albert Hirschman[40] has argued that dissatisfied members of an organisation have two alternative options: 'exit' or 'voice'. The latter is an attempt to address the causes of discontent by trying to reform the organisation, whereas 'exit' often occurs after a failed attempt to exercise 'voice'. Martha Crenshaw,[41] applying Hirschman's perspective on 'exit' to the special circumstances of clandestine extremist organisations, proposes that dis-

39 'Patrik', interviewed by Torbjørn Esping on *Sweden's Radio*, 14 April, 1993. After he broke with the Nazi movement, 'Patrik' had to change his name and identity because his old pals were trying to punish him for his 'treason'.

40 Hirschman (1979).

41 Crenshaw (1988), p. 22 ff. In Bjørgo & Heradstveit (1993), Ch. 6, we discuss Crenshaw's perspective further.

satisfied members have the possibilities of either joining another, rival organisation, or splitting off and creating a new group (which may be more militant or more moderate). However, significant segments of a group or a movement may also withdraw from militant groups and extremist politics altogether, sometimes involving a considerable number of individuals. When internal group discipline and loyalty is low, when leaders are weak or discredited, and many activists break out to join or establish competing groups, sanctions against defecting members are likely to lose credibility. It is therefore relatively easy to join others in breaking with the group without necessarily following them into a new group.[42]

Another frequent cause of mass defection is that members of the group carry out serious acts of violence, and that leaders and co-members become implicated. This happened with *Norsk Front* (Norwegian Front, NF) and its successor, *Nasjonalt Folkeparti* (National People's Party) after bombings in 1979 and 1985 respectively. The same was the case with the Swedish *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (Nordic National Party, NRP) and its *Riksaktionsgruppe* (National Action group, RAG) during the same period. In the NRP/RAG case, the young militants felt deeply betrayed and alienated when the NRP leaders during the trial distanced themselves from actions they had approved of earlier. Most of the militant youths subsequently left the organisation.[43] Although many former NRP/RAG activists later started up or joined other racist groups and activities, quite a few did not – including the RAG leader himself. The Danish 'Green Jackets', a criminal youth gang, turned to racism during the mid-1980s. However, at the height of their 'career' as a group around 1987/88, the 'Green Jackets' started to fall apart. In co-ordination with youth workers, the police managed to jail the more ideological hard core of Green Jackets, thereby isolating them from the wider group of followers. The youth workers concentrated their efforts on this outer circle, offering jobs and job training, help to find apartments, leisure time activities, and other forms of assistance. Quite a few got girlfriends and children, and new loyalties thereby replaced ties to the gang. By the end of the 1980s, the Green Jacket group had more or less disintegrated, and was no longer considered a problem in terms of racism or extremist politics.

However, even among groups, which seem to grow and thrive, there may nevertheless be a large turnover. For instance, the Norwegian nationalist girls' group *Valkyria* was established in late autumn 1994, consisting of 12 'founding members'. One year later, *Valkyria* had grown to 30 members, divided into two separate groups. However, of the original twelve, only four were still members after that year (a turnover rate of 66 per cent), and at least one (probably two) of these remaining quit later. Altogether, about 60 girls had been members or participated in group-activities at some point during that twelve-month period. One of the two groups had a great influx of new recruits, but a very high turnover rate (possibly due to intensive intervention efforts from police, school, and parents). The other group had a lower but somewhat more stable membership.[44]

42 Factors behind mass defections from religious groups are discussed by Wright (1988), pp. 156–157.
43 Lööw (1993), p. 74; Wright (1988), 151–2.
44 This is based on information from one of the core 'founding members' of *Valkyria* who later left the movement. Police and other sources who have followed the group closely

Thus, a considerable turnover of members seems to be a normal feature of most racist youth groups, but the rate varies strongly from group to group. The likelihood of dissociation declines with the time the person has been part of the group. Mass defection from racist groups may be facilitated by general dissatisfaction, conflict within the group, or discredited leaders, which in its turn may lead to factionalism and organisational splits. 'Forced' reorganisation due to police investigation or arrests of members or leaders for illegal activities is also a situation likely to cause a high number of defections. In some countries, banning of organisations may lead to the same results. And when groups collapse completely, many of the members are likely to leave not only the group but the racist subculture as well. What these situations have in common is that they tend to reduce the effectiveness of some of the factors, which normally keep members from dropping out. When many of the positive characteristics which in the past made it attractive to belong to the group are gone, and when the threat of negative sanctions against members leaving the group is less credible, the likelihood of mass defection rises considerably. What may still prevent members from leaving the racist group or sub-culture is, however, that they see no alternative places to go outside, and that they expect to be rejected by society.

Conclusions

In most cases, young people do *not* enter racist groups primarily for political reasons or motives. The main reason for joining is that such tight-knit and secretive groups fulfil a number of their social and psychological needs, in terms of providing identity, community, protection, and excitement. Racist ideology is usually adopted afterwards – as a consequence rather than a cause for joining the group. Similarly, those who quit the group usually do so because continued membership in the group appears as unattractive and is no longer fulfilling their social and psychological needs (push-factors), whereas life outside the group appears as more attractive (pull-factors). Thus, they leave the racist group for many of the same reasons as they once joined. Typically, their views and attitudes change more or less gradually *after* they have broken the social ties with the group, as the belief system is no longer supported and validated by a community of 'significant others'. Thus, changes in political beliefs follow changes in group membership rather than preceding and causing these changes.[45]

To join a racist group will for a young person in most cases involve a dramatic transformation of social status and identity. However, leaving the group may for some involve even more dramatic breaches and transformations. As we have seen, however, whether this process of defection and reintegration goes smoothly or encounters obstacles depends on a number of factors.

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have confirmed the general pattern, although they are not in a position to confirm the actual figures. The two *Valkyria* groups were split (but continued to co-operate) because the girls in *Drammen Valkyria* would not take orders from the male leader of the *Viking* group, whereas the *Viking Valkyrias* would. The turnover rate was an issue discussed among the core members, partly because they had been accurately forewarned by a more experienced activist when they started up that they should expect that at least 75 per cent of the recruits would quit.

45 Cf. J. Aho (1994), pp. 125–128.

1. *How far has the person progressed in his/her career as an activist or member?* This relates to the time spent with the group, the level of trust and access to group secrets (i.e. core/periphery member), degree of ideological radicalisation, whether the person has become publicly known as an activist, and to what degree the person has become involved in acts of violence and other crimes.

2. *The character of the group or scene with which the individual is involved.* A clandestine, terrorist-oriented cell is likely to be much more paranoid and punitive in relation to (potential) defectors than would normally be the case with loosely bounded skinhead scenes – where people drift in and out all the time.

3. *The degree of stigmatisation and isolation in relation to 'normal' society outside.* Having been publicly exposed in the media and by anti-racists, or 'frozen out' by family and former friends may serve to push a person further into the extremist scene. On the other hand, such isolation and stigmatisation may also add to the hardships of extremist activism, making the person long for a more 'normal' life.

4. *The availability of alternatives and support.* Racist youth gangs fulfil certain needs of its members, in terms of providing identity, community, protection, and excitement. Potential defectors from racist groups are unlikely to take the plunge if they see no realistic, reasonably safe, and sufficiently attractive escape routes and alternatives to the kind of life they are presently living.

Antiracist mass campaigns with a focus on ideology and values – the favourite measure of politicians who 'want to do something against racism and right-wing extremism'[46] – are not likely to have much effect in terms of preventing youths from joining racist groups or of inducing anyone to quit such groups. Other types of measures, addressing more directly the social factors and needs which motivate young people to both join and leave such destructive groups, are more likely to make an impact.

Youths who fail to be reintegrated into 'normal' society will not necessarily remain within the racist subculture as adults. Some are likely to continue their 'careers' by joining related and even more destructive groups. In Scandinavia, there are, for example, signs of increasing convergence and exchange of personnel between criminal MC gangs and the White Power subcultures, sharing many of the same traits and values. As some youths grow out of the skinhead and neo-Nazi subculture, joining Hells Angels and Bandidos may be the next logical step in their extremist careers.

46 The Council of Europe's 'European Youth Campaign Against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-semitism and Intolerance' and the European Union's 'European Year Against Racism 1997' are prime examples of this approach.

3. How do Violent Youth Groups and Gangs Fall Apart: Processes of Transformation and Disintegration

In the previous chapter, we have described the motivations and processes whereby young people join violent groups, the different reasons why most of them want to disengage after a while, and different factors which may prevent them from doing so (se also Bjørgo 1997, 1998, Bjørgo & Carlsson 1999). Substituting this individualistic perspective with a more collective approach, it would be natural to ask:

- Why and how are gangs and other violent youth groups established?
- What keeps gangs and violent groups together?
- How do gangs sometimes transform into other types of violent or criminal groups?
- How and why do gangs disintegrate?

In the following, we will focus on the latter two issues – processes of group transformation and disintegration.

Gang basics

We follow Decker and Van Winkle (1996, p. 31) in defining a gang as 'an age-graded peer group that exhibits some permanence, engages in criminal activity, and has some symbolic representation of membership'.

It is useful to make a distinction between a gang and a group of friends, often called a 'play group'. Although most gangs start out as a groups of friends, gangs have passed some distinctive tipping points on their way to becoming a street gang. Malcolm Klein (1995, pp. 29–30) identifies the first one to be a commitment to a criminal orientation – although non-criminal activities take up most of the members' time even in the most criminal gang. The second signpost is the group's self-recognition of its gang status. At some point, the gang-to-be starts to think of itself as a gang – a group set apart from others. This will usually involve hostilities with rival gangs. As Malcolm Klein reminds us, it is hard to find a one-gang city; gang cohesiveness thrives on gang-to-gang hostilities. The third tipping point in the development of a gang is the responses it receives from segments of the community as the group becomes more troublesome. 'The community serves as a looking glass: Members look into it and see their gang character' (Klein 1995, p. 30).

Irving Spergel et al. (1994) make a useful distinction between chronic gang problems and emerging gang problems, which will require different strategies of intervention.

'A community with a chronic gang problem is characterised by a persistant, often acute pattern of gang violence and crime lasting for more than a decade. A community with an emerging gang problem is associated with a pattern of gang crime that is less organised and virulent and more recent' (Spergel et al. 1994, p. 1).

The processes of gang disintegration I describe in this chapter will be of particular relevance to emerging gangs, although these processes are also at work in more chronic gangs. However, even if most gangs have a limited shelf life, gangs tend to foster rival gangs and successor gangs in an ongoing process. Thus, it is important – and obviously easier – to try to stop these processes at an early stage, when the community has an emerging gang problem rather than a chronic one. Less established gangs are much more likely to fall apart by natural causes – and these processes of disintegration can be stimulated.

It is a well-established finding in gang research that joining a gang tends to lead to an increase in the violent and other criminal activities of the new members (Thornberry et al. 1993, Esbensen and Huizinga 1993). Disengagement from gangs tends to be followed by a drop in violent and criminal behaviour. Malcolm Klein (1995) has also emphasised the strong relationship between the level of gang cohesiveness and the level of criminal activity of its members. Reducing gang cohesiveness will generally also reduce the crime level. Gang cohesiveness has to do with such factors as time spent together, level of in-group loyalty, willingness to back up each other when members get in trouble, etc.

Thus, to reduce the level of crime and violence in a gang-ridden community, it would obviously be a wise strategy to try to reduce recruitment to gangs, increase disengagement, reduce gang cohesiveness, and ultimately, to facilitate processes of disintegration of gangs. In this presentation, I will focus on the 'natural' processes of gang disintegration – with an eye to how we can 'help nature' a bit. By understanding these mechanisms, it should be possible to reinforce these disintegrating processes, and identify promising points of intervention. Although it is important to encourage individual defection from gangs, making an entire gang fall apart may result in even greater reductions in criminal activities – providing that the homeless gang members do not join other gangs or establish new ones.

Processes of gang transformation

Street gangs are not stable structures. They have usually emerged out of something else – a playgroup or a clique of friends, a loose subculture, or perhaps even a basketball team. Gangs may go through a life course as members get older, acquire criminal records and experiences, get in touch with political movements or other subcultures, acquire enemies, get access to economic profits, or establish links to other groups. These are factors and processes that may transform gangs and other youth groups into something they were not before. I believe there is too little focus in gang research on these processes of group transformation. We should take a more systematic look at what comes before street gangs, and what may come after, and how one type of gang may transform into other types of gangs. Klein's typology

of traditional, neo-traditional, compressed, collective, and speciality gangs provides some input to such an analysis, focussing on variables like age composition, numbers, sub-groups, leadership, etc. However, I believe there is a need for a stronger emphasis on the processes of change. American gang researchers also have a tendency to lose interest in a youth group once they have established that it is not quite a gang. However, 'pre-gang' and 'post-gang' groups should be of particular interest, in order to study how they might transform into or out of a gang type of group.

I have observed and tried to describe some of these processes in my own studies of racist gangs and their opponents in Scandinavia (Bjørgo 1997, Bjørgo & Carlsson, 1999). One finding was that many of these racist or nationalist groups emerged out of what was initially non-political and often petty-criminal street gangs or cliques of friends. In one case, some Norwegian boys from a middle-class neighbourhood in Oslo were harassed and beaten up by Turkish and Vietnamese youth gangs. They decided to go together with their friends to form their own gang for protection. In effect, this became a white ethnic gang. For support, they got in touch with the Nationalist milieu in Oslo, and gradually adopted their style and ideology, calling themselves 'Viking'.

In Copenhagen, another process took place when a group of unemployed young Danish boys from a rather poor neighbourhood, known for their crime, violence and rowdy behaviour, in the early 1980s started to burn crosses (KKK-style) and harass their immigrant neighbours to get attention to their demands for flats of their own and other social goods. They got an enormous coverage in the news media, which called them the 'Green jackets' (*Grønjakkerne*), and boosted their image as a racist 'White Power' gang. This media response clearly gave them an image to live up to, and served to politicise some of them. The original gang of some 20 male teenagers soon became the core group of a wider subculture of 'Green Jackets', consisting of several White Power gangs, which occasionally joined forces to fight immigrant gangs and anti-racists.[47] They could mobilise up to 200 for a particular battle.

Largely as a response to the threat from the Green Jackets, the so-called Warriors emerged during the second half of the 1980s. This was an immigrant youth gang surrounded by a network of similar gangs. Together with their affiliated groups, the core group of 20–40 could mobilise up to 2000 supporters, according to the police. Initially, they tried to present themselves as some kind of anti-racist guardians, armed with bats, knives, and guns. The Warriors assaulted and beat up alleged racists, both individuals and in large battles. They also offered protection to immigrant-owned kiosks and shops vulnerable to racist attacks. Although many of the gang members even during this early phase were involved in crime, they tried real hard to present themselves as anti-racist 'good-guys'. However, as the Green Jackets for various reasons fell apart and disappeared from the streets – largely displaced by the Warriors – more serious forms of crime started to dominate the activities of the Warriors. They were increasingly involved in robbery, burglary, car theft, and drug distribution. One speciality they adopted from the

47 For a more detailed description of 'The rise and fall of the Green Jackets', see Bjørgo 1997, pp. 127–133.

Green Jackets was to assault and rob homosexuals in parks. When they assaulted more or less arbitrary victims in the streets, they typically claimed that the person had made a xenophobic remark or 'looked upon them in a racist way'. By the early 1990s, some of the elder original Warrior members withdrew from street activities such as violence and robberies. For this, they used their younger brothers and cousins, who were too young to be prosecuted for crimes. They no longer used the name 'Warriors', although there is a clear continuity to the criminal immigrant gangs of the late 1990s in Copenhagen, which have now become an extremely hot issue in the political debate in Denmark.

Even police officers, which knew the Warriors well, agree that protection and resistance against racism was the main cause for the emergence of the Warriors, and that this was the main issue during the first years. However, it was also important for the gang to win respect through intimidation. They armed themselves not only for protection but also as a part of their image. Witnesses were harassed into silence. The aura of fear they evoked and the way they were able to dominate the streets of Copenhagen, turned out to be a useful resource once they left anti-racism behind and turned to more serious and profit-oriented crime.

Racism and anti-racism has been a main issue around which gangs in Scandinavia have formed and transformed. However, gangs may transform both from non-political into more politically oriented groups, or they may transform from a group with a political image into a predominantly criminal and profit-oriented gang.

Understanding the processes whereby gangs transform into other forms, and change their purpose, justification, style and mode of action, should be of high relevance to developing policies of prevention and intervention. However, it would be even more useful if we could understand the processes of gang disintegration, and how one may influence and reinforce these processes.

Processes of gang disintegration

New youth gangs and extreme groups emerge constantly. However, most of them fall apart after a few months or years – only in rare cases are they able to survive as a gang for a decade or more. These few 'successful' gangs are more likely to keep most of their members over an extended time, and replenish their ranks with new recruits. Other gangs suffer from steady defection and turnover in membership without being able to recruit sufficient newcomers to keep the gang sufficiently strong to survive.

How and why do gangs and similar violent groups fall apart? It is useful to distinguish between six main processes, which may work separately or in combinations:

Growing out of gang life through natural maturation and new priorities in life.

- Defeat of the group by external use of force.
- Loss of external enemies or threat.
- Loss of identity, status and image.

– Decay of group cohesiveness, solidarity and attraction value.
– Fragmentation of the group into smaller units, which may be too weak to survive.

A strong group is the result of both 'push' and 'pull' – external pressure and internal cohesiveness working in the same direction. If there is no external pressure (or it becomes overwhelmingly strong), and the inner forces of solidarity disappear or are substituted by forces of disruption and discord, the group will disintegrate.

Aging out

Aging out is the most common process through which youths leave gang life and a criminal life style in general. Most gang members are only involved with gangs during a limited period of their teens. At some point of time, these youths will reach some of the natural crossroads of life where they will have to change schools, find jobs, or do their compulsory military service. Some get girlfriends or boyfriends and, eventually, children, or they start to consider their futures and options for education and jobs. Most gang members will at some point realise that gang life is not compatible with the kind of life they would like to live. If a gang consists predominantly of members of the same age, they tend to reach these crossroads approximately at the same time. As a consequence, the gang is likely to fall apart. However, if the gang has a larger distribution in age and a certain recruitment of younger members, these crossroads of life are likely to come at different times, providing a continuity which makes it possible to maintain the gang even if individual members constantly disengage.

Defeat

Overwhelming external force may also crush gangs. In some cases this might be a rival gang or enemy, which drives them off the street. However, such counter-gangs may also give rise to feuds, which reinforce solidarity and mobilisation in both groups. More commonly, gangs and violent organisations may collapse under the pressure from the state's apparatus of power – the police and the system of justice. In most cases, this happens as a result of arrests and criminal prosecution – usually in the wake of serious crimes where the police has succeeded in arresting and convicting leaders and members. Some states may also have legal provisions for proscribing (membership in) organisations, which work through illegal means.

Loss of external enemies or threats

may paradoxically have some of the same consequences to a gang as if the group was defeated by an overpowering adversary. To a large extent, gangs emerge and are maintained as protection against other gangs perceived as threats. Some gangs may even require rival gangs to exist. Frequently, they develop into mirror images of each other. In some cases, there seems to be little else, which keeps the group together beyond the perceived threat from

the adversary, and the hatred and thirst for revenge caused by repeated clashes. If the counter-gang disappears and the threat comes to an end, this external pressure will cease as well. The group may then lose its *raison d'etre* – unless it can be transformed to fulfil other needs to its members. Some gangs with an anti-racist image have, e.g., turned to profit-oriented crime when their racist opponent disappeared. Since conflicts and feelings of threat are driving forces both in the formation and maintenance of youth gangs, efforts to promote mediation and conflict resolution among youths may stand a chance to prevent some of these conflicts to turn into spirals of violence, and prevent rival groups from developing into full-fledged gangs. Obviously, this is easier to accomplish *before* the conflict has escalated and before the fronts have hardened, and before a gang identity has been firmly established.

To the police and other agencies who have to act in relation to gangs, it is tricky to find the balance between measures which may serve to defeat gangs, and going into roles where one may provide gangs with 'good enemies'. There are many examples of how a too confrontational policy from the Police towards deviant or oppositional groups and subcultures has served to strengthen the milieus and violent tendencies one is trying to fight.[48] As Klein (1995) and others have pointed out, the main sources of gang cohesiveness are external to the gangs, and the police will often perform that function.

Loss of status, identity, and image

Street gangs and violent subcultures are not based on formal organisation and hierarchies, but rather on status, reputation and image. Gangs and subcultures provide their members with an identity, but this is something both the individual and the group must live up to in order to keep their standing and reputation. This is their main capital, so to speak. Thus, both the individual members and the group are vulnerable to loss of reputation. Individuals, who lose their 'honour' and fall in standing, will either have to do something drastic to rebuild their reputation, or they are likely to drop out. The same may be a case on the group level: A gang which loses its reputation of being tough and of closing ranks when members are threatened, is likely to be ridiculed and challenged. If they do not stand up to the challenge, the gang is likely to fall apart or fade away (Bay 1989). When gang members do not back up each other, the gang can no longer serve as protection to its members. When this becomes known to former enemies, the gang members will be easy prey (Varang 1999).

The importance of maintaining a tough collective reputation to the survival of gangs is demonstrated through the extreme measures some gangs are willing to take in order to defend their reputation. Gang members who desert their friends and fail to back up co-members in fights against enemies (or in other ways dishonour the group) may be subjected to harsh sanctions. They

48 For instance, Malcolm Klein (1995: 161–168) criticises harshly the Los Angeles Police Department's so-called 'gang sweeps' – mass arrests where alleged gang members are apprehended and registered without necessarily any charges being filed against them for specific crimes. Klein argues that such harassing 'sweeps' generally serve to strengthen gang cohesiveness, without having any deterring or preventing effects.

will normally be excluded from the group, sometimes after being severely beaten up by their former friends (Wolf 1991:98–100; Næss 1999: 14).

Ritual or physical challenges to a gang's image or by rival gangs (e.g. crossing over gang graffiti or beating up a gang member) typically leads to revenge, spirals of violence and feuds. Failure to respond to such provocations will undermine the collective reputation of the gang.

However, other forces may also threaten identities and images. Some youth subcultures with a provocative and violent image, such as the Punk movement, disintegrated when the fashion industry expropriated and commercialised their style – thereby neutralising all the provocative power of their symbols and image. Ridicule of a gang's or subculture's style and symbols by the entertainment industry may also undermine their image.

Decay of internal group relations

is a main cause when gangs fall apart. These processes of decay may undermine the group's cohesiveness and solidarity to such an extent that the gang disintegrates. The decisive turning point is when gang members no longer back up each other if someone is beaten up or gets involved in conflicts with outsiders. The 'one for all and all for one' principle is no longer at work. For all practical purposes, the gang is then no longer a gang.

A common factor when a gang decays is that the group has lost its attraction value to its members. This might be the outcome when leaders withdraw or lose their credibility. Another factor is strained and conflict-ridden relations between members, which leads to a deterioration of the sense of brotherhood. Sources of discontent may vary from disagreement about ideology or use of violence or drugs, to rivalry over leadership, charges of misuse of the group's economic assets, or accusations of cowardice, disloyalty or of being an informer to the police. Failing group solidarity will not only increase the number of members leaving the group – it makes it much more difficult to replenish lost members by attracting new recruits. Over time the group will not have the 'critical mass' it needs to function as a gang. Continued group membership is becoming a lonely activity – or even outright boring. Members may disengage through an active and sharp break, or they may gradually lose interest and seek friends and affiliation elsewhere. When the loss of members over time is larger than fresh recruitment, the group's activity will gradually and inevitably come to an end.

It would be most useful and interesting to know more about the actual 'turnover rates' (or 'disengagement rates') with regard to violent youth groups and gangs in general. Although extremely difficult to ascertain, such rates could in principle be determined by following a cohort of new recruits, and checking who are still members after specified time periods, such as one month, six months, one year, three years, ten years, etc. Such studies have to some extent been carried out in relation to new religious movements ('cults'). Defection rates in the range of 60–75 per cent over a two-year period have been reported with regard to various religious groups.[49] Due to the sensitive nature of the matter, very little reliable data or statistics have been available regarding the proportion of those joining e.g. the racist youth mi-

49 Cf. E. Barker (1988), pp. 167–8; S. Wright (1987), p. 2.

lieu who are still part of the scene after a given period. I know there are some data on defection rates in youth gangs in some American longitudinal studies (e.g. Esbensen and Huizinga 1993).

What seems to be clear, however, is that a considerable turnover of members seems to be a normal feature of gangs and violent youth groups (as in all organisations!), with the rate varying much from group to group. The likelihood of dissociation is largest in the beginning, and declines with the length of time the person has been part of the group.

One interesting case of a racist gang, which collapsed almost completely, is the *Green Jackets* of Studsgårdsgade in Copenhagen, a criminal gang of about 20 youths who with their racism and violence drew much attention to themselves during the mid and late 1980s. They became role models to a number of similar local youth gangs in Denmark.[50] At the height of their career as the core group of this racist youth subculture around 1987–88, the original Green jacket gangs started to fall apart. By 1988, the group had shrunk to twelve. Only one of them considered himself a racist, the rest even claimed to be against racism. This reduction of the group and its racist core may be explained partly as a result of systematic efforts by youth workers (in close co-ordination with the police) to dissolve the group and help members to find jobs, partly because several leading members were put in jail by the police, and, perhaps most importantly, as a result of normal processes whereby young people establish families and leave behind juvenile delinquency. Some of the Green Jacket die-hards considered girlfriends and babies to be the greatest threats to the cohesion of the group, undermining the former loyalty among the boys. By the end of the 1980s, the *Studsgårdsgade* group and the Green Jacket movement as a whole had more or less disintegrated, and was no longer considered a problem in terms of racism or extremist politics.

Gangs usually consists of a group of hard core members surrounded by circles of ordinary members, and fringe members, hang-around or wannabes who may serve as a recruitment base and as supporting troops in cases of larger confrontations with rival gangs. One important strategy for breaking up the group is to separate the hard core from the more marginal members. A way to accomplish this is by physically removing or isolating the hard core, e.g. through imprisonment or by providing education/jobs far away from the local community. Alternatively, the more marginal members may be diverted away from the influence of the hard core through alternative activities and possibilities, such as job training or exciting activities.

Fragmentation

of the group might result in one gang becoming two, which may continue to co-exist side by side or in conflict. Usually, one gang will continue under it old name while the split-off makes its appearance as a new gang with a somewhat different identity. The split may weaken both groups, and in many cases one or both gangs will disintegrate and vanish. In politically extreme milieus such processes of factionalism and fission seem to be the rule rather

50 The rise and fall of the Green Jackets is described in more detail in Bjørgo 1997, Chapter 4.

than the exception. As a result, these politically extremist groups are weakening themselves to such an extent that they rarely are able to muster enough strength to achieve any political influence, in elections or otherwise. External pressure in the form of legal or political restrictions may force the group to present itself to the public as more moderate than most members prefer – which will frequently cause splits between moderates and more radical activists (cf. Van Donselaar 1993a, 1993b; Bjørgo 1997, p. 55). Another common cause for factionalism is rivalry between competing leaders with personal ambitions. Many politically extreme fringe groups seem to consist of 'more chiefs than Indians'.

Final remarks

As I have already stated, considerable turnover of members is a normal feature of most organisations – including gangs and violent youth groups. However, group cohesiveness and solidarity is vulnerable to a number of disintegrating factors and processes – and many of these can be reinforced by external actors such as the police, teachers, youth workers, parents and others. If gang cohesiveness is cracking, and many members begin to pull out, this process may reinforce itself. In such a situation it is much easier for individual members to follow others out of the gang without necessarily joining a new gang. When such groups collapse completely, there is a likelihood that many members will not only disengage from that group, but from the entire subculture or movement. Such situations of gang collapse seem to reduce the effects of the factors that would normally prevent members from defecting. When most of the positive aspects which in the past made it attractive to belong to the group are no longer present, and when threats of negative sanctions against defectors are no longer credible, the probability of mass disengagement will increase strongly. What might still keep members back in the group is that they are unable to see any alternative places to go outside the gang, and that they expect to be rejected by the community. This may to some extent explain the fact that when youth gangs fall apart, new gangs will often emerge with many of the same members. Splitting gangs is therefore not sufficient to ensure that the members will disengage from the gang subculture altogether. It is also necessary to develop methods to integrate individual gang members back into mainstream society.

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4. What Do They Fight Over? A Multi-dimensional Approach to Racist Violence

The surge of violent attacks against asylum seekers and labour migrants in many European countries, have given rise to widely different interpretations. Some see the violence as expressions of racism and xenophobia, orchestrated by far-right organisations. Others see the violence as a 'natural response' from locals who feel they are being swarmed by unwanted aliens, and that the violent outbursts indicate that the population's 'natural threshold' for assimilating foreigners has been exceeded. Still others consider the violent incidents as 'childish games and drunken pranks',[51] carried out by the usual local troublemakers. Common to most such interpretations is that they tend to be rather one-dimensional. I will try to provide an alternative multi-dimensional interpretation of the violence against foreigners, showing both that the violent actors, the victims, and those who respond to the violence (anti-racists, the anti-immigration lobby, the police, local authorities, etc.) act on the basis of a mixture of motives and reasons. The following discussion identifies and analyses six main 'value complexes' which the parties involved struggle over: ideology and immigration politics, identity, scarce resources, sexuality, territory, and security.

Immigration politics and ideology. Many of the perpetrators of violence against immigrants and asylum-seekers claim to have committed the act because of opposition to current immigration policy, or simply assert that they 'don't like foreigners'. Typically, they leave graffiti, symbols and slogans such as 'Turks out!', 'Norway for Norwegians', Keep Sweden Swedish, WP (White Power), swastikas, and the like. In other cases, racist or xenophobic messages are conveyed through the act itself, or at least interpreted as such by others. Only a minority among the perpetrators hold explicit ideological ideas or are members of racist groups, but more general xenophobic attitudes are common. However, in the context of police interrogation and court proceedings, such perpetrators often tend to deny or play down such racist or xenophobic motives since it might be used against them as an aggravating circumstance, resulting in a stiffer sentence. On the other hand, anti-immigrant and racist organisations sometimes praise such young violent perpetrators as good patriots and nationalists eager to defend their country and community against foreign intruders. However, these organisations usually express – at least officially – certain reservations about the form their 'desperate' actions take.

51 This expression has often been used by the police in the Scandinavian countries to describe such violence.

Antiracists generally interpret violent attacks against immigrants and asylum-seekers as an expression of racism and neo-Nazism, and consider it their task to alarm the public of the threat of racism. The more militant variety of antiracists in particular tend to see the presence and actions of alleged racist and neo-Nazi groups as primarily a *political* threat 'which must be fought in the same way as the forces of the radical left fought the Nazis in the streets during the 1930s'. More mainstream antiracists are usually more concerned about such attacks as transgressions of human rights rather than on ideological politics in a narrow sense.

The media also frequently emphasise the racist dimensions of violent acts against minorities. Especially when the police and other public institutions are slow to respond or when they play down xenophobic motives, some journalists see it as their role to make the public aware of the reality of racist violence, and put pressure on those whose responsibility it is to act against it. In this respect, they sometimes make important contributions to placing the problem onto the public agenda. However, journalists also sometimes tend to overdo the racism/Nazism dimension for a variety of reasons. Some apparently prefer a simple and snappy explanation such as 'Race War' rather than a more complex analysis of conflicts between youth gangs. Extremism and racist violence are also potential hot news. It is sometimes obvious that sensationalist first-page exposés of alleged Nazi terror groups are also a convenient way to sell newspapers.

However, although such acts of violence, and the responses to it, may be used to express ideological values regarding immigration politics and acceptance/rejection of ethnic pluralism, this is frequently only on the surface. Both racist and antiracist idioms may be used to express quite different values and interests. Often it is part of what may be called 'identity politics'.

Identity relates to how individuals and/or groups view and define themselves, and how viewed by others. Establishing and managing identities is an important concern for most people. To many perpetrators, their acts of violence against 'foreigners' are motivated more by a wish to impress their mates with a certain image of themselves than by any political or ideological values. Many of these youths have a strong feeling of not being appreciated – neither by parents (whose expectations they cannot live up to, or who simply do not care), by teachers and classmates, by a labour market, which does not need them, or by society in general. However, there are many ways to establish an identity or make others take notice. In certain types of youth gangs and cliques, being one who dares to do what others merely talk about may give status and serve to build one's reputation and standing among one's mates. Frequently, violent attacks are the outcome of drinking parties where young men try to outdo each other in expressing hostility towards foreigners and suggestions about what ought to be done to them. Afterwards, perpetrators are often aware that they had such motives for carrying out the violent act, sometimes claiming that they were carried away by the exchange of violent proposals and their beer-boosted courage. However, they sometimes also express surprise that their actions changed their status in relation to the community around them, and not necessarily in ways they themselves perceived as all negative. From being known as a gang of petty criminal losers, they suddenly become *somebody* – dangerous Nazis and racists in the

eyes of some, brave patriots and daredevils in the eyes of others. To such young boys, donning a skinhead 'uniform' conveys an aggressive and 'dangerous' image, and signals affiliation with a wider group of like-minded 'racists' who might be mobilised if the need arises. This gives some youths a feeling of being respected, or at least feared. Especially for those who in the past were looked down upon or even bullied, it is a remarkable change to see that their old tormentors suddenly give way to them, and even show deference. Making media headlines, being courted by militant nationalist organisations, causing the initiation of local action plans, or just to make things happen – all this may give marginalised young people a feeling of importance they have never experienced before. Finally they *are* somebody.

The identity dimension is also of vital importance to the victims. Being victimised by violence may in itself be an extremely traumatic experience. Becoming a target for harassment and violence just because of what the person is and cannot change – race, nationality and origin – may be even more devastating to one's self-esteem and identity.

Thus, violence and victimisation are closely related to the identity, self-esteem and honour of both the direct perpetrators, the victims, and the peer groups to which they belong. For that reason, victimised groups do sometimes carry out acts of revenge. This may be intended as a way to restore their own feelings of humiliation and vulnerability, and to teach their adversaries a lesson. However, such retaliation may easily escalate into feuding and spirals of violence between native and immigrant youth gangs, or between 'racists' and 'antiracists'.

Racist violence also often affects the identities of the local community in which such events take place. Spectacular incidents of racist violence or manifestations of racist activities attract the attention of the national news media. Recurring negative focus on a particular community as a place of xenophobic activity and violence may over time stigmatise the entire community. Even individual inhabitants interacting with outsiders frequently experience the stigma of being associated with their home community, and may feel obliged to defend their integrity by stating that 'Yes, I am from X, but I am certainly no racist!'

The almost instinctive tendency of mayors, the police and other locals to deny that a specific incident has any kinds of racist dimensions, or that there exists a problem of xenophobia in their community, is usually an attempt to avoid the stigmatisation. Their message is intended to prevent the event being blown out of proportions. However, the message received by external audiences is often that community representatives are denying and belittling a real problem of racial violence, which they rather ought to confront head-on. What may stigmatise local communities most severely is not the simple fact that racist violence has occurred, but the general perception that the community is not willing to address the problem and do something decisive about it – and thereby in practice condoning what happened. On the other hand, local authorities do also sometimes try to pre-empt potential stigmatisation of the community by reacting promptly, strongly and publicly against local expressions of xenophobia and racism, especially if such incidents have been reported in the national news media.

Thus, identity management is also a concern for many of those who take an antiracist stance. Public display of antiracist attitudes, tolerance and support for immigrants and other minority groups, and contempt for groups and individuals, who are identified as 'racists', may also be a way of presenting oneself in a favourable light. To some groups of youths, 'antiracism' may even serve as a convenient legitimacy for their own violence and fights with rival gangs, or as a way to present themselves as superior to others.[52]

This may also be part of the syndrome of what the Norwegian sociologist Ottar Brox calls 'the moral elite' and its struggle for 'moral championship'. Actors may present themselves and their moral qualities through their liberal views on immigration and through condemnation of anything tasting of racism, and particularly in contrast to others.[53] Just as members of xenophobic youth gangs sometimes try to outdo each other in expressing aggression against foreigners, the 'moral elite' has sometimes competed in doing the opposite, by expressing unreserved openness towards immigrants and asylum-seekers. According to Brox, these discursive practices have the unfortunate effect of polarising the debate on immigration politics, making the more constructive and realistic middle ground morally suspect.

Scarce resources. A struggle for the access to and distribution of scarce resources – money, jobs, housing, social services, leisure activities/facilities, etc. – lies behind much xenophobia and violence against immigrants and asylum-seekers. In the general public debate, one of the main arguments for a more restrictive immigration and asylum policy, presented by the anti-immigration fringe and mainstream politicians alike, focus on the economic costs involved in taking care of and integrating large numbers of immigrants. This argument has had considerable credibility in times of economic crisis, and when high unemployment gives immigrants limited opportunity for achieving self-sufficiency.

There is, for instance, no doubt that the more than 80,000 asylum-seekers arriving in economically depressed Sweden in 1992, or the 440,000 applying for asylum in Germany the same year, represented considerable financial burdens to these countries. Thus, it is therefore commonly argued that the resources spent on asylum-seekers would be better spent on 'our own needy groups'. In addition, countless stories circulate – some true, many not – of how demanding foreigners are given easy access to all kinds of social services, special grants, jobs, facilities, etc. Especially among relatively deprived and marginalised groups in society, such stories may easily evoke anger, bitterness, and jealousy. The claim that foreigners are given social goods they themselves have been denied has been a recurring theme in many of the explanations young perpetrators of violence and harassment have given to the police and the media. Some marginalised youth groups even use (the threat of) violence against immigrants as leverage against local authorities to obtain goods they would not get otherwise.

52 Cf. Frøydis Eidheim, *Hva har skjedd i Brumunddal: Lokalsamfunnet i møte med de fremmede og seg sel*v (Oslo: NIBR report, 1993, No. 20), pp. 49–95; and Yngve Carlsson, *Aksjonsplan Brumunddal – ga den resultater? Bekjempelse av fremmedfiendtlig vold i lokalsamfunnet* (Oslo: NIBR-rapport 1995:13), pp. 66–73.

53 Ottar Brox, *'Jeg er ikke rasist, men...' Hvordan vi får våre meninger om innvandrere og innvandring* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1991), in particular pp. 44–88.

The economic dimensions of racist violence also affect other involved parties than perpetrators. Acts of arson or vandalism may have serious economic effects on victims as well. In particular, immigrants who are in the process of establishing themselves with property and perhaps a small business of their own are particularly vulnerable to vandalism. They are often underinsured. If the windowpanes of the shop or apartment are smashed several times, they may be driven into bankruptcy – or even be driven out of town.

The local community, especially the municipality and the business community, may also become affected by the economic consequences of racism and violence. The realisation that 'racism is bad for business' explain why in several cases the local business community have been among the first actors to respond to racist violence and demand firm action against it. There are several ways in which racism and xenophobia may have negative economic consequences for businesses. Some companies are dependent upon maintaining good relationships with foreign customers and partners coming on business visits. If they are harassed on town during their stay, contracts may be lost. Local companies may also have serious problems in recruiting highly qualified personnel to fill key positions. Such experts are in high demand, and are not likely to move with their families to a community where their children will grow up in what appears as a 'hotbed for racism and violence'. The economic consequences of these tendencies may spread to other sectors of the stigmatised community, and set off a vicious circle. If the local community becomes so stigmatised that well-off families start to move away, the price of real estate may go down. In their place, lower-class families with social problems may be attracted to the community by cheap housing. As a result, the municipality may receive less income tax and acquire higher costs on social security.

On the other hand, racist violence may also, paradoxically, have some positive effects in terms of improved access to scarce resources for some of the actors involved. If, for instance, an emerging problem of racism and violence is defined by local authorities as being the result of marginalisation or social deprivation, the youths in question will often be offered jobs, education, leisure time activities or facilities in order to provide positive alternatives to their present destructive lifestyles. Critics argue that young racists thereby make profit from their negative behaviour. Municipalities and local police departments may also receive extra funds from the state to implement measures to fight racism and violence in the community.

However, in the struggle over scarce resources, there is one special form of 'scarcity goods', which is more precious and emotionally charged than any other: The struggle over girls, sexual favours, and the procreation of children.

Sexuality. Both the racial ideologists and the nationalist anti-immigration lobby have placed a strong emphasis on controlling the sexual behaviour of women. To these movements, sexual relations between 'our' women and the 'strangers' constitute the original sin: the pollution and dilution of race and

nation with foreign and inferior blood.[54] This is also a core issue in classical racist ideology and practice. A main objective of both the 'science' of racial hygiene of the inter-war period, Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws and the South African Apartheid system was to prevent racial mixing and preserve racial purity. Among the more modern versions of racial revolutionary ideology, such as *The Turner Diaries*, women are seen as holding the keys to the demise or survival of the white race.[55] The images of and rage against white women mating with non-white men are also prominent in the magazines and music produced by contemporary neo-Nazi activists.

Nationalist anti-immigration groups and activists have thus been highly concerned with women having sexual relations with 'foreign' men. In their propaganda, expressions like 'asylum mattress' and 'whores' are used to describe these women. At the same time, male immigrants were frequently described as HIV-infected, sex-crazed animals only out to rape local women.

It is difficult to evaluate to what degree ideological propaganda produced by organised groups has made an impact on the general public. In some cases, it is obvious that the propaganda has had an effect on at least certain sections of the population. That notwithstanding relations between local girls and 'foreign' men are also – almost literally – an explosive issue at the local community level. A large proportion of the violent attacks, confrontations, and fights – sometimes even knifings, shootings, and large-scale riots – begin as seemingly minor incidents involving jealousy and rivalry over girls. These incidents often take place at dance halls, bars, youth clubs or similar public arenas, and usually in connection with the consumption of alcohol. There are two main varieties of these triggering incidents: in the first type, a male 'foreigner' flirts with a girl who turns out to be a local man's girlfriend. The boyfriend then often reacts violently, especially if he suspects that his girlfriend is attracted to this exotic, cool and often well-groomed male.[56] The same may happen if the 'intruder' does not take the girl's no for an answer. The second typical situation is that 'foreign' men are out with their local girlfriends, and some of the local men react with anger and aggression against the girls and/or the 'foreign' men who allegedly take the local girls away from them. Being passed over, local boys may feel humiliated, and their masculinity threatened, by the experience that these girls consider the 'niggers' or the 'Arabs' more attractive, exciting and – possibly – sexually more potent than they are themselves. Insulting comments against the girl or against the foreign rival frequently provoke a physical (often, but not necessarily, violent) response from the man who wants to defend her or his own honour and dignity. Then the fight is on. What distinguishes these incidents from ordinary rivalries over girls is that a similar quarrel between a local boy and someone from a neighbouring town does not usually have the same po-

54 Some racist groups take this concept of original sin literally: the so-called Christian Identity Movement in North America considers the Jews to be the offspring of Eve's illicit relation with the Satanic snake.

55 Cf. the harrowing vision of 'the Day of the Rope' in Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries* (Hillsboro: The National Vanguard Books, 1980), pp. 160–163.

56 When the Danish 'Green Jackets' complained that *'perkerne'* (the Turks) were stealing 'their' girls, a youth worker pointed out to them that they would probably improve their chances in the competition for girls dramatically if they started to wash and wear clean clothes… (from the author's interviews with youth worker René Johansen in 1991).

tential for escalation – at least not nowadays.[57] In contrast, when the rivals are foreign men, a large number of local boys frequently join in to 'teach the foreigners a lesson', sometimes ending up in an outright riot.[58] However, although such riots have racial dimensions, this does not mean that the participants are able to formulate any kind of racial ideological views. What is involved is more the gut feelings that the 'foreigners' are winners and they are losers in the struggle over girls and sexual favours. This experience is felt as a threat to the masculinity of the local boys. And how can they better prove their masculinity than through a good fight?

Territory. In the rhetoric of both the nationalist anti-immigration lobby and the racial revolutionaries, the territorial dimension is at the core of their ideologies. The anti-immigration activists claim that the country is threatened by an on-going Muslim invasion. The arrival of thousands of labour migrants, asylum-seekers and their families is in reality part of a conspiracy to conquer Europe for Islam, they claim. In a few decades from now they will have taken control of territory and the political system by means of a 'demographic time bomb', the argument goes.[59] The racial revolutionaries see immigration as part of a Jewish scheme to bring non-whites into our lands in order to destroy the white race through racial mixing. In their conceptualisation, the Zionist Occupation Government is already in control through their agents. In both ideological versions, a 'resistance struggle' is needed to fight back the invasion/occupation, ultimately involving the use of violence against both 'foreign invaders' and 'traitors'.[60]

However, the territorial dimension is often highly important on the local level as well – without necessarily involving any ideology. When local youth gangs with xenophobic inclinations have carried out acts of violence against 'foreigners', the immediate cause has often been that they felt threatened because they believed these others were trying to take over their territory. The disputed territories may involve entire towns or blocks, or merely specific street-corners, pubs, or youth clubs. For instance, in connection with what some Danish tabloids called the called 'race war' in Copenhagen in 1982, local Danish youths claimed the media did not understand what their fight with some Turkish youths was all about. 'It was only because they took our café', they claimed.[61]

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57 In a not very distant past (e.g. during the 1950s or some places even up to the present), quarrels over girls with men from neighbouring communities did in fact frequently cause large-scale fights and riots around dancing halls. In those days, when immigrants from abroad were an unknown phenomenon, xenophobia was often directed against people much closer to home.

58 One typical case happened in the small Norwegian town Grimstad 1 September 1996. Six African men and three Norwegian girlfriends were at a discotheque when one of the Africans was pushed by a local man. When he asked why, he was hit in the face with a bottle. He hit back, and a fight followed, continuing on the street outside. Suddenly, almost 100 local youths started to chase the Africans and their girlfriends, throwing stones and shouting 'Kill the niggers!' and 'Nigger whores!'. The police and the mayor nevertheless claimed that the incident was not racially motivated but only an ordinary gang fight over girls. *Agderposten* 2 and 3 Sept. 1996; *Fedrelandsvennen* 3 Sept. 1996.

59 Cf. *Nordmannen* No. 3 (Sept. 1995), p. 8.

60 I discuss these discourses in Bjørgo (1997), Chapter 8, and in T. Bjørgo, 'Extreme Nationalism and Violent Discourses in Scandinavia: 'The Resistance', 'Traitors', and 'Foreign Invaders'', in T. Bjørgo (ed.), *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

61 Cf. Lis Norup, *Rasekrig?* [Race War?] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1982).

Interestingly, this territorial dimension is also a core issue for other actors involved – although they may not themselves always be aware of it. Radical antiracist activists, with their slogan 'No Nazis in our streets!' sometimes use violent means to prevent racist groups from establishing themselves in certain areas. This struggle often has close similarities to rivalries between gangs fighting over turf. Several municipalities have declared their community as an 'Antiracist Zone'. Increased patrolling from police and co-operating groups of adults[62] as a response to violent confrontations and gangs fighting over turf, may also be seen as civil society's attempt to regain the territory from unruly youths.

Security. To the immediate victims of racist violence, and the wider groups, which feel threatened, security from further violence and harassment is a primary concern. When a spectacular act of violence attracts the attention of the media, the police and the public, it is often only the climax in a long process of harassment and victimisation directed against individuals and groups. The most effective measure is of course to physically prevent the perpetrators from committing further attacks by arresting, prosecuting and jailing those responsible. However, other responses may also strengthen the victimised groups' feeling of security. It is of great importance that neighbours, voluntary organisations and local authorities show a determination to include exposed minorities in the community and take responsibility for their safety and well-being. Even if the police are not able to identify and arrest the perpetrators, the *attitude* displayed by the police towards the victims and the crime may have a strong impact on the victims' sense of security. In cases where the police in public statements swiftly brush aside the possibility of any racist or xenophobic dimensions – even when it is obvious – or try to play down the gravity of the incident(s), it may increase the feeling of insecurity among the victimised groups. If, on the contrary, the police display a willingness to explore possible racist dimensions and take the victims' concerns seriously, it may even serve to subdue some of the negative effects of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experienced by many victims of violence.

Even for perpetrators of violence with racist or xenophobic dimensions, their own feelings of fear and insecurity may have played an important role in the process leading up to their violent acts. Many of these perpetrators have in the past themselves been victims of threats and violence. Youths who have been bullied or violently attacked sometimes seek protection in gangs with a violent image. Racist skinhead gangs may offer the kind of collective protection and intimidating image they crave for, even if their tormentors are 'native'. Individuals who have carried out extreme acts of violence against 'foreigners' have, in several cases, also personal histories of being victimised by violent immigrant youth gangs. In the two main cases of

62 Both the Swedish *'Farsan på stan'* ('Grand-Dad in Town') and the Norwegian *'Natteravn'* ('Night Raven') projects are based on the observation that during weekend nights, urban streets are taken completely over by youths, often heavily intoxicated by alcohol. The idea is that an increased presence of sober adults may calm down the mood and prevent events from getting out of hand. The task of the adults is not to intervene if violent situations occur, but to report emerging conflicts to the police as soon as possible, and try to serve as a calming influence through their mere presence.

killings with racist dimensions in Norway (one of which was a double-murder), the perpetrators had, in both cases previously been attacked by dark-skinned immigrant gangs or individuals. These experiences had instilled in them feelings of fear, anger and hatred, which were *generalised* towards dark-skinned young men as such. When a new and totally unrelated situation arose, their fear and hatred made them overreact in extreme ways, stabbing or gunning their victims to death.

Fear of crime from immigrants and minority groups is widespread among considerable sections of the population, sometimes based on what people themselves or persons close to them may have experienced, or more often, on rumours and media accounts emphasising the ethnic origin of perpetrators of crimes.[63] Criminality by immigrants – real or imagined – is in some cases cited as a legitimisation of violence against immigrants and asylum-seekers as a group. The generalisation of blame, guilt and punishment – from *some* specific 'foreigners' to 'foreigners' *as such* – is what gives this type of acts of violence a racist dimension.

As the discussion above has demonstrated, what is commonly known as racist or xenophobic violence is highly complex phenomenon, which cannot be reduced merely to violence, carried out for specific ideological or political motives. It is a characteristic of the phenomenon as such that the motivations are mixed, and that both the violent act and the responses to it involve several dimensions. At least six different clusters of values can be identified as being at stake in this interaction: ideology, identity, scarce resources, sexuality, territory, and security. Several, but not necessarily all of these dimensions are usually involved in connection with specific incidents. Authorities and others who endeavour to prevent outbreaks of such violence, should take a broad perspective on the possible motives, issues and situations, which tend to give rise to incidents of violence. Several of these may provide promising avenues for intervention and prevention.

63 It is a fact that 'foreigners' or ethnic minorities constitute a disproportionate share of the prison population in many countries, including the Scandinavian ones. However, there is often great variety with regard to which categories of 'foreigners' are over-represented, and in which categories of crime. For some data on minorities and crime in Oslo, cf. Roger Andresen, 'Innvandrere og kriminalitet i Oslo' in *Årbok 1995: Oslo Politikammer* (Oslo: Oslo Police Headquarters, 1996).

Part II:

Interventions

5. The Exit Project: Promoting Disengagement from Violent and Racist Groups

Background

During the early and mid-1990s, several local communities in Norway had faced serious problems with xenophobic violence and racist youth groups. After a particularly nasty series of incidents in the town Brumunddal, central and local authorities eventually took the problem seriously and made heavy investments in research and development on how to handle this and similar situations. The three-year Action Plan Brumunddal, based on and followed up by substantial research,[64] had a very positive outcome. The action plan included broad mobilisation of public agencies as well as civil society. Some of the interventions focused on reintegrating a group of young marginalised men who had directed their frustrations and anger against immigrants. Xenophobic violence stopped, and the local racist youth scene dissolved. Although all xenophobic tendencies were hardly eradicated completely from the community, Brumunddal had clearly become a much better place to live – for the remaining immigrants as well. Local agencies had learnt some valuable lessons on how to collaborate closely to handle such problems.

The positive experiences and outcomes from Action Plan Brumunddal provided inspiration and promising methods to several other Norwegian communities with similar problems of violent and racist youth groups. In most cases, these communities managed to solve or at least reduce their problems. During the 1990s, local and central authorities in Norway were much more on the offensive compared to the typical response a few years earlier, when denial, belittling or moral panic were the usual responses to problems of xenophobic violence and racist youth groups. Experiences and knowledge gained from various local projects were also documented and accumulated systematically for later use.[65]

One lasting lesson of the highly successful Action Plan Brumunddal was that problems of xenophobic violence should be considered a responsibility to the entire community. A second important lesson was that it was useful to involve external experts as advisors. As a consequence, the central government decided to establish a permanent pool of experts, '*The Interdisciplinary*

64 In particular Frøydis Eidheim, *Hva har skjedd i Brumunddal: Lokalsamfunnet i møte med de fremmede og seg selv*. Oslo: NIBR rapport 1993:20; and Yngve Carlsson, *Aksjonsplan Brumunddal – ga den resultater? Bekjempelse av fremmedfiendtlig vold i lokalsamfunnet*. Oslo: NIBR-rapport 1995:13. Parallell to the Brumunddal studies, there were also two ongoing doctoral projects focusing on other racist youth scenes by Katrine Fangen and Tore Bjørgo, respectively.

65 Cf. Carlsson, Y. & Lippe, H.v.d. (1997), *Industribygda og rasismen: Utvikling og avvikling av et fremmedfientlig ungdomsmiljø i Vennesla 1991–1996*. Oslo: NIBR-rapport 1997: 17; Carlsson, Y. og von der Lippe, H. (1999): *Velstandsbydelen og rasismen*. Oslo: NIBR-rapport 1999:9; Tore Bjørgo & Yngve Carlsson, *Vold, rasisme og ungdomsgjenger: Forebygging og bekjempelse* (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1999).

Advisory Service for Local Action against Racism and Xenophobia', coordinated by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). This advisory service consists of (at present) 17 researchers and practitioners, including police officers, social workers, pedagogues, conflict mediators, and others.[66] Together, they provide complementary forms of expertise to municipalities and local agencies that have to deal with problems they do not locally have experience with how to handle. Usually a team of two advisors will assist local agencies in developing an adequate analysis of the problem, and give advise on what kinds of action might be effective. One important task is to determine the magnitude and nature of the problem, in order to avoid both belittling and overreaction.

Another important useful function of the advisory service has been to accumulate experiences from many communities that have had to handle varieties of the same types of problems. Rather than having to 'reinvent the wheel' every time a new local community gets a problem with xenophobic violence or racist youth groups, the advisory group is accumulating and systematising knowledge, methods, and practical experiences that might be of relevance to other communities with similar problems.

The advisory service provided a framework within which several researchers and practitioners started to work closely together to develop more effective methods. One of the outcomes of this process was the Exit project. Exit was gradually developed during the period 1995 to 1997, when it was formally established as a project.

The emergence of the Exit project

During 1995 and 1996, the police made several mass arrests and other interventions in the racist youth scene in Oslo and Kristiansand. The participants turned out to be young, sometimes 13 years of age or younger. Many parents were shocked about what their children had become involved with, and were desperate to get their children out of the racist scene. In close co-operation with the preventive police unit in a part of Oslo (Manglerud), some parents established parental network groups in 1995 to help each other and to pool their efforts. These parental groups turned out to be useful. Within a few months, almost all the children of these parents had withdrawn from the racist scene.

As a researcher, I was at the time studying how young people join and leave racist groups. Parents with children in racist groups contacted me, asking for advice on what to do. Together with two officers at the Manglerud preventive police unit (both part of the Advisory Service), we started to develop a more general project for parental network groups and other methods to get young people out of racist groups. Our first activities started in spring 1996, but the project was formally established from mid-1997, funded as a three-year development project by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Children and Family, and the Directorate of Immigration. The NGO 'Adults

66 These experts are involved with the advisory service on a freelance basis only, and get paid for each counselling job they do for a municipality. The central government sponsors the municipalities by covering the costs of one day of free counselling (for one or two advisors) per case.

for Children' hosted the project that eventually was named 'Project Exit – Leaving Violent Youth Groups'. The Exit project had three main objectives:

– aiding and supporting young people who want to disengage from racist or other violent groups,
– supporting parents with children in racist or violent groups, establishing local networks for parents,
– developing and disseminating knowledge and methods to professions working with youths associated with violent groups.

The Norwegian Exit project decided to work through the local agencies by providing them with relevant know-how and methods, rather than building a separate Exit agency to take care of youths. Thus, it is the local youth workers, child welfare officers, teachers, and police officers that work directly with the youths. The project has trained more than 700 practitioners from various agencies and professions in prevention and intervention in relation to racist and violent youth groups. An Exit handbook is now published (in Norwegian).[67] Below two of the main methods will be described in more detail – both focusing on early intervention by involving parents.

The parental network group

Parents are in a central position to influence on their children's behaviour, although this influence will naturally decline as the child grows up. Parents with teenage children in racist or other violent groups may profit from collaborating with other parents in a similar situation.

– These parents have a strong need for knowledge and information on what is going on in these groups. By sharing information between them, parents can together build a better understanding about what is happening in the milieu in which their children are involved. This knowledge can be extended if the parental group brings in knowledgeable people from outside, such as police officers, researchers, or ex-members.

– In such a forum, parents can discuss their dilemmas in connection with how strict restrictions they should put on their children and their behaviour, and how to avoid that their sanctions might result in pushing their children away from them. Parents may also reach agreements on common positions regarding what their children are allowed to take part in, or what will be accepted in terms of (Nazi-style) dress code. The network group can thereby strengthen the parents' monitoring, control, and ability to provide care for their children.

– Having children in neo-Nazi or criminal groups can be socially stigmatising for the entire family. Some parents and siblings have been excluded

67 Tore Bjørgo, Odd Arild Halhjem, and Taran Knudstad, *EXIT – Ut av voldelige ungdomsgrupper: Kunnskap, erfaringer og metoder i lokalt tverrfaglig og tverretatlig arbeid* (Oslo: Voksne for Barn, juni 2001). The handbook is available on the web at http://www.vfb.no/nedlasting/Haandbok.pdf

from former social networks. Most of these parents feel a strong need to talk with someone about their problems but do not dare to bring it up in their regular circles. A closed forum with others in a similar situation offers such an opportunity. Single parents in particular need the support such a parental network can provide. Some parents have succeeded in getting their children out of the racist scene. Their experiences may be of use and an inspiration to others.

– A parental network may also play an important role in disseminating information to parents regarding upcoming events. If the son or daughter tells the parents that they plan to go camping with friends in the weekend, it might be useful if the parents know from another source that the local racist group plans to attend a Nazi concert or a demonstration the same weekend. The parental network may also be informed by the police that a large confrontation between rival groups is coming up. This may enable parents to keep their children at home during the event, preventing them from becoming victims (or perpetrators) of violence, or arrested.

There are great differences between various parental groups. Some groups have consisted of parents with strong personal resources. They have in some cases been able to run the network group mainly on their own. Several of these groups have been highly successful – getting all their children out of the racist scene within a few months. Other parental groups have consisted of parents with weak resources, lots of personal and family problems, and often holding attitudes that do not differ much from those of their children in the racist group. However, even these parents have often realised that their children are involved with something that will hurt their future. Groups consisting of such parents will usually require that a professional or another resourceful person come in from outside to organise the network group and keep it up and running over time. These external helpers have often functioned as liaisons between parents and the police or social agencies.

Not all parents are motivated to take part in such a network group. Some do not see anything problematic in their children's involvement with a racist group – either because they are just happy that their child has finally got some friends, or because they hold views similar to those of their children. Some parents are racist or criminals themselves. Others do not realise – or do not want to realise – what their children are involved with. They are afraid of being branded as bad parents who have transferred dubious values to their children. Some parents get paralysed, apathetic, or just indifferent. And to some it is a completely unthinkable idea to take part in a network group where they have to talk with strangers about their problems. Thus, parental network groups are not for everyone.

In spite of problems, results show that parental network groups have been successful. About 130 parents representing 100 youths/children have participated in such parental network groups in Norway between 1995 and mid-2000. By the end of that period, only about 10 of these youths were still involved with the racist scene. We do not claim that all those 90 quit the scene because of the parental groups – many left for other reasons – but we do know that this work made a decisive impact in many cases.

Parallel with the Norwegian experience but originating independently, parental network groups have also been tried out in the Swedish town Klippan, and found to be a highly useful method. Some parents have been involved since the beginning of the group in 1997, some have quit when their children disengaged from the scene, whereas others continue in the parental group to help and inspire others. When parents started to organise themselves, it did sometimes escalate the conflicts they had with their children. But on the whole, the parents involved considered the network group to be an indispensable source of strength.

One of the tasks of the parental group in Klippan is to operate a hot line that can be phoned by parents and others from all over Sweden, providing information about neo-Nazism, what to look for to detect if a child is involved with the scene, and offering practical advice on how to respond and discuss the issue with the child. This type of information and advice is also distributed in a small booklet (in Swedish only), 'On responding to racism and Nazism among youths'.[68]

The Klippan group is now also involved in preventive work, collaborating with schools, the police, and other agencies and NGOs. The parental group in Klippan has worked closely with Exit in Sweden and other disengagement projects, and also exchanged experiences and methods with Norwegian partners.[69]

The Empowerment Conversation

A preventive police officer being one of the co-founders of the Exit project, Bjørn Øvrum, has developed another powerful method of early intervention with children involved with racist groups or other delinquent behaviour. 'The Empowerment Conversation' can be applied when e.g. a police officer, a teacher, or a youth worker detects that a child or youth is involved in activities that give reason to worry. The professional will then summon the young person together with the parents for a voluntary conversation, and will present the symptom that gave rise to that worry. This could be theft, drug use, tagging, or participation in a racist group or another type of gang. Child and parents will also be informed about the likely consequences of this behaviour if it continues. The purpose of the conversation is not to punish but to create the basis for reorientation and change in behaviour of the child or youth, as well as mobilising the parents' own engagement and resources. The professional asks for the parents' consent to share information with other relevant agencies to help the child through coordinated efforts. This helps to get around obstacles to collaboration often caused by the strict rules of confidentiality practiced by social agencies. The conversation session should be seen as the starting point in a process of reorientation where other agencies (school, social workers, etc.) will also get involved in the next stages.

68 *Om att möta racism och nazism bland ungdomar* ('On responding to racism and Nazism among youths'), co-published by the Parental group in Klippan, and Save the Children Sweden (2001).

69 The Klippan experience is described and analysed in a book by Berit Wigerfelt and Anders Wigerfelt, *Rasismens yttringar: Exemplet Klippan* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001). The parental network group is discussed on pp. 281–283 and 307.

The conversation is based on a structured procedure where the professional, the parents and the child together discuss the behaviour that gave rise to the meeting, and what they believe is explaining that behaviour (see figure on page 96). If, for instance, the young person is participating in a violent or extremist group, the youth is asked what he or she believes is causing him/her to get involved with such a scene. The youth will be presented with a set of alternatives (cf. figure): is it for example a need for protection, thrill seeking, friendship, or status? For each type of cause there is a card suggesting possible corresponding options to be discussed with parents and child. If, for example, the probable cause of the problematic behaviour was thrill seeking, they can discuss what kinds of legal and socially acceptable alternatives could be available, and how the young person can realise his or her wishes for an exciting leisure time. Together with the youth and the parents, the professional try to look forward, focusing on solutions in order to stimulate a process of reorientation and alteration of behaviour.

Although the Empowerment Conversation model was originally developed during preventive police work with racist youth groups, it can be applied for many types of youth delinquency problems. The Norwegian police have recommended it for more general use. Youth workers, teachers, and other professionals are also being trained to apply it. Results so far are very promising. However, it probably makes a particularly strong impact when it is the police that call in parents and child for a conversation.

These two methods have been effective as early interventions with young teen-agers who have got involved with racist youth groups. In several cases, recruitment to racist youth groups has been reduced to almost zero. Using these methods, local police, youth workers and other agencies are now equipped to act promptly once they notice that young people flirt with such groups.[70] We believe that such early intervention is one of the main reasons why the neo-Nazi scene in Norway remains relatively small, young, and characterised by short careers and few 'veterans'.

When it comes to providing disengagement assistance to older and more established neo-Nazis activists, the Norwegian Exit project has been less successful. In this area, however, the Swedish offshoot of the Exit project has achieved impressive results.

The proliferation of the Exit model

Exit in Sweden

Shortly after the Norwegian Exit programme started in autumn 1997, it got in contact with a former Swedish neo-Nazi, Kent Lindahl. He had broken with the Nazi scene in the early 1990s, and had more recently made a number of presentations at Swedish schools together with a Jewish Holocaust

70 In a local Exit project in the city Kristiansand, an inter-agency task force consisting of police officers, youth workers, social workers, teachers, and the Exit worker together used this approach in their work with 38 youths involved with the local racist scene during the period from 1996. By mid-2001, six of these individuals were still active in the Nazi scene, three were dead (by accidents or drug overdose), but the remaining 29 are living relatively normal lives. By end of 2001, the project had worked with 60 youths, and 49 had left the racist scene.

survivor, warning pupils against involvement with the Nazi scene. He was a highly credible person with a powerful personal story. The Norwegian Exit challenged him to start up Exit in Sweden. He did so, with great success.

Exit in Sweden was established in mid-1998. The goals of the Swedish project were similar to the Norwegian model, but it is implemented in a somewhat different way. The Swedish Exit projects works directly with the individuals who contact Exit. Staff members also make school visits to talk to students about neo-Nazism, and increasingly also train teachers, social workers, and police officers on the issue. Several members of the staff (which at present in mid-2001 counts a total of seven) have a background as former participants in the neo-Nazi movement (or the 'White Power world', as it is often termed in Sweden). This personal experience obviously provides a powerful credibility when they talk to young people. It also makes it easier to establish contact with individuals that consider disengaging from the Nazi movement.

Exit in Sweden has developed a five-stage programme that describes the process individuals typically will go through when leaving the movement and re-establishing themselves into mainstream society, and what Exit can contribute to help them through this process:[71]

The phase of motivation: The young person is still part of the White Power scene, but has started to have second thoughts about it, and questions his/her involvement. At this point the person contacts Exit and probes the possibilities for disengagement and assistance. Exit answers questions, provides information, and offer a contact person 'who has been where you are and knows how it is'.

The phase of disengagement: The person has made the decision to leave the White Power scene. Some have already quit when they contact Exit, others need practical help and advice to do so. Exposed to threats from former friends, and left without a social network, this is a chaotic period. They need someone to talk to, and help from Exit (and sometimes the police) to assess the threat situation in a realistic way. In some cases they have to move to a different community, and may be in need of financial assistance and social services. The contact person from Exit is available by phone around the clock, and may serve as a guide and liaison to social agencies, the police or other resources. The personal support from the contact person, providing an opportunity to talk out on doubts, fears, problems and thoughts about the future is of great importance at this stage.

The phase of establishment: The break is now completed. The young person has secured a place to live and subsistence (usually with parents or by assistance from social services). Some have a job, others study or get job training, and some have still not found anything to do. But they have cut their ties to the White Power scene, as well as to their former friends there. They are

71 The following description is based on the evaluation report on Exit in Sweden by the Swedish Council for Crime Prevention, titled *Exit för avhoppare: En uppföljning och utvärdering av verksamheten åren 1998–2001* (Stockholm: BRÅ-rapport 2001:8), pp. 20–23.

usually in a social vacuum, with a very limited social network. They often feel empty and alone. And they fear to go out in the evenings. At this stage the contact person try to provide new links to 'normal' life, and help to expand their social networks. Exit organises some joint activities for persons who have disengaged from the White Power scene, bringing them together with other youths from different and more mainstream backgrounds. Group discussions are useful at this stage.

The phase of reflection: At this stage the individuals start to realise what they have been involved with during their time in the Nazi movement, such as violence, crimes, extreme ideologies of hatred, and recruitment of others into similar activities. Some get problems with anxiety, depression, insomnia, or alcohol. Some also need professional help to deal with their violent impulses, traumas, or their lack of confidence. The Exit staff includes a therapist who is available for consultations. Many ex-activists need to reflect on why they got involved with the scene, where the hatred came from, and how to go on with a normal life. Most of the racist thoughts and impulses have disappeared during this process. Some leave their racist views behind when they break with the group; others need more time to change their worldview.

The phase of stabilisation: at this stage, the young persons have got a 'normal' life with job, studies, and sometimes a family of their own. They have turned away from hatred, racism, crime, and alcohol abuse. However, they still fear that their past will ruin their future, and they feel guilt and shame for what they have been involved with. Exit no longer works actively with persons in this phase but many of them still keep in touch with their contact person.

Exit's period of active involvement usually lasts between six and 12 months. By April 2001, Exit was working actively with around 40 persons.

The Swedish Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) has carried out an evaluation[72] of the project on assignment from the Swedish government that funded Exit. The BRÅ evaluation was highly positive, concluding, 'the work of the Exit project has been both relatively extensive as well as successful'.

During the three years Exit in Sweden has operated, 133 persons turned to Exit for help, and 125 of these have left the White Power movement. The majority of the persons that contacted Exit were between 18 and 25 years of age, and most had been involved with the White Power movement between two and four years. Half of them had been convicted of criminal offences, and a further quarter reported to have committed such offences without having been convicted. After they broke with the movement, they claimed to have ceased to commit criminal offences.

BRÅ interviewed 17 ex-activists, eight parents, and 24 representatives of institutions that had cooperated with Exit. They generally expressed a very

72 *Exit för avhoppare: En uppföljning och utvärdering av verksamheten åren 1998–2001* (Stockholm: BRÅ-rapport 2001:8). The evaluation report is available (in Swedish with a four-page English summary at the end) in Acrobat format from the BRÅ web page http://www.bra.se/web/material/

high level of satisfaction with Exit's work and contribution. Several ex-members and parents stated that they would not have been able to get through it alone, and that Exit's help was invaluable.

Although the evaluation report generally gave the project very high marks on its activities and results, it pointed on the negative side on organisational problems that had led to a high turnover of staff. This has to do with typical traits of organisations established by committed enthusiasts, with all the strengths and weaknesses of many such organisations. The evaluation showed that having persons with that particular background and personal credibility had been decisive for the success of Exit in Sweden. However, there were also problems in the organisation. For the future operation of Exit, this strength of personal experience should be combined with a more professional leadership and improved ties with other agencies.

Exit Deutschland and governmental Aussteigerprogramme in Germany

From mid-2000 onwards, the notion of reducing right-wing extremism through promoting disengagement made a strong and rapid impact in Germany. Directly inspired by Exit in Sweden, *Exit Deutschland* was established in August 2000. The criminologist and former police officer Bernd Wagner and the ex-Nazi Ingo Hasselbach initiated the project, which was hosted by the NGO *Zentrum Demokratische Kultur*. The magazine Stern and its '*Mut gegen rechte Gewalt*' campaign supported Exit Germany economically.[73]

Exit in Germany offers assistance to persons who want to quit the right-wing extremist scene. The initiative has to come from the person who wants to disengage. Exit provides help with assessing and handling threats to the personal security of these individuals, although to move to another city is only required for a few clients. Exit assists them through the process of disengagement and resocialisation (cf. the Swedish five-stage model). It does not offer any economic support during reintegration. Exit Deutschland emphasises that these persons must take responsibility for their illegal actions and the consequences, but may help to arrange legal assistance. Focusing on reorientation, Exit also sends persons in crises to psychological counselling, but does not provide these services itself.

After one year of activity, *Exit Deutschland* currently (Sept. 2001) works with 87 individuals who are at different stages in the disengagement process. Twenty-four of these cases are now finished in the sense that the persons have broken completely with their racist past and established themselves with a new life outside the movement.

The clients are between the age of 15 and 55 but mostly between 17 and 27. They are almost exclusively males who have been heavily involved with neo-Nazism for at least two years. Some have been leading figures, and most

73 The '*Mut gegen rechte Gewalt*' campaign and the Exit approach are presented at http://www.stern.de/politik/spezial/index_mut.html. The Exit homepage is http://www.exit-deutschland.de/. Most of the information in this section is based on a presentation made by an Exit representative, Christina Hausmann, at a seminar on 'Decreasing Racial Violence', organised by The EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in Vienna 2–3 July 2001. See also a full-page article in *Die Zeit* 10 Mai 2001 on Exit and the *Aussteigerprogramme*: http://www.zeit.de/2001/20/Politik/_200_120_rechteaussteiger.html

have committed criminal acts. They often serve in prison, where it is difficult to shelter them from former comrades if they want to break with the group. In some cases, the solution is to apply for transfer to another prison. In the early stages of the project, the great majority of those who contacted Exit for assistance were from the western parts of Germany – very few were from the east. By mid-2001, this trend has reversed. The project now has an east–west ratio that roughly represents the population of East and West Germany. One possible explanation is that Exit needed more time to be known in the East. Another factor might be that the structures there are more closely knit and activists need more time and effort to get out. Most of the clients have jobs, study, or are in vocational training. Only a few are unemployed or social cases.

Exit Deutschland is part of *Zentrum Demokratische Kultur* in Berlin that also hosts several related project against right-wing extremism and racist violence. This includes support to victims of xenophobic violence, and mobile counselling teams that work with communities where there are problems with racist violence and right-wing extremism. Exit is an important supplement to these other activities.

Partly due to all the publicity in the news media surrounding the establishment of Exit in Germany during autumn 2000, German authorities decided to set up similar *Aussteigerprograme*. By mid-2001, such programmes had been established in 11 of the 16 states of the German federation. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) runs a program targeting right-wing extremist activists all over Germany. At the state level, however, these programmes are run by different governmental agencies in the various German states. In Baden-Württemberg, for example, it is organised by the police (*Landeskriminalamt*); in Rheinland-Phalz and several other states the programme is under the State Office for Youth Affairs and Social Welfare; in Hamburg it is run by the Senate Administration for the Interior; and in other states by the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz*).

Due to their different institutional basis, these programmes will naturally also differ in focus and content, although they all generally seek to facilitate disengagement for persons involved with the right-wing extremist scene. Most of the programmes also operate hot-line telephones where persons willing to quit can make contact. The programme developed by the Ministry of Justice in Niedersachsen is mainly focusing on helping right-wing extremists in prison or on probation to break with the extremist group. Other programmes, e.g. one called *Ausstiegshilfen Rechtextremismus*[74] run by the Criminal Police in Baden-Würrtemberg, focus on putting an end to right-wing extremist 'careers' but also the prevention of further criminal offences as well as a sliding into the extremist mainstream by marginally involved persons and sympathisers. Another goal of this programme is to provide protection of threatened witnesses in order to ensure criminal prosecution. Offenders who are willing to cooperate with the public prosecutor may also be offered some

74 The description of the programme *Ausstiegshilfen Rechtextremismus* is based on the paper 'Programme 'Assistance to Exit Right-Wing Extremism'', presented by Karl-Heinz Ortenreiter of the Office for Criminal Affairs Baden-Wurttemberg during the EUMC seminar on 'Decreasing Racial Violence' in Vienna 2–3 July 2001, and personal conversations with Mr. Ortenreiter.

legal advantages. Such persons should then be separated from the right-wing scene. Being operated by the Criminal Police, this programme has certain criminal justice flair to it. Nevertheless, there are also several elements in the programme that focus more on preventive work. These parts emphasise such means as education, discussion, care, intervention with youth welfare, and cooperation with teachers and parents to prevent a further sliding into right-wing extremism. This requires that the police collaborate closely with other public bodies and institutions, such as social services, youth workers, schools and employment services, and that these agencies coordinate their efforts in a common prevention and intervention strategy. Such cooperation has often been a problem between various agencies in Germany, in particular between youth workers and the police.

The *Aussteigerprogramm für Rechtsextremisten* run by the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* will be described in some more detail.[75] The programme has two main objectives consisting of an 'active' and a 'passive' part. The first is to 'separate out' leading figures and activists, in particular by contacting those who show signs of wanting to break away from the scene, e.g. if they appear to be burnt out, discouraged, or that they have realised the futility of their political struggle. The ultimate aim of this part of the programme is to weaken and disconcert the right-wing extremist scene by causing the defection of such influential figures, which in its turn might influence others to quit as well. Although the BfV claims to have modest expectations regarding how many leading activist they could turn through this approach, the reactions from the right-wing extremist scene could at least be interpreted as an indication that this part of the programme had disconcerted leading figures considerably.

The second part of the *Aussteigerprogramm* is to persuade sympathisers who are not yet that deeply involved in the right-wing scene to leave, thereby preventing them from drifting further into the violence-prone extremist circles. The main tool is the operation of a telephone hot line, open at all hours to persons considering leaving the scene. Here, they will receive advice and support from staff members who have been specially trained for this task. They may provide advice on such matters as whether it is necessary in that particular case to move to a different social environment, assistance when looking for employment, or help to find a new apartment – all with the aim of providing help to self-help.

When the programme was made public, news media in Germany and all over Europe published stories saying that the programme would make payments of allowances amounting to 100,000 DM for right-wing extremists willing to leave the scene. The BfV strongly denies that this is the case. Although financial aid may be granted in certain individual cases (e.g. if the situation requires urgent measures to be taken for the individual to move to a safer locality), the BfV claims to be very cautions in paying economic allow-

75 The description is based on the paper 'Concept, response and perspectives of the BfV-Aussteigerprogramm to encourage right-wing extremists to leave the scene', presented by Bodo W. Becker at the EUMC seminar on 'Decreasing Racial Violence' in Vienna 2–3 July 2001, and by personal conversation with Mr Becker. It should be noted that the Office for the Protection of the Constitution is a security service, not a police force, and it does not have the obligation to initiate criminal prosecution if it gets knowledge of illegal offences.

ances. Right-wing extremists who are willing to leave the scene, will, for example, only be refunded part of their travel expenses when they go to have a meeting with a contact person in the programme. As could be expected, the flawed news stories on the programme regarding alleged payments led to a number of phone calls from individuals claiming to be right-wing extremists eager to start a new and better life! One of the first tasks of the hot line operators when someone calls therefore became to start the process of checking out whether the person in question was actually known to the *Verfassungsschutz* as a participant of the right-wing extremist scene. A number of callers turned out never to have been heard of in these circles. These persons were obviously motivated by the alleged payments.

For this and other reasons, the BfV expects persons calling the hot line and expressing willingness to leave the scene, to provide their real name and agree to a personal interview with the BfV in Cologne or Berlin. This is to test how seriously they intend to leave the scene.

The *BfV-Aussteiger hot line* has been operative from mid-April 2001. By the end of August, more than 680 calls had been received. However, this figure includes journalists, information requests, and non-genuine inquiries. The number of right-wing activists who were considered to be potentially willing to leave the scene amounted to about 140 individuals. As expected, the majority of the callers were from the various neo-Nazi comradeships and from the right-wing skinhead scene and similar violence-prone groups.[76] These are circles where group pressure is stronger and the difficulties involved with quitting are greater than in other parts of the right-wing extremist scenes. During the first four months of the programme period, 35 such persons have had their initial meetings with BfV staff, and some more meetings were fixed. Another ten persons who were in the process of leaving the scene on their own have also been provided with advice or assistance on the phone.

The high number of serious responses to the hot line part of the Aussteiger programme clearly exceeded what the BfV had expected initially. On the other hand, the active part of the programme – approaching leading figures to encourage them to disengage – has turned out to be a difficult task, although it was expected to be so. However, if successful, the potential effects and repercussions of 'separating out' some of the leaders could be considerable.

Exit in Finland and Switzerland

A group of researchers (headed by Dr Vesa Puuronen) at the University of Joensuu started a local Exit project in Joensuu in 1998, inspired by the Norwegian Exit project.[77] This city had got a bad reputation in Finland for a large number of racist attacks and other xenophobic and criminal activities

76 The neo-Nazi comradeship scene is considered by the BfV to consist of some 2200 persons in 2000, whereas the number of right-wing extremist skinheads and other violence-prone individuals number are counted to 9700.

77 The description of Exit in Finland is based on a paper presented by Vesa Puuronen and Jarkko Riikonen at the EUMC seminar on 'Decreasing Racial Violence' in Vienna 2–3 July 2001, and personal information from Puuronen and other researchers involved with the project since the onset.

committed by a relatively large group of Nazi-oriented skinheads. This racist youth scene had emerged and grown during the 1990s on the background of economic recession in the city. A growing number of immigrants and refugees arriving during the same period became convenient scapegoats.[78] Xenophobic attitudes were widespread among young people as well as among some adults who condoned the activities of the skinheads.

The Exit project in Joensuu was based on cooperation between Exit project workers, youth workers, social workers, teachers, police officers and researchers. This multi-professional composition of the project group was a source of strength but also caused some difficulties due to different professional cultures, approaches, and interpretations of the problem at hand, and different ideas regarding how these problems should be solved. Nevertheless, the participants gradually managed to reach a more common understanding and coordinate their efforts better.

During its first two–three years, the Exit project in Joensuu focused its main effort on prevention and early intervention to reduce recruitment. Addressing xenophobic attitudes among youths had high priority. One method was to provide social arenas based on tolerance to provide areas where local and immigrant youths could mingle. A municipal youth house within the framework of the Exit project was an important part of this, providing exciting and meaningful activities. This seems to have contributed to a reduction of tension among different youth groups in the area.

A method of early intervention has been to get into dialogue with racist or skinhead pupils at school. When pupils in general violate school rules, a common reaction is hold back the pupil at school at the end of the day, where they have to sit quietly in the classroom for an hour or two as a form of detention. In cases where pupils known as participants of the racist or skinhead scene violate rules at schools, they are offered to speak with an Exit worker during their 'detention'. Most of these youths are eager to participate in such a conversation because they normally do not have the opportunity to discuss their life situation and problems with adults. This situation also provides the Exit worker with a good opportunity to get to know the children or youths in question, and to develop confidential relations with them. This may in its turn be a starting point for a process of change for the young person. These discussions are also excellent sources of information regarding what is going on in the racist youth scene.

During its first two–three years of operation, the Exit project in Joensuu has not succeeded in reaching the older and more established skinheads in order to start processes of rehabilitation with them. This is an effort planned to be intensified during 2001 and 2002.

One characteristic of this project is the strong link between youth work and research. As mentioned above, researchers initiated the local project, and researchers have also been directly involved in the activities of Exit as part of an action research project.

78 The combination of these two factors is a common background for the emergence of racist youth groups. The cases Joensuu and the Norwegian town Brumunddal were remarkably similar in this respect. Cf. Bjørgo (1997:87–93) for a comparative analysis on the co-occurrence of racist violence, youth unemployment, and increased numbers of asylum-seekers in the Scandinavian countries.

More recently, there has also some been some interest in Switzerland to adopt elements from the Exit approach as part of governmental action plans against neo-Nazism.[79] The public in Switzerland realised in 2000 that it had a growing neo-Nazi skinhead scene and that something had to be done about it. The Federal Commission against Racism is working actively to set up a network of low-level counselling centres throughout the country that eventually will be linked through a single telephone hot line. This hot line will also offer assistance to parents of Nazi skins as well as to active participants in the Nazi scene who seriously consider disengaging.

Some comparative comments and conclusions

It is important to emphasise that the Exit approach does *not* intend to offer a complete strategy against racism and xenophobia. It should be seen as one element within a broader framework. Such a comprehensive strategy should provide support to victims of racism; improve awareness towards tendencies of xenophobia and intolerance among 'ordinary people'; influence popular attitudes and public policies that legitimise xenophobia; reinforce and implement legal measures to suppress racism, discrimination and xenophobic violence and harassment; and address more structural causes of the emergence of racism, xenophobia, and violent youth groups. Reducing the size and activities of racist groups by stopping recruitment and promoting disengagement from racist groups should nevertheless play an important role within such a broader framework of fighting racism and xenophobia.

Since the first Exit project was initiated in Norway in 1996/97, similar projects have been implemented in Sweden, Germany, and Finland by mid-2001, with several other countries expressing interest in adopting the approach as well. Although building on past experiences and well-established methods as well as some more innovative means, Exit's main contribution has been to put together these elements into more systematic strategies for reducing recruitment and reinforcing disengagement from racist youth groups. In addition, it has also been instrumental in getting the issue of disengagement from racist groups on the policy agendas in these countries.

Although closely related in approach and goals, there is some interesting diversity among the various Exit projects in these four European countries. The first difference is that dissimilar types of organisations implement the projects in rather different ways, depending on the primary purpose of the organisation. Exit in Norway, Sweden, and Germany (Berlin) are basically non-governmental organisations (or parts of larger NGOs), although largely funded by the government.[80] The local Exit projects in Joensuu (Finland) and Kristiansand (Norway), on the other hand, are integrated in inter-agency projects at the municipal level. In contrast, the various *Aussteigerprogramme* that were established in Germany during 2001 were run by different governmental agencies at the federal or state level. Obviously, the primary tasks as

79 This paragraph is based on information provided by Michele Galizia of the Swiss Federal Commission against Racism during a presentation at the EUMC seminar on 'Decreasing Racial Violence' in Vienna 2–3 July 2001, and discussions on several other occasions. The Swiss action plan puts strong emphasis on victim support and holds a somewhat critical position towards the Exit approach due to its lack of focus on the victims of racism.

80 The exception is Exit Deutschland, which is mainly funded by Stern Magazine.

institutions vary considerably between e.g. the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the Criminal Police, and the Youth and Social Services. It is hardly surprising that this will also influence the character and emphasis of the projects these various agencies organise. Thus, when the Criminal Police of Baden-Württemberg as part of its *Ausstiegshilfen Rechtsextremismus* project is offering selected ex-Nazis a witness protection programme, such an element would hardly be included in the toolbox of Exit programmes run by NGOs.[81] The NGOs hosting Exit projects do also differ between themselves in ways that make their imprints on the character of the programmes. Thus, the Norwegian organisation Adults for Children is a social policy NGO, whereas Exit Deutschland is hosted by *Zentrum für Demokratische Kultur* that runs several anti-racist and pro-democracy initiatives. As a consequence, the latter Exit project has a more explicit anti-racist orientation, emphasising ideological conversion somewhat stronger than is the case with the Norwegian Exit project (which is of course also anti-racist in its values and goals).

Of greater importance is the impact institutional affiliation will have on the willingness of potential quitters to contact the project in question. To some (former) activists who for years have considered the security service or the police as representing the Enemy,[82] it may be easier to contact an NGO. Many of those considering disengaging are very concerned not to be considered as someone betraying former friends. The *Verfassungsschutz* and the criminal police to some extent provide that role by offering witness protection programs in certain cases. The NGO programmes try to avoid placing their clients in such problematic 'traitor' roles.[83] Several Exit workers have emphasised the advantage they have in being considered relatively neutral actors who are not part of the government. On the other hand, state agencies do of course have several advantages compared with NGOs. Secure funding and large resources make operations much easier and sometimes also more effective. NGO projects are frequently hampered with having to spend so much of their effort on fund-raising.

The other main difference between the various projects relates to what stage in the process of recruitment and disengagement they focus their efforts towards, which their main target groups are, and which methods these projects employ as their main tools. As stated earlier, it is possible to reduce the size of an extremist group (or change the 'population balance') both by reducing recruitment and by reinforcing disengagement – although a combination of the two will obviously give the strongest reduction.

Several projects (e.g. some of the German state-level projects and to some extent also the Swedish and German Exit projects) are primarily based on operating a telephone hot line and waiting for persons to call when they

81 However, (preventive) police units have also been heavily involved in the Exit projects in Norway and Finland, although as partners rather than as main organisers of the project.

82 Paradoxically, some neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists also view the police and security service with a certain respect and even awe. However, this depends much on the ideological direction of the group in question – some are anti-state, others are in favour of a strong state.

83 It is worth noting that the German word *Aussteiger* and the Norwegian/Swedish *avhopper* are morally neutral terms, meaning someone who leaves something or breaks out, whereas the English term *defector/defecting* has a negative connotation of someone who switches sides and starts to collaborate with the enemy. *Disengagement* is a more neutral term in English.

have more or less decided that they want to quit. Depending on the response (some publicity work is obviously needed), this 'passive approach' may get a rather high success rate, as almost all those calling are motivated to quit and succeed to do so.

The Finnish and Norwegian Exit projects, on the other hand, have focused their efforts more on prevention and early intervention with the aim of reducing recruitment or promoting early disengagement – before they young person has become too much entangled into the scene. Unlike Exit in Sweden, these two Exit projects have not succeeded in reaching long-term and hard-core activists. The Norwegian Exit project has had its main successes in early intervention with new recruits and teen-agers who are flirting with the Nazi scene, in particular through close collaboration between public agencies and parents. Working with youths who (at least initially) are often not motivated to quit is a hard task, and the success rate is not as high as working with those who take the initiative themselves of asking for help to disengage. In principle, prevention is always preferable to trying to cure the 'disease' at a later stage, and the sooner a new recruit quits the scene, the better. On the other hand, many prevention programmes tend to become rather general and unfocused, spending resources on youths who never get in trouble anyhow. Interventions targeted on those who have started to flirt with the scene may be more cost-effective.

However, several of the projects try to combine active and passive approaches. Exit in Sweden has visited schools where there are problems with racist groups, telling their personal stories about how they got involved with neo-Nazism and how they got out of it. These presentations have made great impact on many schools and pupils, and established contacts and dialogues with a number of young Nazis who later contacted Exit for assistance to quit. Another variety of the combined approach is that of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which has had great response on it 'passive' hot line, but is also actively approaching leading activists in order to persuade them to disengage. It is too early to assess whether the latter approach will succeed or fail, but the hot line seems to be a clear success.

In spite of differences in organisation and focus, these programmes do share a common goal – decreasing the racist and neo-Nazi scene by reducing recruitment and reinforcing disengagement. It is encouraging to observe that this approach is spreading to more and more European countries, and that results seem to be highly promising – in particular in countries like Sweden and Germany where problems with neo-Nazism are most severe. It is almost self-evident that reducing recruitment and facilitating disengagement are simple and sensible approaches that could and should be adopted by different agencies and organisations with a stake in the struggle against racism and violence. It resembles similar prevention and intervention efforts to such problems as drugs or alcohol abuse. Different public, private, or religious institutions that put their different imprint on the activities also run such programmes.

It is now time to establish closer international collaboration between the various national Exit and disengagement projects – governmental as well as NGOs – to exchange know-how, methods and experiences. Separately, such initiatives are likely to succeed in some areas and fail in others. They need to

learn from each other – about failures as well as mistakes – to improve and be more effective in reducing recruitment and helping people to disengage from the far-right scene – thereby changing the population balance of these racist groups in ways that will reduce their numbers and undermine the ability of these groups to spread hatred, intolerance and fear among the population. There is also a need for more research on the causes and processes that facilitate the emergence of racism and xenophobia in society, as well as research and evaluation of successful and unsuccessful attempts to counter these negative processes.

6. Knowledge based Action against Racist Violence: The Advisory Service for Local Work Against Xenophobic Violence

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to argue for the importance of diffusing knowledge from both researchers and experienced practitioners on how to handle racist or neo-nazi violence to politicians and professionals in communities confronted with this kind of problem. Such a transfer of competence and knowledge is especially important because this is a very complicated problem to solve, and because an enormous media attention pushes forward irrational responses. I present a Norwegian model for giving knowledge to communities that experience problems with racist or neo-nazi groups – *The Interdisciplinary Advisory Service for Local Action against Racism and Xenophobia*. I then go on to specify what kind of knowledge is needed – both general knowledge on racism, neo-nazism and violence, but also knowledge on how to make a good local diagnosis where one combines general knowledge with information of the local situation. I present three ways of making a local diagnosis, and specify which questions and issues one should collect local information on. In the end some examples are given of what kind of concrete measures local actors should bear in mind when trying to solve this kind of problem.

Knowledge based and rational action

To base action against problems and challenges on knowledge – both scientific and experienced based – is of course not a new or an exceptional message. We all live in societies where most professionals learn to base their work on different sources of knowledge. Professionals also learn to assess and analyse a situation, select the best means for tackling the challenge or the problem, then they are engaged in the implementation process, before they evaluate the results – through a new assessment and analysis, which in turn is put into practice. And so it goes. The key word is rational problem-solving – which is an important tool in the tool-bag of most professionals.

In organisational development (Harrison 1987), community-work (Twelvetrees 1991), health-preventive community work (Bracht and Kingsbury 1990), crime prevention (Communities that Care-program) and gang-intervention (Spergel et al 1994) the same procedure is recommended. I have no other alternatives to offer than this model. This is an important professional tool to solve complex problems in whatever geographical or organisational unit.

When it comes to racist or neo-nazi violence – the conditions for going through a rational local problem solving process are not the best. There are other forces and rationalities that counter our wish to deal with it in a sensible way. Local actors – both local politicians and professionals – are often confronted by a number of considerations and interests, and what is rational in relation to one challenge, can be irrational in relation to another challenge. So when local actors seem to act irrationally this does not always mean that they are irrational, but that they choose one objective, which is in conflict with other objectives. Concerning racist or neo-nazi violence; the *media attention* which neo-nazi or racist activity or violence gets, might push to the front goals that might be in conflict with a rational problem-solving procedure.

But seemingly irrational action can also have a lot to do with lack of knowledge of the problem at hand, which I will return at the end of this paper.

Media-attention and seemingly irrational responses

Let us first take the probable consequences of the huge media attention. The media coverage will normally stigmatise the affected community, especially in countries where racist violence and neo-nazism is not common or widespread.[84] To be labelled a nazi-town is of course stigmatising, and the journalists often explain the nazi-phenomenon with reference to negative community characteristics. Such a stigma normally will have negative consequences for the town or the city's ability to attract both new investors and the well-educated taxpayers, and for most of the local inhabitants such an image will be unpleasant. The political rationality in cases like this will be to wash off the stigma. And the most common whitewashing responses will not necessarily solve the problem.

The first is to *deny the problem*, to say that it is very exaggerated, that it is not worse here than in other places, that the event happened by coincidence, or to stress that the involved actors probably came from outside the community. To engage in a time consuming rational problem-solving process would then be to admit that one has a problem, and is thus irrational from this point of view. I am the first to admit that such a belittling strategy in some cases might be successful to reduce the racist violence. Some racist groups want media attention, and to belittle or deny the problem can reduce the media-interest and thereby reduce the extremists' willingness to show a local profile. But I think the opposite danger is even bigger. In the shadow of such a belittling strategy – the problem can grow. And what probably will have the greatest stigmatising effect on a village, town or city is to have such a problem, and not doing anything to get rid of it. Denial can be a very risky strategy.

The opposite reaction when confronted with violent racism and neo-nazism, and the subsequent media-attention, is *panic-action*. It will be urgent to wash off the moral stigma – as soon as possible – by doing anything that can symbolise a willingness to deal with the problem. Such quick action will

84 This means that lack of media attention represents a far larger problem – that violent racism or neo-nazism has been that common that the media does not care any longer.

often be based upon the media's analysis of the situation and the measures proposed by the media, which of course can be very superficial. Or – one seeks in the tool-bag for tools that can show the general public that one acts strong and forcefully. Such measures will often be suppressive and hard, symbolising that one is against the evil, and is often advocated by the conservative political side. Such measures can under certain circumstances escalate the conflict and problem, and they do not deal with the underlying forces creating it. But the responses, especially in the context of the welfare state, can also be 'soft' preventive measures – for example youth club, new leisure facilities or a campaign against racism. In the last case the message is *reason*. 'It is better to prevent than to repair' – is the well-known argument from the liberal or social-democratic side. The consequences of such quick-implemented 'soft' measures can be that the available resources will be spent on useless measures, excluding more effective measures later on.

There are of course also communities that wish to meet the existence of a violent racist group in a more sensible way. Their problem is that violent racist or neo-nazi groups are a new phenomenon – for most communities it is. The result of inexperience and lack of knowledge can be that one is *puzzled or paralysed*.

One challenge in dealing with racist or neo-nazi violence on the local level is to have good intervening strategies when the problem is small and possible to solve, when the local group still has not reached the critical mass, which will enable it to grow firmer and more permanent. Then we need a strategy that can counter the wish to belittle the problem, to act in panic or to be paralysed.

It should be a state responsibility that actors on a municipal level do not fall into one of these pits when confronted with violent and racist youth groups.

A simple measure against a complicated problem

The Interdisciplinary Advisory Service for Local Action against Racism and Xenophobia represents such a strategy. This advisory service consists of (at present) 17 researchers and experienced practitioners, including police officers, social workers, pedagogues, conflict mediators, and others. Together, they provide complementary forms of expertise to municipalities and local agencies that have to deal with problems they do not locally have experience with how to handle. Usually at team of two advisors will assist local agencies in developing an adequate analysis of the problem, and give advise on what kinds of action might be effective. One important task is to assist the local communities to determine the magnitude and nature of the problem.

This service is organised by The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and is a service for communities or municipalities with problems in this field. The Directorate also pays the first consultation, normally from one day to one weeks work. On some occasions both the Directorate of Immigration and the Ministry for Children and Families have financed more long-lasting and comprehensive interventions. During the last five years almost all villages, towns and cities having experienced this kind of problem have been

offered such knowledge-assistance in Norway, and most of them have used the service.[85]

It is also important to state that violent racist or neo-nazi youth groups have not been a major problem in Norway, so that the places having received this kind of assistance is no more than roughly 20–25 in five years. In the smaller European countries, or where racist or neo-nazi violence is limited, one does not need many members in such a consultation network. Less than ten people would do. In the greater European states, or where this problem has taken bigger and more serious proportions, one will probably need more – and perhaps also on a full-time basis. Such a service can be organised along different lines. What is important is that communities in trouble should have quick and easy access to relevant knowledge.

Quick assistance to avoid 'silly' action

A major objective for the Advisory Service is to give quick assistance after violent episodes – to prevent the aforementioned dysfunctional responses – sometimes even within a week or two. Municipal governments using the service shortly after a media-focused violent incidence can of course present the use of the service as being in accordance with important political values. The message to the general public that: 'we will immediately use the nations leading expertise on the issue', will symbolise both vigour and rationality. If one can couple the intervening strategy with other important political objects, the strategy will have a greater chance to succeed. Such a quick assistance does not mean that one has to act immediately after a short consultation. It is a way of putting the local authorities on a track where they will use a more rational problem-solving process that leads them outside the aforementioned pitfalls. The problem-solving process itself can take both weeks and months and the implementation process might take years.

Such a service can of course also be offered to villages, towns or cities with a more chronic problem with racist or neo-nazi group activity and violence. But here a quick consultation will probably not do. What is needed is a more thorough way of addressing the problem.

What kind of knowledge and assistance?

We think that successful intervention will rest on three different sources of knowledge. The first is what we can call *phenomenon-knowledge*. This contains general knowledge on what cause racist or neo-nazi violence? Why do young people join violent racist groups? Why do they wish to stay in such groups, and what causes people to leave? What do we know about efficient strategies and means to prevent young people from joining such groups, and

85 Some of the municipalities have asked for assistance themselves. In other instances the regional offices of the Directorate of Immigration have discovered municipalities having problems with racist groups (through their contacts with local refugee workers or the readings of local newspapers) – and they have thereby offered the municipality such assistance. We know of two municipalities that first were reluctant having this kind of assistance, but this reluctance had to do with old conflicts between the directorate and the municipalities. Since the advisors from the service did not represent the directorate – but only the institution were they normally are employed, it was fairly easy to get the confidence of these municipalities.

what will probably dissolve such groups. What works and what probably will not work? Such *'phenomenon-knowledge'* also includes definitions of the concepts of immediate importance – such as racism, neo-nazism – to avoid misunderstandings. And it includes an experience in assessing such problems to determine the magnitude and nature of it.

In some municipalities they might have such knowledge, but our experience from Norway is that most professionals have restricted competence on this issue. And even if some professionals should have such competence it can often be difficult to get recognition for it by other professionals and politicians in the local municipality. It depends very much on your position in the local authority system. Young and well-informed professionals below in the hierarchy are often not properly listened to. So in most municipalities with violent racist groups or violent activity they will probably find such *phenomenon-knowledge-assistance* useful.

The other source in a rational problem-solving process is *local information.* That is knowledge on what happens in the community, who the perpetrators are, how many they are, what kind of structure do they have and so on. Who are the victims? When and where do violent acts happen? What have been done in previous years in the community to prevent or combat such groups? What seemed to work in the local context and what did not? The answer to such and other questions presupposes knowledge on the local situation – which the local actors normally will possess. Each single local actor will not have satisfactory information of the local situation, but if we put together bits and pieces of relevant information that different local actors might have, it should be possible to make a more comprehensive local picture and diagnosis. This is of course very crucial information in a rational problem solving-process. It is the coupling of this local knowledge with the knowledge of the phenomenon – that can lead us to strategies and measures that will have a chance to work effectively on a community level.

But this coupling of local information and general knowledge of the actual problem can be difficult. One need additional knowledge and experience on how to run the process from a diagnosing of the local situation to making an action plan. This is what we can call *process-knowledge*. Some municipalities themselves, have experienced professionals or leaders to in run a problem-solving process, others do not. And those who do not, should get it. The Advisory Service in Norway also offers advisors with such process-knowledge, who cooperate with advisors with phenomenon knowledge. A two-person team where one possesses the 'phenomenon skills' and the other the 'process skills' should be a good combination.

Making a local diagnosis and analysis

One critical element in the problem-solving process is making a proper local diagnosis. Before the different agencies and organisations can act in meaningful and effective ways, the local problem must be recognised and understood, and preferably, the agencies involved should try to reach a common understanding. From our experience in Norway, we have seen that the causes for the emergence of such gangs, and the ways these problems manifest themselves, may be very different in different communities. It is therefore

important in each community to describe the magnitude and seriousness of the problem, and also to try to identify both the manifest and the underlying factors that have caused the problem. Those agencies that have some kind of responsibility to do something with the problem, should take part in the process of describing and analysing, as well as proposing solutions.

One obstacle to inter-agency collaboration is that police officers, teachers, youth workers and e.g. victimised minority groups tend to have highly different understandings of the problem, and divergent approaches to what should be done with it. However, these differences may be turned into an advantage rather than a problem. Different perspectives provide different insights and possibilities for intervention. Racist violence is a multi-caused problem, and should therefore be addressed from different angles.

Depending of the model of mapping, participants in this process should include the police, relevant departments in the municipality, school, voluntary organisations, and representatives from the youth population. In special cases it might be possible to bring in representatives from victimised groups, and even from youth close to the groups involved in conflicts as well.

One challenge when making the local diagnosis is that the municipality, local schools and the police, are hierarchical organisations with long channels of information. There are many information filters between the street level workers who in detail know some sides of the problem – to the administrative leaders and politicians who make important decisions on behalf of the system. In bureaucratic systems there will always be a danger that important information will disappear in the information-filters or that such information is distorted. This might in turn lead to the wrong diagnosis and the wrong responses to the challenge. One important role of the *process consultant* is therefore to secure that relevant information on the issue comes through these filters. This can be done in insisting on who should participate in making the local diagnosis. And if one uses the diagnosis or mapping seminar presented below, this can be done in actively addressing those who normally will have first hand knowledge of the problem.

In Norway we have seen three different models for diagnosing, analysing and assessing the local problem.

A diagnosis seminar (one or preferably two days) with 20–50 participants, representing different agencies and perspectives, including some local politicians. The seminar goes systematically through a lot of questions concerning the magnitude, nature and the causes of the problem. It is useful to bring in a *process consultant* who is experienced in running such processes together with an expert with the relevant phenomenon knowledge. This is a quick method, but may be 'good enough' to provide a basis for action – especially when the problem still seems fairly modest. Such a mapping seminar can end up with some propositions on concrete preventive and intervention measures, which seems logical from the local analysis. Or – it can end up proposing a further process that should result in a concrete action plan built on this diagnosis. One of the strengths of this diagnosis-seminar is that its collective nature creates optimism and motivation, and that it commits the actors to act – in front of the rest of the participants. Besides it is fairly cheap and not very time-consuming. The weakness is that it might be superficial, and that it can be dominated by some of the participants. To collect the rele-

vant information the *process consultant* should in a gentle way try to curb those who normally talk a lot (often powerful people with only second hand information), who tend to 'steal the show' and thereby tend to curb the other participants. The police sometimes present a dramatic picture which may overwhelm the other informants and which may lead them to think that their information is of little interest which in turn results in a withholding of valuable information.[86] A simple advice for such a diagnosis meeting with participants from different agencies and positions is on each issue or question to address the representatives for the youth population first, then the other agencies and the police in the end. One way of counteracting the shallowness of the method is to suggest deeper follow-up investigations on those aspects of the problem that was not satisfactory covered by the diagnosis-seminar.

An inter-agency working group with knowledgeable representatives (5–12 persons) from relevant agencies, working together to collect information, analyse, and produce a report or action plan. This method resembles research, but is done by professionals from the local administrations and/or local police authorities. I guess that in most countries within EU you will find professionals on the local level trained in research methods. The advantage using such a local working group is that the participants already know a lot of what is happening. They know violent incidents, the local groups, leadership structure and so on. They often know the involved actors and have their confidence – which will easily give access to further information. Such a diagnosis can be much deeper than the diagnosis done in a one or two-day diagnosis-seminar. One disadvantage is that the local professionals often do not have the capacity to do a proper diagnosis – because they are so bound by their ordinary tasks. The whole process may be time-consuming too, and when the diagnosis is ready the problem might have grown or changed.

Both these methods, which rely on the analysis done by the local actors, have another disadvantage: The local actors might have 'gone native'. They are standing so near the local situation that they have problems understanding what is going on. Through their earlier involvement in the local processes they might have been predisposed or biased. One objective for offering the assistance of an external expert with *phenomenon knowledge* in both kind of diagnosis is to broaden up the analytical perspective and reduce the danger of a 'gone native perspective'. The probably best way to reduce this superficiality and shallowness is to launch ……

A research project by external researchers with expertise in the field, providing description and analysis of the problem from a different perspective than the local agencies, but is incorporating their knowledge. This is now being done in Kristiansand (Bjorgo, Carlsson and Haaland, report in autumn 2001). Such research may provide solid basis for action, but is expensive and time-consuming. Another research role is *action research* where the researcher continuously collects and analyses data and feed it back to

86 We have not experienced this everywhere we have participated as advisors. In some instances the police have been very careful in sharing their information to others. But in other instances the police has presented a picture that has been very dramatic and overwhelming. This is partly due to the fact that the police are involved in the most dramatic situation, that they have access to a lot of information channels that ordinary people do not have, but also to the fact that some police officers have a tendency to dramatise.

those actors responsible for action. Such a research role where tried out in Brumunddal in the mid 1990'ties (Carlsson 1995) and will be carried out in Kristiansand from now and until April 2004.

Some key questions for the local diagnosis

In the following, I will give an overview of questions that are important to answer before considering interventions or developing an action plan. This is not a complete list – the local situation should determine which questions are relevant to ask.

1. What are the characteristics of events and actions?

What kinds of actions are considered problematic in the local community? Are there acts of violence? What kinds of violence? Threats? Vandalism? Other forms of insults or harassment? How many such incidents are known to have taken place? Who are targeted? What are the consequences to the victims? How do these misdeeds affect other people than the immediate victims – those that are not directly hit but might feel vulnerable to similar attacks? Do they restrict their normal activities or their freedom of expression due to a perceived threat?

2. Relations between perpetrator(s) and victim(s). Motivations?

Before we categorise incidents of violence, vandalism or harassment involving immigrants or minority groups as expressions of racism or xenophobia, we should consider whether this is actually a probable motivation. Are the same persons repeatedly targeted by violence, threats or vandalism every time, or do such incident happen randomly? Are there other more likely issues or circumstances that might throw light on the incident?

3. Where and when do incidents take place?

Do they happen at particular times (e.g. Friday and Saturday nights, or just after school)? Where do these incidents take place? At a public place (streets, shopping malls etc.) or near or at the home of the victim(s)? Or on the phone in the form of threats? Such 'when and where' questions are important when planning situational preventive action and protective measures in relation to potential victims. If you want to increase police patrolling or reinforce the presence of teachers in the schoolyards, what you do should be determined by the answers.

4. Characteristics of scenes / gangs / organisations?

What do we know about those perpetrating acts of xenophobic violence or other crimes? How many are they? Is it a 'lone wolf' or several persons acting together? Are they part of a group of friends, a gang, a subculture, a political pressure group, or a political party? How ideologically conscious are participant is the group? What characterise their ideology? Do they have a specific dress code, style or uniform? What does it look like? Do they use specific symbols? Are they armed, or do they have access to weapons? If so, what kinds of weapons? Does their group have a form of membership? Does the group have distinct leaders or a core of activists? How many belong to

the core? How many belong to the outer circle? How many can be mobilised in case of conflict or crisis?

5. Group dynamics. Motives for joining and leaving the group?
How are new individuals recruited into the group? At what age? What attracts them into the scene? Do they agree with the political views of the group? Easy access to alcohol? Excitement? Action? Weapons and uniforms? Does the group offer protection against perceived threats (e.g. bullies, gangs or other youth groups)? Does the group offer social community, acceptance and friendship? Are there sanctions against members leaving the group? What kinds? These questions are important to address in order to develop measures to prevent youths from joining, and to help members to disengage, and if necessary offer protection to those who want to leave but do not dare to do so.

6. Characteristics of actors / participants
What types of youths are represented in the racist or xenophobic group in question? Helmut Willems (1993: 200–207; 1995:168–174, see also Bjørgo 1997: 48–51) describes four main types: a) The ideologically motivated right-wing extremist; b) the xenophobe or ethnocentrist; c) the criminal and marginalized youth; and d) the fellow-traveller (*Mitlaufer*). Sometimes groups may consist of different mixtures of such groups.

Are there any ideologically motivated leaders among them? What characterise them (age, education, work, etc.)? How do they carry out their role as agitators or instigators? Do they take part in violence themselves? Do they instigate others to carry out acts of violence? Or do they represent forces of moderation?

Are there youths in the group that are xenophobic without having a conscious ideology? What is their age, education, and connection with the labour market? What kinds of action do they carry out?

Are there criminal and marginalized youths in the group? Age, education, connection with labour market, and criminal records? What kind of acts do they carry out? How many of these youths have a particularly problematic family background, and are in need of special assistance and intervention? Do any of them have handicaps like ADHD or dyslexia, in need of special treatment? Are they followed up by relevant agencies for these problems? How many in the group fit the profile of 'followers'? Age, education, ties to labour market, family, friends… Are the just passive members of the group, or do they actively carry out violence to be accepted into the group? Do any of these have particular psychosocial problems that hinder their acceptance into more positive youth milieus?

7. Local connections and external links
Do we know where the 'hard core' and the followers live? Do they live in the local community where the negative incidents have taken place, or do they come from other communities? What links do the persons and groups in question have with other extremist or criminal groups in other parts of the country or internationally? What kind of relations? What is exchanged between these groups? Ideology, cultural expressions (e.g. music), weapons,

actors willing to perform serious crimes or take part in actions and manifestations of strength?

8. Relations with rival groups / gangs
Are there any opposing or rival groups or gangs present in the community or coming in from outside (e.g. militant antiracists or minority youth gangs)? What roles do these rival groups play, and what methods do they use? Do they rely on acceptable political means, or do they use violence? Does this opposing milieu contribute to prevent or slow down the development of racist or rightwing groups in the community, or do they rather 'carry wood to the fire'?

9. Responses from the local community and the social surroundings
How has the local population – other youths, adults, parents, labour unions, the business community, voluntary organisations, the local media, etc. – responded to the problematic acts carried out by the groups in question? By support, passive acceptance, indifference, or disgust? Do violent offenders, gang members or extremist activists receive support that is important to them (e.g. legitimacy, money, weapons, a club house or other place to come together, etc.)? Or were the responses from the environment so strong and negative that the extremist group might have encapsulated themselves even more in a negative identity?

10. Responses from public agencies – municipality and the police
How has the extremist / violent group in the community been handled by the authorities in the past? Has this been recognised as a problem at an earlier stage, or have the authorities become aware of the problems only recently? Was there an attempt to 'play down' the problem in order to avoid giving the group too much publicity? Or was the problem belittled to avoid stigmatisation of the community? Or have there been over-reactions and 'moral panic'? Have there been any specific interventions? What were the effects of interventions – or lack of intervention? Negative consequences? Positive consequences? Is it likely that local agencies have treated immigrant and minority groups in ways that might have contributed to foster frustration, jealousy, or aggression among marginalized local youths, e.g. by offering real or imagined) advantages to specific minorities. Or have local agencies treated minorities in such negative ways that local youths might have felt that they might also act negatively against unpopular minorities – with impunity?

11. Structural characteristics with the community that might influence what is happening
Does the structure of the local labour market and the level of education in the population create marginalisation and exclusion of significant parts of the youth population? Is there a mismatch between the types of qualifications among young people, and the demands of the local labour market? Are there strong divisions among the local population based on class and/or cultural differences? How are these differences expressed? Are there in the local community groups that are socially excluded? Are there any local tradi-

tions of how 'strangers' coming to the community has been received – with openness and positive curiosity, or with suspicion and hostility? Is fighting and violence against foreigners (whether they have a different skin colour, or coming from the neighbouring village) been a common phenomenon, or rather exceptional?

12. The situation of the victims
To what extent have the same persons or groups been targeted for violence, threats or harassment time after time? If so, what can explain that that these people are targeted? What have the police done to protect these individuals or groups against repeat victimisation? Is there a need for physical security measures, increased police patrolling, or help from neighbours? What is done to help victims to handle their mental traumas caused by such experiences? Who are in charge of following up victims of violence, and attend their needs?

What to do?

The whole idea of doing such a local mapping and analysis is to improve the accuracy of interventions by focussing where they are most likely to have an effect. That will reduce the risk of wasting resources for prevention and intervention. Some examples: We have seen in some communities that a good medicine against racist and criminal youth groups is to provide employment to these young people. However, success cannot necessarily be transferred to another community – it is only useful if the relevant youths there are actually unemployed! Campaigns to change attitudes towards racism and violence among the pupils in a secondary school may miss the target if recruitment to racist groups mainly takes place among younger pupils, or among youths who have dropped out of school. Campaigns to educate young people about Nazism and the Holocaust may also miss the point if the main reason for young people joining a xenophobic youth gang is that they have been beaten up by immigrant gangs and seek protection. It is also necessary with quite other forms of prevention and intervention if the local Nazi scene consists of 100 youths rather than if only three-four activists are involved.

Logical and effective action will not only follow from a good diagnosis. Our experience is that local actors also will need broad information of what can be done under certain circumstances. In Norway and probably in the other Nordic countries as well, both professionals and politicians have long traditions of thinking of long-term *social prevention*, which is of course an attitude we appreciate. Local professionals and politicians are unfortunately not used to think of *situational preventive measures* in the same way, and should be informed of the applicability of such measures against racist violence. Situational preventive measures are directed to what trigger off an illegal act. The intention is to make it more difficult to carry out the illegal act, to increase the possibilities that the perpetrators will be discovered by increased formal or informal control, and to reduce the rewards from the act (including social rewards). The results from such measures will probably be that the actor will abstain from carry out the act.

Situational prevention have been strongly criticised for not attacking the causes of criminal behaviour and that such measures are only suitable to protect property crime. The advocates for situational prevention will probably reply that situational prevention is especially important to prevent repeated victimisation. One often cannot wait until the social prevention strategies will have the desired effect – often after many years. And we know that refugees or immigrants that have been harassed and injured once often will be victims twice or more. It is therefore of great important for the local actors to have some ideas of what situational measures they can use to prevent repeated victimisation. Such situational measures might be informal neighbourhood protection of refugees, but also the use of personal alarms, cameras or the use of automatic strong light when intruders approach a refugee dwelling which earlier has been exposed to attacks from racist or neo-Nazi groups. A strong local manifestation against racism and racist violence can also be important to show the perpetrators that they do not have local support, and to show the refugees that they have. In villages, towns or cities where local racist or neo-Nazi groups have occupied their own territory, such a territory can be won back through organised action from ordinary citizens taking the territory in use – often assisted by police action. The police, the municipal welfare bureaucracy and the civil society play an important role in putting into effect situational preventive measures.

A very important piece of advice to the municipal administrations is that they must not forget helping the victims for violence and intimidation. Within the Nordic welfare bureaucracy the focus have too much been put on the perpetrators, and the victims have in many cases nearly been forgotten. The local politicians and professionals should be reminded over and over again to give support to the victims of violence and terror – both medical, psychological, social and political support.

Conclusion

We think that this transference of knowledge from experienced researchers or practitioners to the local communities is an important part of a strategy to handle racist or neo-nazi violence in a rational way. In Norway we have created a very simple institutional structure. *The Advisory service* which is a list of competent people that have obliged themselves to give affected communities quick assistance, and where the first two to three days of consultation is paid for by the Directorate of Immigration. Such a unit can of course be organised in different ways. What matters is that the local professionals and politicians have easy access to both 'phenomenon knowledge' and 'process knowledge' so that they can deal with this complicated issue in a sensible way. This should be easy to organise, it is not expensive and the cost-effectiveness of such a measure should be very satisfactory – especially when considered what values that are at stake.

A condition for such a strategy of diffusing competence is that the nation has researchers and competent practitioners on the issue. The next condition is that they are willing to go into such work. It can especially be difficult to find researchers willing to go into such advisory work because it does pay off academically. Researchers should have a moral obligation to do so!

7. Preventive Police Work in Practice: The Empowerment Conversation

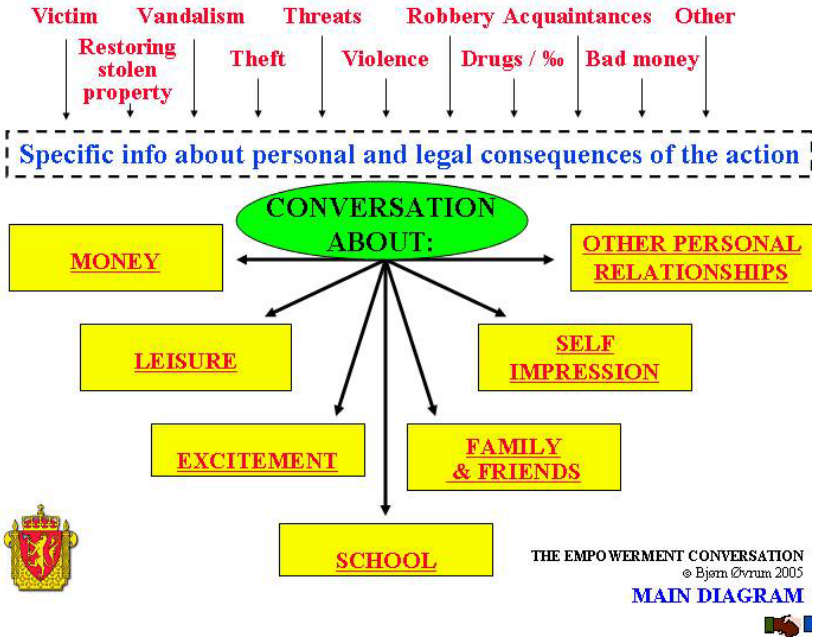
A preventive police officer being one of the co-founders of the Exit project, Bjørn Øvrum, has developed another powerful method of early intervention with children involved with racist groups or other delinquent behaviour. 'The Empowerment Conversation' can be applied when e.g. a police officer, a teacher, or a youth worker detects that a child or youth is involved in activities that give reason to worry. The professional will then summon the young person together with the parents for a voluntary conversation, and will present the symptom that gave rise to that worry. This could be theft, drug use, tagging, or participation in a racist group or another type of gang. Child and parents will also be informed about the likely consequences of this behaviour if it continues. The purpose of the conversation is not to punish but to create the basis for reorientation and change in behaviour of the child or youth, as well as mobilising the parents' own engagement and resources. The professional asks for the parents' consent to share information with other relevant agencies to help the child through coordinated efforts. This helps to get around obstacles to collaboration often caused by the strict rules of confidentiality practiced by social agencies. The conversation session should be seen as the starting point in a process of reorientation where other agencies (school, social workers, etc.) will also get involved in the next stages.

The conversation is based on a structured procedure where the professional, the parents and the child together discuss the behaviour that gave rise to the meeting, and what they believe is explaining that behaviour. If, for instance, the young person is participating in a violent or extremist group, the youth is asked what he or she believes is causing him/her to get involved with such a scene. The youth will be presented with a set of alternatives (cf. figure): is it for example a need for protection, thrill seeking, friendship, or status? For each type of cause there is a card suggesting possible corresponding options to be discussed with parents and child. If, for example, the probable cause of the problematic behaviour was thrill seeking, they can discuss what kinds of legal and socially acceptable alternatives could be available, and how the young person can realise his or her wishes for an exciting leisure time. Together with the youth and the parents, the professional try to look forward, focusing on solutions in order to stimulate a process of reorientation and alteration of behaviour.

Although the Empowerment Conversation model was originally developed during preventive police work with racist youth groups, it can be applied for many types of youth delinquency problems. The Norwegian police have recommended it for more general use. Youth workers, teachers, and other professionals are also being trained to apply it. Results so far are very

promising. However, it probably makes a particularly strong impact when it is the police that call in parents and child for a conversation.

These two methods have been effective as early interventions with young teenagers who have got involved with racist youth groups. In several cases, recruitment to racist youth groups has been reduced to almost zero. Using these methods, local police, youth workers and other agencies are now equipped to act promptly once they notice that young people flirt with such groups.[87] We believe that such early intervention is one of the main reasons why the neo-Nazi scene in Norway remains relatively small, young, and characterised by short careers and few 'veterans'.



87 In a local Exit project in the city Kristiansand, an inter-agency task force consisting of police officers, youth workers, social workers, teachers, and the Exit worker together used this approach in their work with 38 youths involved with the local racist scene during the period from 1996. By mid-2001, six of these individuals were still active in the Nazi scene, three were dead (by accidents or drug overdose), but the remaining 29 are living relatively normal lives. By the end of 2001, the project had worked with 60 youths, and 49 had left the racist scene.

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8. Violent Youth Groups: Strategies for Prevention and Intervention within the Scandinavian Welfare State

The question of violent groups, gangs or 'bands' is an extremely complex one. There are big controversies over the definition of such 'structures'. What is a gang or 'bande' in relation to a violent group, sub-culture, network or organised crime? We can discuss this – not only for hours, for weeks, and we would probably not reach a common understanding of the word. The controversies over the gang-concept do not make the definition of *gang-prevention* any easier. Should 'gang-prevention' include all kinds of preventive efforts that are aimed at reducing delinquency in general? Should it also include social policies on both national and local level to prevent poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation – which of course is important forces leading to delinquency? Should it cover both national and local policies to integrate new immigrant into the society –since many of the 'gang-members' obviously belong to immigrant groups living at the margins of the society? Should it include measures to prevent or ameliorate family-problems, child neglect or lack of parental control over their children? Should it include strategies to cope with individual problems – ranging from the treatment of ADHD to learning problems? We could have continued to ask about the use of treatment in institutions, the use of prisons and so on and so on.

Or should 'gang-prevention' be confined to deal with just those factors that make young people forming a special structure – a gang structure –from which they commit criminal acts?

In most or nearly all cases – we believe – gang-prevention cannot be separated from the wide body of strategies to prevent violence and delinquency in general on the macro, messo and micro-level. We agree with James Howell in an overview article on gang-prevention stating that…

> Because separate causal pathways to gang participation versus non-gang serious and violent offending have not been identified, programs found to be effective or promising for preventing and reducing serious and violent delinquency in general may hold promise in combating gang delinquency and violence. (Howell 1998:302).

Crime-prevention is a superior concept covering gang-preventive strategies and measures. But within the wide body of crime-preventive strategies – there may be some measures that will be more useful in preventing the formation of gangs or violent youth groups, to reduce the entry of youth into existing gangs and to support exit from gangs. Intervention is more concur-

rent with tertiary prevention, and includes measures directed towards existing gangs and their participants.

Our point of departure is therefore that:

> *What prevent delinquency in general also prevent the formation of criminal youth gangs, but within the great body of prevention and intervention strategies, programs and measures, there may be some that might be particularly useful in preventing gang-formation and promote gang-dissolution.*

The connection between concept and action

Before we turn to the local strategies and policies – we must make a comment on the gang concept used in Norway and Sweden and the 'bande'-concept used in Denmark. *What you call and define a problem will of course influence which actions you take.*

There are two pit-falls in the local response-process – one is denial, the other is moral panic (Curry and Decker 1998, Bjorgo and Carlsson 1999).

A real problem can of course be *denied* because lack of information and knowledge about what is going on in the dark corners of the community. It can also be denied because of lack of concepts to grasp a local phenomenon. Sometimes the problem is both apparent and the local actors have concepts to grasp it, but the problem is denied because one does not wish to stigmatise a specific geographic or ethnic community, or a specific youth group. To intervene would mean an official recognition of the problem. By denying an apparent problem one can hope that the problem will disappear by itself. In some cases this may be a successful strategy because a violent group or even gang after a while often fall apart by itself. The risk of denying is that a gang can develop their violence, and strengthen their gang-structure, to extreme levels before it is officially recognised. The only strategy left when the problem is officially recognised, will then often be hard and suppressive police measures.

The opposite pit-fall is moral panic. Using the label gang or bande to emphasise a gang-response, *when gangs do not constitute a problem,* might lead to such a panic. If such labelling is followed up by increased surveillance, police patrolling, and incarceration, this may increase the group solidarity and cohesion and virtually make the group into a gang. And if the gang or bande is named and presented in the media, this can make the participants important, give them prestige and honour, and in this way meet one important need which the youth cannot satisfy on legitimate arenas. It gives them an identity as 'someone'. This is the essence of labelling theory.

The response heavily depends on the concepts being used. And we strongly believe that the concepts used have different meanings – especially in Norway and Danmark.

The Norwegian and Danish share the same written language – to 99 percent. One important difference is the word *gang*, which is used in Norway, and *bande*, which is used in Denmark.

I will assert that the Norwegian word gang can give associations leading to a belittling or denial of the problem. The Danish word 'bande' can push in the moral-panic direction.

The Norwegian Gang-concept

This concept can give two different associations. For some – especially for well-educated police officers, youth workers or field workers having read criminology – the word gang calls forth the picture of the well-organised American gang, often with hundreds of members, and which have existed for decades. The concept has been so strict that they have not grasped what indeed have been gangs. The result is denial of gangs.

In its everyday Norwegian use, gang is synonymous with group. The word gang has gone into the ordinary Norwegian vocabulary as a cohesive group. We often say – we are a gang of friends meeting once a month and drink some beers. The Norwegian prime minister Bondevik two years ago referred to his cabinet as 'a nice gang'. Sometimes people talk of criminal gangs – but then synonymous with petty criminal groups. Even if one defines gangs –*as a group engaged in criminal activity, where such activity is accepted and encouraged, having a common identity (name, symbols), having been in operation for at least half a year or so* – (which we think is a reasonable definition) this sounds familiar to many Norwegians: 'Oh yeah, we have had gangs here for more than fifty years. In the 1960'ies they often met on the icy river fighting each other. But that is not a big problem. Boys are just like this' – a lot of people would say. The word gang gives associations that may lead to deny or belittle a serious gang problem.

The Danish bande-concept

In Denmark the situation is different. As far as we understand the word 'gade-bande' is a fearly new word in Denmark – introduced by the police some years ago. The Rikspolitisjef in Denmark have defined 'gade-bande'/street-gang as *'a group of children and youth who in the streets commits crime or other kinds of troublesome or aggressive behaviour, and who by the surroundings and themselves are considered as a group'*. This is a definition that emphasise criminal acts and aggressive behaviour, and that they are a group, but it does not include the duration-criterion. The duration criterion is important in American gang research (Klein 2001: 249), and the duration is often followed by a more fixed structure. Rikspolitisjefens definition includes most violent youth groups, both permanent and transitory in the gang concept.

In many respect this may be a useful definition – but it is no gang definition. The problem with some words is that they are immune against official definitions. *Gadebande* is not only a groups of wild youth that are loose in the streets, the concept is also ' loose in the streets' and it gives practitioners in the municipalities, the local politicians and the general public a lot of associations, images and sentiments. The problem with the bande-concept in Denmark is that it gives associations to organised and planned crime, while the defined concept (by the Rikspolitisjef) is widely used on groups not hav-

ing such characteristics. The Danish prime minister would not label his cabinet as a bande (may be his opponents would). Using this label on petty-criminal groups, on ad-hoc-groups who have been engaged in a fight, or on a group of adolescents making problem on the last night-bus or train – there is a considerable risk to make them more serious, organised and evil than they really are. This may in turn lead to action that may be counterproductive. And the labelling may virtually make them into a gang – especially if this labelling is followed up by heavy media-coverage and public stigmatisation.

I will not deny that 'gade bande' – when used synonymous to the American gang concept – in some cases in Copenhagen and may be in Odense will be a useful concept, as will be the case in Oslo. But we doubt that this will be the case in many of the other middle-size Danish towns.

There is of course a chance that this concept in its everyday use over the years will be inflated, and will have the same meaning as the Norwegian word gang. But up till now, the use of the concept probably have pushed in the moral panic direction. we have of course registered how important the issue of 'gadebander' has been on the national political agenda in Denmark. It has been a major issue in the last election campaign in Denmark. A couple of years ago (2000) it was a major issue in the prime-ministers (Nyrup-Rasmussen) speech to the Danish national assembly when he presented the governments program and the state-budget for the next year (the presentation of 'finansloven'). In Norway and Sweden this speech will solely be a presentation of the economic policy, the care for the elderly, health service, improvements in schools and so on. In Denmark the issue of street-gangs has been pushed to the top of the political agenda for a long period of time.

I guess that this focus may contribute to xenophobia, it stigmatises whole categories of youth with an immigrant background and contributes to social exclusion – strengthening the forces that give rise to gangs. The moral panic may make this into a huge and nearly insoluble problem. Since this problem has attained such a prominent position on the political agenda, it is reasonable to expect that the preventive strategies to a large degree will be political decided – and not that much based on the judgement from experienced researchers and practitioners on neither the state nor local level.

I hereby stop the whipping of the Danish use of the label Gadebande, and the current political climate here. This is because there are many reasons to be worried concerning the use of youth violence committed in a group or a network context. There are of course serious problems with violent youth groups on Nørrebro, Ishøj, Høje Tåstrup and Vollsmose, and probably in the medium sized towns in Denmark as Haderslev and Randers. Such problems must and should be managed one way or another, and this must mainly be done at the local level.

Local strategies within the welfare state

The Scandinavian Welfare state is built on a solid local pillar. To a large extent the welfare state is a 'welfare municipality'. The legitimacy of this welfare system is based on giving people social security and social services – and that it solves defined problems. If the welfare state – and municipality –

does not solve problems that the citizens define as real, the citizens' support will vanish and probably turn in a politically populist direction.

The great challenge for this system is that problems defined as a public responsibility to prevent or solve, are steadily growing. New problems are steadily defined by both the social and medical sciences. The threshold of acceptance of old and known problems is getting lower. The problem solving ambition has grown immensely, and the problem-solving capacity has grown due to economic wealth, and because of a more professional workforce. The citizens themselves, both individually and from interest-organisations, often put a pressure on the authorities to solve their problems. In addition the media act as a Supreme Court or a grill, where the politicians have to answer why problems remains unresolved, particularly after a dramatic incident.

There is hardly any problem or human suffering that is not made a public obligation, and the demand for public prevention and intervention becomes bigger. Such problems include all kinds of criminal activity, especially all kinds of violence and bullying, but also loneliness, hyperactivity among children, social incompetence, learning-difficulties and dyslexia, overweight, anorexia and bulimia, forced marriages, racism, female circumcision, passive smoking, parents that do not stimulate their children and so on and so on.

What we define as problems have been extended, and the threshold for defining a problem as a major and serious one, has in many cases been heavily reduced. In most respects we think this is a positive quality with the welfare state.

Worrying and concern

The welfare-state thinking includes a lot of worrying and concern. To be worried is a part of the preventive thinking that has characterised especially the social-democratic parties in these countries. If one is not worried or concerned, what is then the reason for prevention?

Turning back to our issue – youth violence – there are of course many reasons for being concerned. Some types of youth violence are rather new and frightening, others are old but have increased, still others have not increased, but the threshold for worrying and concern have decreased. People are also worried because of the fear that the situation might get worse.

The kind of action giving rise to worrying and concern is:

- Drive-by-shootings
- Homicides[89]
- Assaults
- 'Children robbing children'
- Use of knives and other weapons in fights

89 These two most extreme violent acts are of course not common. In Oslo there were two gang-related (and perhaps motivated) murders last year. Last week there was probably a gang-related (or motivated) murder in Stockholm. The chance of getting hit is far greater than being eaten by a wolf – and there is a great concern for wolves in part of Eastern Norway.

- Practicing the 'musketeer -principle' within groups – individual conflicts easily escalates to conflicts between groups.
- Mobilising of huge networks for a fight – where the participants' loyalty is attached to the person who mobilised him or her. Often they do not know why there is a battle. Such battles may involve hundreds of people.
- Revenge is directed towards members of the opponents group or category, even family-members
- Sexual offences – sometimes committed by a group
- Fights between girls (with groups of boys as 'back-ups')
- Victim intimidation, and sometimes also the victims family or friends
- Assaults and treats on public servants (teachers, youth-club-workers)
- Unlawful entry on private parties (which resulted in a murder a month ago in Oslo)
- Unlawful entry into schoolyards and school-buildings to commit violence, take revenge etc.

Since a great part of these types of violence happens in a group or collective context, it is of course important to look at the group, gang or network – when considering strategies towards such violence.

To select preventive measures from the huge prevention cafeteria

Social problems in general and particularly delinquency and violence are met by several strategies. A media focused problem very often results in an action plan and some state financed local projects. After the racist murder on Benjamin in Oslo in January last year – a lot of Norwegian Municipalities started to make an action-plan against racism, and a lot of local projects got financial support from the state. A lot of such 'action-planning' is obviously symbolic – where the goal is to symbolise action and to get political support. But such action-plans may in some cases result in action that produces results.

The most important strategy in the longer run has been to organise a new agency or office with a defined expertise, either within the municipal administration, or within the civil sector with public financial support, or to extend the scope and capacity within existing agencies.

Such an expansion is often motivated by a deep concern for those affected by the problem, and for a deep worrying for the consequences if nothing is done.

The municipal capacity for preventing youth problems and individual maladjustment has been extended during the last 20 years, especially in Norway and Denmark. The Swedes have for a long time had a more developed municipal sector, but due to the economic recession in Sweden in the early nineties, we believe that the capacity now is fairly even.

The preventive policies within the municipalities one generation ago were not driven by strong theoretical ambitions. The municipalities had rather few preventive instruments in their toolbox. To establish a youth house or youth club became the social democratic answer and a universal

medicine to most youth problems.[90] During the last 15–20 years the situation has changed fundamentally.

Today we have got a huge market for preventive programs and packages. The internet plays a major role in diffusing information on preventive programs. There are international humanitarian organisations like the Red Cross and Lions promoting their own programs. And there are a lot of research-groups, University Institutes and consulting firms that have developed programs, often evaluated by themselves – and afterwards selling them on the international market. Preventive programs have been big business.

As pointed to at the beginning of this lecture, most programs aimed at preventing youth violence can also be used as gang programs. In his list of promising *gang programs* Howell (1998) mentions among others manhood development, employment training, education and counselling, conflict resolution and peer mediation in tandem, equipping peers to help one another, community policing, community mobilisation, aggression replacement training, multi-systemic therapy – and of course police suppression.

The Scandinavian municipalities, and increasingly local schools, enjoy a great freedom to choose measures and strategies to prevent violence or whatever problems. Different schools within one municipality may choose different programs to prevent problems. One school may choose the Olweus anti-bullying program, which stresses tight social control by the adults and their interference in conflicts. The near-by school may choose a mediation program, which stresses that the pupils themselves should solve the conflicts through mediation. And sometimes – the same school may choose one program one year and the competing program the next.

Also within the police there are different directions. The New York 'zero-tolerance model' is one example. And a lot of police officers have been there on study-trips, and nearly every conservative or populist politician in Scandinavia is familiar with the model. Today this model is used as an example on how to handle delinquency in small towns and small fishing villages in Scandinavia. This New York model is by-the way competing with the San-Diego-model with its intense focus on situational prevention. A number of Norwegian police officers have lately been in San Diego, following some Swedes that were there some years earlier.

Malcolm Klein (1995) asserts that youth gangs are characterised by a *cafeteria style of criminal behaviour*. They are versatile in their criminal behaviour and do a little bit of this and a little bit of that. The Scandinavian Preventive Strategies have the same characteristics – *a cafeteria style of prevention*.

The cafeteria offers of course well-known national dishes – as youth club or youth house, and the traditional dishes from the health service, the social service, the schools and kindergartens. This is still the basis of the welfare state diet, but there is a constantly growing number of international dishes – most of them abbreviation with 3–5 letters. You find 'individual dishes' – as aggression replacement programs, 'family dishes' as Marte Meo, PMT and MST, 'school-dishes' as the Olweus-program, and different 'community' dishes like Communities that Cares (CTC).

90 Jerzy Sarnecki knows more about this, since he wrote his academic dissertation on youth-houses in St ockholm. (Sarnecki 1978).

In addition one will find foreign spice to put an international flavour on the local and traditional dishes. There is a lot of mobilization models – 'the future workshop, search-conference, SOFT-analysis. But also hot spice like metal-detectors and electronic foot-chains.

In the Norwegian prevention Cafeteria you will find many Danish dishes. The most famous Danish dish in Norway is the *SSP-model* – the coordination model, which is rather traditional and rational and very much looks like a Swedish 'samverkansmodell'. On the other hand you have the '*the Front-runners*'and the '*Caos-pilots*' – using culture as a means of qualification for youth at risk. (In Kristiansand you will find an adoption of this – the 'street academy'). You have the *Bifrost-school*, which is promoted in Norway by a small municipality (Eidskog), which have got the exclusive right as a Norwegian agency. You have the use of *youth contracts*, which recently has been launched as a program for a dozen municipalities.

The headlines of an article in Berlinske Tidende 21/10–01 illustrates the business part of this new industry:

> Youth project an export-success. The article is about the project Ny Start (New Start) – an aggression-control program. 'The program has obtained international interest. The Netherlands and the Baltic countries have shown interest for it, and Iceland has already *bought it*.' [91]

From Sweden we have got night-walkers – 'farsan på stan', a lot of 'samverkan' – coordination, and a lot of stuff from Ørebro – a city that has the ambition to be the first to make or test out new dishes in Sweden. And you have got the Värmland police model – which is a Swedish adoption of the San-Diago-model – which recently has been promoted to Drammen in Norway. We should have had the crime-prevention model from Tyresö in our cafeteria, but it is not there yet.

The Norwegian contribution to our neighbouring countries is not big. *The Olweus-method* is of course prominent. Tore has developed the *EXIT-program*, which has been diffused to Sweden and a lot of German 'Bundesstaten'. A new and interesting dish is the *'worrying-conversation'* – a 'zero-tolerance-model', which is 'soft' and helpful, and not brutal. It is developed by the preventive police in Oslo-South, and it should be much more digestive to Scandinavians than the New York model.

You have by no hopefully caught the point. Both local politicians and practitioners are today just a double click from an overwhelming menu of preventive practices, models and programs. We hereby stop using this cafeteria metaphor.

The Scandinavian welfare municipality use a shotgun strategy towards complex problems– through its variety of agencies and services, programs and projects. The shotgun is probably not a good metaphor since some of the bullets go in opposite directions. Some countervene each other – partly because they pursue different goals and partly because they are grounded in opposing theories. One good example of this is that schools may concentrate pupils with behavioural problems in a special class, to prevent them from disturbing other pupils, but also to give these children a more adapted teach-

91 According to the article the program has had considerable success in Voldsmose.

ing. Others are sent to institutions for individual treatment. The MST program, on the other hand, tries to get the delinquents out of such institutional settings and special classes to reduce peer-group anti-social influences, and try to integrate them in pro-social groups within their own community.[92]

The Scandinavian municipalities do a lot to prevent what is sad and evil such as psychological problems, racism, drug-abuse, violence and so on. Even though there is a lot of symbolic action, and a measures and programs that are not properly implemented, there is still produced a lot of preventive work from the municipal institutions, private sector-organisations and the police. To combine measures is a rational crime-preventive strategy, and one that is recommended by leading criminologists; *complex problems must be met by complexity in action*. There is no magic bullet, or no single dish with all the necessary preventive ingredients. The problem for the research-business is that complex action makes evaluation extremely complicated and may be even impossible. It becomes impossible to find the active ingredients that can explain the outcome. (Hawkins 1996, Ringman 1997).

This is the Prevention paradox: The more we do, the less we know.

This means that Crime Prevention to a large degree is to handle uncertainty in a rational way.

What do we know about gang-prevention and intervention in Scandinavia? And what should we do?

Our knowledge is to a large extent limited to what we know about what prevents delinquency and violence in general. There is no body of Scandinavian gang literature – and gang evaluations. This would have been surprising since there is no accepted definition of youth gang-concept. The knowledge we have in our Norwegian research-group on prevention and intervention on gangs or gang-like groups, is therefore very fragmented, and much based on anecdotal evidence from municipalities, schools and police departments, and through descriptive research-reports (Bjorgo and Carlsson 1999, Bjørgo, Carlsson and Haaland 2001).

We will return to some measures and methods that we find promising – especially in intervening into existing gangs or gang-like groups. Our most important recommendation is procedural: to do a proper local assessment and analyses – preferably in cooperation between researchers and practitioners. Local authorities are often very puzzled when confronting violent gang-like groups. They often need help.

The most important point is to make a proper mapping, assessment and analysis of the local situation. One has to answer questions like: What is a gang? Do we see gangs in our community? (If not – what kind of groups do we see?) ? How many participants? Age? Ethnic background? Leadership?

92 The welfare state of course also implements policies that may well have a very negative effect on juvenile delinquency and violent youth groups. One is to promote competition between schools (both secondary school and upper secondary school), where the most important success-criterion is the average mark/grade-level. Breaking with the old system of community based schools – by letting pupils choose whatever school they (and their parents) prefer, the best pupils will probably seek the most successful schools. The weakest pupils, often with a pile of risk factors, will end up in the schools with the poorest results – making this into a vicious circle. This may indeed be a gang-spawning policy.

Do they have a turf? Their social situation? Gang-structure? Conflicting enemies? etc., etc. Such an analysis should be the departure for action.

The action part is often difficult because there may be differences between professions, sometimes also within professions, and there may be political differences. Crime prevention is a highly politicised field, and local politicians have a legitimate right to interfere. Such divisions and disagreement make both prevention and intervention difficult, which has been shown in a comprehensive crime-preventive work in a suburb of Stockholm (Fisksätra) (Ringman 1997:99).

If the local analysis shows that the community has a real gang-problem or a lot of 'vilde unge' (wild youth) acting violently, one way to reduce local political and professional conflicts that might paralyse the local work, is to start with some goals that seems simple and logical. And – that most researchers, practitioners and politicians probably would agree on.

The means to attain these goals will sometimes be disputed. One solution is then to find out what one agrees upon, and try out these measures first. On measures where there is much disagreement, one can try to explore and discuss the strategy further, and try to reach an agreement through an open discussion. If this does not succeed, and this may often be the case, one simply have to live with some disagreement – and that one is implementing opposite strategies. Some conflict and disagreement may also be productive, since it probably stimulates a local discussion.

These goals are:

1. Limit recruitment

If the recruitment is lower than exit, the group or gang will dissolve. How to prevent recruitment – involves the whole stock of well-known preventive strategies. We will not go into them here.

2. Avoid public labelling of violent groups

To put a label publicly on a violent youth group very often will stimulate the cohesion of the group, and make the group more attractive for potential new participants.

3. Neutralise leadership

This is especially important when the group is rather small, have a loose organisation structure – or if the group is built up around a powerful leader. A leader can be the glue in some groups. The removal strategies can be suppressive through the use of heavy surveillance on individuals, quick prosecutions and placement in prisons or prison-like institutions. Often this will not have any crime-preventive effect on this individual, but it may have an effect on the gang he is leaving. This is a major point on intervention that Jerzy Sarnecki (2001) makes in his last book. One can also use more 'positive' measures to take key persons out of a structure. Some gang-leaders or key persons are tired of fighting and not having a chance to live a normal life, but they are strongly restricted by the role they have to play. They may answer positively to such an invitation for education or a job, preferably far away from the gang.

If the group is either big or heavily organised, to remove the leader, may be of little help. But some gangs are fairly small, and by neutralising the leaders by 'force' or by using the 'carrot', the gang may be dismantled.

4. Stimulate and support exit from the gang

Common gang participants can also be helped out of the gang with positive methods, by being offered job, education or military service. The problem of breaking the ties to a gang is that one breaks the ties to old friends. There is a risk of pushing individuals into social isolation. Those who leave such groups should be offered alternative social networks. One such alternative is building networks of defectors who can give each other social support. Tore and We have been somewhat critical to the MST-model working to get individuals out of a gang or criminal network. If one just take a single individual out, there will be a risk of social isolation – and that one virtually returns to the gang after the five or six month of treatment. One alternative is to work with dyades or may be triades.

5. Limit inter-group conflict

Scandinavian gangs may as American gangs 75 years ago, be born in strife and nourished by conflict (to quote Thrasher) – as we have shown in our report from Kristiansand. To have one local gang can be problematic, but to have two gangs constantly in conflict increases gang cohesion. It creates need for protection by individuals being near the conflict, and thereby increase the recruitment into the gang. Such a conflict will easily have fatal consequences, as we have seen in Oslo – and by the way also in Kristiansand. Taking the law into one's own hands is a dynamic element in a process of retaliation. We have seen from Kristiansand that the youth within the fighting groups have no confidence in the police. They claim that they have tried, but that they have not been taken seriously.

We know that it is extremely difficult for the police to build up confidence with groups like this. But we do not think it is impossible. The police here are confronted with a difficult and interesting development work on how to approach such groups both in acute violent conflicts and how to deal with their complaints on each other. We have experienced both in Oslo and Kristiansand that they may have confidence in specific police officers – especially within the preventive police. There is something to build on.

6. Limit the wearing and use of weapons and knives

Strong inter-group conflict stimulates the youth to take precautions. One precaution is wearing a knife – and to small degree also guns. In conflicts such weapons easily will be used. The involved youth in Kristiansand claims that the zero-tolerance from the police on wearing of knives combined with huge fines have had a preventive effect. But we know from Oslo that the steady police searching for knives is very annoying, and contribute to hostility especially among those youth with an immigrant background who do not wear knives. The police in smaller cities – like Kristiansand – have an advantage that they can search for knives on a justified suspicion because they often will know who is capable of wearing and using such a weapon. Some of the boys we interviewed gave verbal support to this zero-tolerance prac-

tice. It prevented them wearing and using a knife – and they knew that when using a knife in a fight they have no self-control – and that they virtually can kill someone. They do not want that.

7. Make children conscious of what honour and respect is
A hallmark with many violent youth groups today is that they constantly are claiming respect by provocative action, and that those who do not pay them respect are beaten up. What we see in some youth groups is not only a culture of honour, but a culture of 'hype-honour'. The culture of honour is well known among delinquent working class youth as described by Willis (1977), among neo-nazi gangs (Bjørgo 1997), and especially among immigrant youth groups. The type of honour being expressed by immigrant youth groups is different of that of their parents – though there are of course many similarities. The 'hype-honour' also reflects their underclass position, and exclusion from alternative arenas for more legitimate honour, and it reflects that they have seen a lot of American gangster movies diffusing such values. But whatever the reason – this is a very problematic type of action sometimes leading to severe violence, to a lot of irritation and probably racism among children and youth having been exposed to such provocations, but also by teachers, youth workers and staff in local shops and petrol stations.

In the same way as the schools put racism on the agenda, they should also put the concepts of honour and respect on the agenda. And may be one also should involve the parents in such discussions.

8. Offer alternative arenas for getting honour
Children and youth are contextual beings. A change in social context often will lead to a change in values, attitudes and in behaviour (Emler and Reicher 1995, Fangen 2001). The identity of a youth is flexible and changeable. To offer youth at risk alternative arenas for success is of course a well-known strategy, but is still an important one. And a change in activities that give new friends, often will lead to a change in behaviour. We believe that these are goals that it is possible to agree on. We shall not go into further detail on what to do.

Involving local politicians

Since there is considerable doubt about which strategies, programs and measures being effective, the scope for political discretion increases. The policies for integrating refugees and immigrants, social- policy, and crime-prevention policies are not only dependant on what is effective, but also on what seems *reasonable or just* – from the point of view of the ordinary citizens. One important objective for having a local political system is that lay people, politicians, shall bring these considerations on what is reasonable and just into decisions.

Another reason for having local politicians is to make decisions at all. The politicians play an important role making decisions when the professionals do not agree, or when there is no clear advice from the professional administration.

Crime prevention is a very complex business. Without open discussion where the politicians meet the arguments from the practitioners and vice versa- there is a risk that the solutions can be very simple. In a period where populist parties – especially in Norway and Denmark, are getting considerable influence, such a meeting and confrontation between professional and political points of views may reduce the danger of returning into simple and suppressive strategies. Without such discussions a populist policy might prevail.

I doubt that there in the near future will be possible to give the municipalities a clear research-based answer on how to solve gang-problems or problems with violent youth-groups. There is far too much professional disagreement, the cafeteria has already too many dishes, and it is difficult to be continuously updated. One answer is to organise good local processes – both in describing, assessing and analysing local problems. Strategies and measures should be chosen after such an analysis, integrating the local politicians into this process. A clarification of the gang- or bande concept is important in this respect. A loose group of immigrant kids, where some of them may be wild and violent, shall not be dealt with as an organised gang.

Towards more control?

If we shall sum up *Norwegian work* against youth violence (after having followed a governmental program on the issue) – our conclusion is that there has been a shift towards more control strategies. We do not believe that there are replacing more 'soft' and inclusive strategies, but there is more emphasis on 'grensesetting' and a 'konsekvenspedagogikk'.

- MST is a mainly a social control measure, teaching and supporting the parents to control children with serious behaviour problems. You have nearly a MST-team in all of the 19 Norwegian counties.
- The Olweus-program is now available for all Norwegian schools. This is also a 'control program' teaching the teachers on how to exercise their control functions.
- The worrying conversation warns parents that their children are in a risk position, and offers help to the parents. But the following up of this conversation may include a lot of helping measures.
- The parent groups established in the EXIT support the control of the parents.
- You have the firm 'control regime' in a famous Oslo-school. The school use personal contracts with the parents to attend to meeting at school. They use teachers and staff with the same ethnic background as the pupils, and meetings with the parents are held in their mother tongue. They have strict reactions on swearing and calling names. After three bookings for calling 'bad names' the parents are called to the school where the child has to tell their parents what they have called other pupils – which bring shame to them and their parents. But this 'control-regime' is coupled with a lot of positive activities – culture, sport, and leisure. We believe that within the leisure-sector the same firm strategy is used at Kvisten Youth Center at Nørrebro.

– The employment in schools of 'social intelligent male gorillas' – with physical strength and determination. They take care of aggressive children at school, and they help to keep intruders out of the schoolyard – coming for an act of revenge.

The Olweus project is evaluated by Olweus and his team at the University of Bergen and has shown good results. The MST program has shown good results in the USA, is now under evaluation by a research team at the University of Oslo. There is only anecdotic evidence that other measures have reduced the problems within the school. But the messages from the schools are quite clear – we have gained control and we are managing our pupils. There is less conflict, less fear and better learning possibilities. But if this will have a positive long-term preventive effect, we do not know.

Reasons for worrying for the future

I started this chapter by whipping the Danes for the moral panic on this issue. There is no reason for moral panic, but there is reason for worrying. The Scandinavian Society is changing towards greater inequality. We have got a new underclass of immigrants and refugees, living close together with Scandinavians with a heavy burden of social problems. Many of the children from both these categories are already lagging behind when starting school. They will have difficulties in succeeding in a society where economic success is becoming the most important measure stick. Criminal activity will for some be an alternative. This situation is gang spawning. We are pessimistic about our political ability and willingness to do something with these gang-spawning conditions. This means that we must be better in both local prevention and intervention. And to be better, we need more knowledge so that we can choose between the 'good' and the 'bad' dishes in the cafeteria.