

# **On the Margins of Life**

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# On the Margins of Life: Life Stories of Radical Nationalists

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## ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the life stories of four radical nationalists. It is based on life story interviews as well as information gathered through a year of fieldwork. This includes conversations with all forty participants of the Norwegian radical nationalist subculture in 1993–94, and in-depth interviews with all the leading activists, except one. Elsewhere I have analysed the identities of these young people in terms of group membership, ideology and gender issues. In this essay, I highlight the radical nationalists' lives prior to their entrance into the radical nationalist underground. I focus on the way they relate to common interpretations of them by outsiders, and the way they themselves argue in order to bring reason into their choice to join a group which is condemned by most people. I look for the common features we can find in these life stories, and in the mechanisms of recruitment described by these four men.

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## 1. Introduction

People ask 'Why?' more frequently when young people join radical nationalist groups<sup>1</sup> than when they join the radical groups on the left. This is easily understood as a consequence of general attitudes towards the radical nationalists' support of armed violence, and their use of the disgraced Nazi symbols.

There is much literature available on the backgrounds of people who joined the National Socialist movements of the 1930s. Some of this literature discusses recruitment to National Socialism in terms of class background. Other texts discuss the psychological outlook of the Nazi recruits, including the leading figures of the Nazi regime. There is less literature available on the types of people who join neo-Nazi or radical nationalist movements. This essay is an attempt to fill this gap.

This essay presents and discusses the backgrounds of four radical nationalists in relation to their peer groups, families and schools. It

examines the gradual transformation of values from the parents to their children and these activists' relationships with authorities. It also reviews the radical nationalists' interpretation of their own entrance into the radical nationalist underground movement. Examining these life stories makes it possible for us to identify the processes at stake when young people join one of the various groups of this movement. It is only when we study their stories that we fully see the complexity of the routes that might lead young people into an exceptional setting such as this.

The essay is based on material gathered during one year of fieldwork, as well as during life story interviews and conversations with four radical nationalists. During the fieldwork, I noticed the huge ideological, personal and social differences between the activists. I do not view any individual activist to be representative of all activists. The four individuals I will present here had all participated in the underground movement for ten years or more. During

various periods of their membership, they had all held positions of leadership or semi-leadership within it. Thus, they had ties to the core of the movement (one later left the underground). This means that they were among the forty most active individuals. These four men thus knew each other. They have been connected to various groups within the movement, such as *Riksfrenten*, the National People's Party, Bootboys, AAFA and Norwegian Front. They have also been involved in violence directed at refugees and anti-Fascists, and they themselves have been beaten up by anti-Fascists on numerous occasions.

## 2. Stigmatization and excommunication

Although the male radical nationalists in this study have slightly different family backgrounds, there are some aspects that appear to be common to most of them. To facilitate analysis of the particular social processes involved in the social careers of young people who enter the radical nationalist underground movement, I will give a brief introduction to several useful concepts.

Certain class backgrounds and local environments (for example, those marked by scarcity of resources and facilities) make the move into this underground movement more plausible than other backgrounds. Class and other structural factors condition rather than determine the move into the underground because this step is always made voluntarily by the individual. There must therefore be something that makes the underground especially attractive to him. As entering this underground movement tends to diminish such people's chances in the labour-market, we might interpret the step into this setting as an *alternative* career move.

According to Becker (1963:24), the notion of *career* refers to the sequence of movements an individual makes from one position to another. Career movements may thus include the step into school, the end of school or the entrance into a circle of friends. A career may also include the step into or exit from a distinct organization, subculture or work life. Furthermore, the concept of career includes the notion of *career contingency*, those factors that determine mobility from one position to another. Career contingencies include both external circumstances conditioned by social structure (class, etc.) and internal circumstances such as changes in the

perspective, motivations and desires of the individual. These internal drives are *conditioned* by external circumstances such as social context and environment. Thus, Becker's conceptualization of career resembles our understanding of radical nationalists as conditioned rather than determined by class and other structural circumstances.

Becker's concept of the deviant career might be combined with Goffman's (1963) concept of the *stigmatized career*, since entrance into the radical nationalist underground implies embracing a stigmatized identity. It is often the case that people with stigmatized identities do not choose this identity. Some blind or deaf people, for example, have been given their stigmatized identity at birth, as the result of an accident at birth or otherwise. In contrast to people who have a stigmatized identity without having contributed to this state themselves, far right activists choose their stigma to a much greater extent. People do not enter the underground passively.

The choice made is twofold. On the one hand, there is the choice of a lifestyle that purposely evokes strong negative reactions in others. Young people may therefore choose a loaded identity in order to shock and thus demand a reaction from others. On the other hand, there is the choice of a political or ideological standpoint, which is defined by Barkun (1998) as *stigmatized knowledge*. People who make such choices view the world in terms of strong 'us-them' categories. These categories make the world more predictable. Although there is an element of choice in entering the underground, a world view so fixated on 'us-them' appears to be more attractive to young people of particular backgrounds more than others.

To stigmatize is to ascribe certain negative attributes to individuals or groups on the basis of one discrediting attribute – a stigma (Goffman 1963; Fangen 1997b). Other people stigmatize a person when they reduce their perception of him/her as a whole person with many qualities to a contentious, subordinate one. When we talk of the radical nationalist, stigmatization takes on a distinct meaning. Such a person stigmatizes certain 'others' (immigrants, homosexuals or other 'others'). When he begins to use Nazi symbols, he enters into a practice condemned by most people and is thus stigmatized by people outside his own circle of fellow activists. Once others start to see him as a Nazi, they attribute to him a wide range of attitudes

and goals, many of which may be quite far from his actual beliefs. People ignore this person's other, more important qualities. He is thus *excommunicated* instead of included. Over time, he may either choose to exaggerate the content of his messages or to find sophisticated means by which to legitimize his views.

Stigmatization comes into play the moment the young boy first makes use of or manifests sympathy with racist symbols, beliefs or practices. He may sometimes experience his stigma as a positive quality. It is this stigma and the condemnation it feeds that provides him with a sense of standing outside conventional society and being within his own unique community. However, from time to time this stigma causes stress and depression. It is not possible to meet contempt day after day without feeling some pain. The pleasure of being hated is not a very stable emotion.

Young people who join radical nationalist groups are often confronted with questions about the type of traumatic adolescence they must have had, since they ended up in such a marginal and commonly condemned setting. When I carried out my fieldwork among Norwegian radical nationalists, I experienced these youngsters' various attempts to counteract these common misconceptions. They did not deny that certain aspects of their backgrounds might have led them into the underground. However, they were sceptical towards purely psychological, and especially psychoanalytical, interpretations. Some of them agreed that they were victims of the system or, more concretely, products of homes with few resources, where their schools and other authorities were unable to deal with their needs. What they did not accept was being seen as victims of their own suppressed emotional needs, suffering from the lack of a father figure. Neither did they want to be seen as lacking in self-respect as a result of their vulnerabilities. Such interpretations provide another way of stigmatizing these young people.

Stigmatization is related to another process: excommunication. This is a process whereby teachers, parents or others of significance exclude these youngsters (from the moral community) as a reaction to their disgraceful behaviour (e.g. violence, painting swastikas, teasing other pupils, etc.). Excommunication involves more severe processes of marginalization than stigmatization does. We find both processes at work in the lives of the radical nationalists I will discuss here. However, they

take different forms. For some of the boys, processes of stigmatization have been most powerful. For others, stigmatization has always been intertwined with processes of excommunication.

### 3. Four trajectories

#### ***Frode: 'I thought that it was tough'***

Frode grew up in eastern Norway. He refers to his background as a 'real working-class background, many generations of working-class people'. However, his father has his own one-man business; he could be categorized as belonging to the *petit bourgeoisie*. 'It's no big business', says Frode. It is important for Frode to underline that although his father has his own firm, it is a small firm with no employees. He thus emphasizes his low mobility status. During his years at school, Frode sometimes worked for his father at weekends. His mother is a data-processing operator. 'It's routine work', he says. Frode wants to be considered working-class rather than *petit bourgeois*. The reason seems to be that he rejected further education for himself. He legitimizes this choice by identifying positively with being a worker with statements such as, 'If I wanted to, I could have been where you are now, but I left school after upper secondary school'. In other words, he views his working-class status (in which he works as an occasional labourer) as a choice he has made freely.

Frode's current predilection for heavy drinking and a rough lifestyle is in accordance with the behavioural patterns of both his father and his grandfather. Frode says that when he was a child, his grandfather lived in the same house as the rest of his family. His grandfather sometimes invited Frode down to the basement, where he kept his liquor, and would offer him a drink. It was mostly Madeira and wine, 'stuff that boys of fourteen don't like', according to Frode. He said 'thanks' anyway, and drank the liquor. At one point, his grandfather commented on another boy 'not being much of a man' because he drank too little. In other words, as Frode understood him, his grandfather taught him that in order to be a tough guy, it was necessary to drink. Frode thus views being 'tough' to be in line with the behaviours of his father and grandfather. He views his 'toughness' as a quality he learned from them.

Frode labels himself a 'nationalist' rather than a 'national socialist'. Even so, he often gives Fascist salutes and paints swastikas. He

used to be a member of a skinhead group with a relatively high Nazi profile. Despite this, he does not want to be labelled a Nazi. None of Frode's relatives were Nazis. However, Frode's father seems to share some of his son's anti-immigrant attitudes. While Frode was still in school, he once brought many FMI (the People's Movement Against Immigration) pamphlets with him home to his parents and urged them to read them, which they did. According to Frode, they agreed with some of the content. Frode has an aunt on his father's side who adopted a girl from Thailand. Frode calls her 'such a little banana'. Neither Frode nor his father wanted to go to her baptism, because they did not want any contact with this part of the family after the Thai girl had become a member of it. Frode's father used work as an excuse not to go, because he often works at weekends. Frode's mother went. She said 'Somebody from the family has to go'. This little girl is now sixteen. She tries to speak to Frode on the phone, but Frode is rude to her. He calls her names, swears, and makes racist remarks.

Another incident that might illustrate Frode and his father's shared beliefs is a story he told about the deputy director of his school, who once took part in an anti-racist campaign in order to stop the repeated violent racist crimes that Frode and his comrades had committed. Frode and his father accidentally bumped into the deputy director later when they went shopping. They greeted him with ironic politeness, while the deputy director turned his back on them and hurried out of the shop. Here, we again see how Frode viewed himself and his father as being a unit in joint opposition against school authorities and their power to condemn.

We might thus assume that Frode has adopted his disapproval of foreigners from his father. Frode says that his father understands that being part of the radical nationalist underground movement is part of being young. He says 'Dad understands this skinhead idea, because he was young himself'. Frode's father was a scooter boy when he was young. The scooter boy subculture is one of the inspirations of the skinhead subculture. Frode, who is deeply involved in the skinhead lifestyle and its roots, obviously feels that his father was part of something similar. His raucous behaviour and excessive drinking also appear to be in line with this family's traditions. Frode considers drinking, fighting and being an anti-foreigner to be part of working-class behaviour.

There are elements of the radical nationalist underground movement that have more to do with National Socialist ideology and appearance, which Frode does not support fully. He therefore shelters his parents from knowledge of this part of the underground. For example, Frode's friend Rein dresses and looks differently, more like the well-dressed Nazi ideologist. Frode will therefore not introduce his parents to Rein. Rein also often talks a great deal and is unashamed about letting others know about his extreme attitudes. Once when Rein went to visit Frode, Frode sat looking out the window, because he knew his parents would be stopping by with food. He ran down to meet them, as he did not want them to meet Rein. In contrast, Frode's flat-mate Gunnar, who looks like a skinhead and is not particularly talkative, has met Frode's parents once.

Frode has 'no big conflicts' with his parents. He visits his parents now and then and he celebrates his birthday with them. On the other hand, he does not have much contact with his sister. She does not approve of Frode's former participation in racist violence.

Except for his participation in a local gang, Frode has not belonged to any other subcultures apart from the radical nationalist underground movement. During his school years, Frode met his friends at the gas station after school. For several years, they committed acts of violence directed at local immigrants.

Frode became acquainted with the right-wing underground when a leading politician of the far right made a public speech in Frode's community, and there was a party afterwards. Frode was especially attracted to the skinhead style. During the course of that year, Frode became one of the most eager exponents of skinhead style in the radical nationalist underground.

Frode got average marks at school, as well as some good ones. In 1993-94, he was one of the few activists who had completed all twelve years at school, not only the mandatory nine years. In addition, he studied carpentry for one year at a technical college. During his last year at grammar school he became more raucous and provoked the teacher by drawing swastikas on his exam paper. He says that he did it because he 'thought that it was tough', but today he sees that 'it wasn't'.

When Frode compares himself to those pupils at school who did well and who now are well off and live in decent areas, he does so in a sad voice. This often happens when he is drunk.

For example, he once spoke about a girl who now is married and lives in the most upper-class neighbourhood in Oslo, although she is from the same town as Frode. Today, Frode lives in a rural area near the town he comes from. He partly admires and partly envies the people he once knew who have moved to urban areas and are mastering city life.

Frode has worked periodically since he left school, as a baker, as a guard at concerts, as a carpenter, and now he works at a factory, cleaning meat. He mainly takes jobs that are paid under the table. 'It's easier to get those jobs when you belong to criminal gangs. Straight people like you don't get those jobs', he tells me. Frode implicitly refers to himself here as a delinquent. He is proud when he tells me of various offences he has committed. For example, he orders mail-order goods under a false name and does not pay for them. In addition, he receives and sells stolen property.

When he works, he earns a good deal of money, since he does not pay taxes. He only has short-term jobs, however, so he is unemployed most of the time. Frode wants to work and has tried to find employment (in contrast to some of the other radical nationalists). The meat-cleaning job led to his having to pay taxes for the first time in his working life. Unlike many other radical nationalists, Frode does not choose to stay out of the labour-market. Also in contrast to many of his fellows, he does not define himself as a rebel. He offers no objections to working for 'the system'. Quite the contrary, he is proud of once having worked for the 'terror police' (National Police Security Service).<sup>3</sup> This event occurred while he was doing his military service. He helped the security police during one of their training sessions. Payment for this favour was a hundred rounds of ammunition, which he was able to use at the rifle range. According to a friend of his, Frode respects the authorities. He is polite in his dealings with the police and says that he has met police officers that agree with his views.

Frode strikes a balance between loyalty to the authorities and conscious counter-reaction. The violence he committed prior to his entrance into the radical nationalist movement was directed against those male immigrants – Iranians – he saw as competitors at the youth club. In contrast, he considered the Vietnamese people in his hometown to be all right. They were friendly and did not invade his territory.

Many of Frode's actions may be viewed as attempts to retain power both to define and to

control others. When he orders mail-order goods in the names of people who have defined him negatively, he inverts their symbolic power and has a comparatively equal negative impact on them.

Frode was not stigmatized or excluded by his parents. Although he committed crimes that made the school authorities treat him with contempt, his father diminished the content of the authorities' view by seeing Frode's actions as linked to the actions of youth. Local authorities and other pupils at school labelled Frode a racist. His response to this label was to exaggerate its content, by shouting 'sieg heil', making grimaces and belching. He thus ensured that others would continue to react this way to him and label him. Frode was never expelled from school. However, he committed violent acts targeted at refugees and provoked the school authorities. As a result, he was excommunicated by means of angry glances from or the ignorance of the people in his hometown.

#### ***Gunnar: 'People always had something against me'***

Gunnar grew up in a rural district about one hour's drive from Oslo. His parents moved there when Gunnar was a child. They originally came from Oslo's East End. Both Gunnar's parents and grandparents came from that part of the city. During World War II, Gunnar's grandfather was a member of the NKP (the Norwegian Communist Party). Some more distant relatives of Gunnar's were members of the Norwegian National Socialist Party.<sup>4</sup> They were peasants in eastern Norway. Gunnar's parents vote for the Labour Party. Politically, his father does not approve of 'anything right of the Left (Party)!'<sup>5</sup> Gunnar's father runs a printing business, while his mother is a housewife.

Gunnar was a troublemaker at school. He says that he was 'not actually very bright'. He did 'all right' in history sometimes, but did badly at 'the rest'. He went to school for the mandatory nine years. During these years, he was a member of various delinquent gangs. He says that he was a rebel in different ways and usually 'did things people don't appreciate'. During the first, second and third grades he was a rowdy; he even 'stole a little here and there'. The pinching became 'good business', as 'people bought cheap tobacco'. The neighbourhood he lived in had 'a reputation for breeding rowdies', and Gunnar was member of a heavy metal gang 'with lots of belts, rivets and all that'. When he was in lower secondary school, there were 'older

people who feared us, although we didn't do anything to them'.

Gunnar never felt really comfortable in any of the groups he belonged to during those years, including a group of communist youths. 'People always had something against me', he says. On his own initiative, Gunnar attended the mass meeting in Frode's local community. He quickly felt more comfortable with the people he met from the radical nationalist underground than with those he had met previously in his local gangs. At the party following the mass meeting, Gunnar met Frode and they became friends. Frode later moved into Gunnar's flat at his parents' house.

Gunnar feels respected at work. He believes this is why he has only had to change jobs twice over a period of twelve years. His first job was a so-called 'job-for-welfare'.<sup>6</sup> Then one of the workers there quit and Gunnar was able to take over his job. It was at a factory. 'I have always been damn lucky with work', Gunnar says, 'Six months is the longest period I have been unemployed'. Over a period of twelve years, he has only had three jobs. He lost a job as a driver because he drank too much. While laughing somewhat self-ironically, he says that the year he had that job, he drank till eleven every night, then went to work at six in the morning. His driver's licence was suspended for seven years. Now he works as a sweeper. He has been doing this for the past fourteen years.

Gunnar is often the first one to go home after a party. In contrast to many of the other radical nationalists, he has a position of responsibility and he does not want to lose his job. Although he often gets heavily drunk at night, he always knows when to go home.

Gunnar says that his parents do not approve of his politics. However, they let him do what he wants. Frode adds that '... his parents haven't got anything to say about it. He is twenty-seven, after all'. At times Gunnar, or his friends who are visiting, argue with his mother. As Gunnar lives in a flat in his parents' house, his mother interferes in his life quite often. She phones him and asks, 'Are you sitting there drinking now? Don't forget that you're going to work tomorrow'. Sometimes she finds an excuse to go upstairs. Once she came upstairs while I was visiting Gunnar and Frode. She said to me 'Are you a racist, too?' 'No', I replied. 'She's writing a book about us', Gunnar added. 'A book about these boys!' She was excited and began discussing immigration policy. Frode disagreed with her views. He said

that the immigrants who came to Norway were people who had money and other resources and that they were well off already, whereas those who were in hunger and in pain did not come here. 'We should care better for our own rather than for people who move here', he said. Gunnar's mother argued that we have to take care of those who suffer, that we have to show solidarity and that the immigrants can contribute positively to our culture. She added a few critical arguments against immigrants, but her attitude was mainly positive.

The way in which Gunnar's mother spoke about her son was partly in his defence and partly critical. She made a point out of the fact that Gunnar had been the only one who had participated at a local demonstration on Constitution Day, the year before, without hiding his identity. She argued that if a person wants to take a stand, he should not pretend to have other views. If not, he is weak.

Gunnar is sometimes very rude towards his mother. Sverre, another radical nationalist, told me about one occasion when the boys were gathered at Gunnar's place and were getting noisy. Gunnar's mother went to hush them. Gunnar shouted at her 'Piss off, you whore of a Jew!' Apparently he is angry about his mother's interference and does not like her to tell him how to behave.

One of Gunnar's sisters has changed her name because of Gunnar's well-known association with the radical nationalist group. She does not want to be associated with him. He has another sister who is ten years older than him. 'She doesn't mind', says Gunnar. 'She is so old that it doesn't matter'.

An important part of Gunnar's identity is that he 'usually did things people don't appreciate'. In other words, he has been an outsider, an individual who has not been viewed positively by others. At the same time, doing bad things has gained him entry into a group that made him feel welcome.

Gunnar did not do well at school. However, at his workplace and in the radical nationalist underground, he is respected as a loyal person. He is not marginalized from the labour-market. His experience of being excluded has partly been a collective experience, as his neighbourhood was 'known to breed troublemakers'. However, he also recounts feelings of being alone within the collective. He says that it was among the radical nationalists that he first felt included and dared to speak his mind. For the first time, he also felt that he was respected. Gunnar has

not been excluded from his family. However, as he continues to live in his parents' house and thus experiences his mother's interference in his own life, he retains the status of not being fully an adult, not completely able to behave in the manner expected by the radical nationalists.

### **Rein: 'Predestined to be a National Socialist'**

Rein comes from a rural district near Oslo. He declares that 'I come from a stalwart old family of workers, a proletarian family'. His father is a carpenter and lumberjack by profession and has worked for the highway authority 'for almost thirty years'. His mother, who died of cancer when Rein was fifteen, had attended a business college in her youth and subsequently held a tradesman's license. 'Mum and Dad have voted for the Labour party all their lives', says Rein. However, 'politics was never a topic at home'. Rein's grandparents on both sides also voted for the Labour Party. His paternal grandfather was a caretaker at a home for elderly people, while his maternal grandfather drove a tank. One of his grandfathers was incarcerated at Grini<sup>7</sup> during World War II. Both his grandmothers were housewives.

Many of the stories Rein tells of his childhood and youth reflect how he felt different from others and how he met with strong reactions from others because of his appearance, statements and actions. In a letter to me, he wrote that

I always knew I was different from the other kids in the neighbourhood in some way. I was not exactly willing to travel two kilometres just to fool around playing football or whatever childish nonsense these kids did, and I had well-known radical political opinions – well, as I've said before: I spent most of my time by myself, not by being excluded but by choice.

Rein writes about himself that 'Subsequently, Rein was what the rest of us would have called 'a loner''. He began early to contribute actively to his being different. One episode seems to have helped to start his voluntary loner career by providing him with an identity as Nazi. This occurred when he was aged five. His parents gave him a police uniform, which he became very fond of. He consequently dressed up in his uniform and rode around on his tricycle with a poster with the word 'Gestapo' written on it, shouting 'siege heil'. This event seems rather astonishing, given the fact that his parents did not sympathize with

National Socialism at all and had not influenced him in that direction. He says that he had just read a comic book set in World War II. Apart from that, he believes that he was 'predestined to be a Nazi'. During his entire schooling he was known as a Nazi. He was the only one in the neighbourhood.

When Rein was in the fourth grade and was asked to write his name and grade on the cover of his notebook, he drew Adolf Hitler's face and wrote his name instead. In the ninth grade he wrote an essay on immigration policy. He got an average mark. In his own opinion, he was graded unfairly, because he believed he had written a good essay. He usually received very good marks for his essays. The headmaster wanted to have a serious talk with him after this, and Rein received a reprimand because of his intolerant attitudes. Rein says that he was an average student in other subjects. He did the mandatory nine years and then studied for six months at a commercial college.

Rein's mother seems to have had more of a counter-impact on her son than Rein's father. She disapproved of her son's attitudes, whereas Rein's father was less bothered by them. This is reflected in the fact that Rein put off joining the NF while she was alive.

My mother died of cancer when I was fifteen. This may be of interest to a psychoanalyst, because one month later I joined the NF.<sup>8</sup> I had an NF poster on my door at home. My father didn't like it much. But the Norwegian flag was all right, he didn't mind that. We don't discuss politics at home.

Rein entered the radical nationalist underground as soon as it was possible for him to do so. He was only fifteen years old at the time. Despite his youth, he was soon given responsibility within the NFP,<sup>9</sup> and obtained a leading position. He looks back at that period with pride but also with self-irony, as the party had very few members then and his high position did not mean much.

During his school years, Rein's strong interest in National Socialism served to make the gap between himself and others more sharply defined. The radical nationalist underground was the first environment in which he was surrounded by like-minded people. However, there also he held the status of being different, as he was not a rowdy or militant like many of the others were during the early and mid-1990s. According to one of the leading figures of the underground, Rein was 'never really part of the core'.



Rein has never worked except for the year in which he completed his national military service. He refused to enrol in regular military service, but completed non-military conscription instead. His reason for refusing was not pacifism, as he was very supportive of the military system. He told me that he did not want to travel to northern Norway and not be able to do as he pleased. However, there must be another formal reason as well or he would have been forced to enrol in regular service. During his non-military conscription, he first worked in a kindergarten and then in a prison. His friends say that he was less of an extremist during that period. According to them, when Rein does not work he sits by himself watching World War II videos and does not see anybody, except at weekends, when he visits his friends. Rein says that he does not want to work for 'the system'. Despite his attitude, he liked his jobs both in the kindergarten and in the prison. However, he was forced to leave both these jobs because of his expression of racist ideas. In 1993–94, he was not interested in further studies. On the other hand, if he could choose freely, he said he would study to be a biologist, specializing in measuring the skulls of people of different races. This statement may be interpreted as part of his rather satiric sense of humour. In 1997, after he had left the radical nationalist underground, he changed his mind regarding education. At the age of twenty-seven, he was attending upper secondary school, in order to be able to study Political Science at university.

Rein has written an autobiographical account of his time within the radical nationalist underground. There he tells how his father did not allow him to talk for long with any of the other radical nationalists when he called them on the phone. When Rein first went to meet one of the leading activists in the 1980s, his father just raised his eyebrows and uttered a 'hem!' He later added 'Now, be careful what you get involved in'. Rein has no serious conflicts with his father. On the other hand, they do not have a close relationship. Rein only goes home to celebrate birthdays or Christmas, and his father seems to be resigned to Rein's extreme views and his belonging to a militant subculture.

***Egil: 'He has always been searching for meaning and belonging'***

Egil grew up in a suburb of Oslo, often considered to be the suburb that produces the most welfare clients. Egil's mother was a shop

assistant, but is now on the dole. When he talks about his grandparents, Egil proudly says that his grandfather was a fisherman: 'He was a real worker, a man of honour. I'm proud of him'. Egil's parents divorced when he was four. Egil remembers that they quarrelled a lot. He has no contact with his father. He hasn't seen him since he left. At different times, he has lived with his mother, his grandparents and at a boarding house for children with behavioural problems. Egil says that his mother had many lovers and remarried once. In conscious opposition to the thesis of Nazism as a reaction to a failing father, he says that 'It's because I don't have a father that I have to look for a *Führer* (laugh). No, really, I'm against leaders and all that stuff. I trust my family, nobody else. They support me'.

Swedish film producer Susanna Osten made a film about a neo-Nazi who almost by accident goes to visit a Jewish therapist and channels his hatred towards his father onto the therapist. At the end of the film his hatred diminishes or vanishes because of the therapy. Egil dislikes this film intensely. Rather than others interpreting his views as being the result of repressed needs, he wants others to see them as a choice made freely. At the same time he describes himself and many of the other activists as 'victims of destiny'.

Egil states that his grandparents 'had no sympathy for the Germans during the War'. According to Egil, his mother is apolitical, but she shares some of his sceptical views regarding the authorities. This might be a reaction based on loyalty, as her son has often been at odds with the law. Egil says that 'I have always done what I wanted to do. Mother didn't like that, not that political stuff, although she sees through the falseness of the system'.

Egil talks of his mother and grandparents with respect. He does not say anything critical about them. He often points out that heritage is more important than environment. The environment he grew up in was not the best. Egil was 'in and out' of school and took part in the activities of delinquent gangs at an early age. He reports that such gangs were common in his neighbourhood. In primary school, Egil was 'considered problematic' and was therefore transferred to a boarding school for children with behavioural problems. However, he did not fit in there either. He says that the others teased him. From an early age he lived on his own. He slept in doorways as well as in a squatter's house.

Egil spent some time in prison after being

convicted for committing a gross act of violence. He later went to upper secondary school and took the *Examen philosophicum*, an introductory course in Philosophy, at the university level. When he was in prison, he did some manual labour. However, now that he is not in prison, he lives on the dole. He visits a psychiatrist so that he can avoid having to work, while still remaining on the dole. He says he does not want to work for 'this traitor system'. Instead, he gets up late every day, often going to bookshops to look at religious or anti-Semitic books. In the evenings he visits friends. He also reads, writes and publishes a fanzine with anti-Semitic content.

Although many young people are trouble-makers and participate in delinquent gangs for a period of time, Egil's life course is not a common one. His involvement in militant groups and actions makes his life story a contrast to more widespread tales of delinquency and mischief. His life-long rebellion may in many ways be seen as a revolt against the many barriers he was confronted with during his childhood and youth and his lack of a stable environment.

Egil labels himself a Christian mystic. He often speaks about his views as truths that are not for everyone to understand. He is fascinated by religion. He is familiar with various religions, including Pentecostalism and Zen Buddhism (despite his support of militant strategies and terrorist movements). Today he labels his former interest in these religions as 'one of my many failures in life'. He also uses religious arguments when describing Zionism and Jews as 'evil'. He often reads the Talmud and uses quotations as evidence of the perversion and destruction of Zionism. However, he sympathizes with Hinduism and says that the reason that this religion is good is beyond the understanding of other radical nationalists. One of Egil's friends attributes the unusual path of Egil's life to the fact that 'he has always been searching for meaning and belonging'.

Egil says that already in early childhood he supported all sorts of 'liberation movements', such as the RAF, the IRA and the Palestinian Intifada. He has considered himself to be a revolutionary since the age of sixteen.

I was a punk for a while too. I came into the punk scene at the beginning, when it came to Norway in the seventies. It was before the squat (in Oslo), but many of the same people were there. I was about fourteen. I know many of the *Blitz* youths<sup>10</sup> from that time. When I meet them walking alone down

the street, we greet each other, although we knock each other down at other times. I can do this because I know how to distinguish between a person and a cause.

Egil later met some militants and through them joined the radical nationalist underground. During his career within the underground, he also made friends with bikers and football supporters. For him, the most important thing is to live within what he conceives as working-class culture, which he primarily defines in terms of meeting friends at the pub and fighting in the street.

To a much greater degree than any of the other radical nationalists Egil was a trouble-maker throughout his whole childhood. He did not fit in anywhere. It was not until an older friend introduced him to a militant group that he felt at home. Here his behaviour was valued, in contrast to all of the more established settings (school, boarding school) he had been forced into earlier. In this new environment, someone like Egil could achieve status and a sense of honour. Egil himself interprets his previous inability to fit in as a result of his difficulties in controlling himself. He says that maybe today he would have been diagnosed as hyperactive. When he entered the underground, he was, according to his own account, socially inhibited and had almost no contact with girls. In his new environment, however, he achieved self-confidence and gained better social skills. Once included in this circle, one is accepted, no matter how insecure one is. Egil thus gained status as a militant. This led him to gross violence as well as aggressive ideology and behaviours.

Egil's story, then, is a tale of participation in delinquent settings, of being a school dropout and of behaving in a way which necessarily results in sanctions from society. Egil has not only been marginalized; he has actively excluded himself as well.

#### **4. The experience of being excommunicated**

There are no background factors (e.g. negligent father, divorced parents, being a school dropout, etc.) that are common to all radical nationalists. Neither are there any absolutes that inevitably lead an individual into the underground movement. However, there is one aspect that most activists seem to share. This aspect has to do

with the fact that joining the underground movement can constrain one's opportunities in terms of education and career, as pointed out by Bjørge (1997). Most of the young boys and girls who enter the radical nationalist movement have little to lose by taking part. This is because they were already in a marginal position before they entered it.

Excommunication can take the form of expulsion from school, being forced to move out of the parents' home, being ignored, being reprimanded, etc. In general, excommunication involves processes whereby an individual is excluded from and denied social rights and participation in the economic, socio-cultural and political life of society. The most serious kind of exclusion a young person can experience is the total exclusion of being imprisoned or put into a locked juvenile institution. He then becomes alienated from more conventional settings. Another process of exclusion commonly experienced by these youngsters is that of being on welfare. The state of being a welfare client means that he must be grateful for what he gets. He cannot demand anything because he does not contribute anything to society.

The four stories narrated here represent different modes of marginality and experiencing exclusion. Rein received reprimands at school and from his mother because of his attitudes. His behaviour cost him two jobs. Rein says that he chose to be alone because he thought the other children were childish. Rein thus viewed himself as a 'voluntary loner', not a victimized one. Rein takes on the analyst's role and discusses himself in the third person, saying that 'Rein reached adulthood a little earlier than the average youth'. He does not assert that he was excluded by others. On the contrary, he chose to stay on the fringe because he did not want company.

Apart from this, processes of stigmatization have played a prominent role in Rein's life. He was seen as a Nazi already from early childhood, and he saw how others reacted strongly towards him. Perhaps these reactions became their own incentive, no matter how negative they were. Rein's way of describing the reactions of others seems to confirm this interpretation. He is very good at telling funny anecdotes based on people's reactions to him. He often exaggerates how correct their view of him is, rather than justifying himself. He says that the fact that he was a loner was something he chose freely, rather than a situation he was forced into. He felt different from others and therefore rejected

their conventional ways of behaving. He voluntarily excluded himself from their company. He thus blames no one else for his marginal position. On the contrary, he reinterprets it as something he is proud of. In this way, his marginal position gives him his very identity.

Egil has experienced social exclusion to a much stronger extent. There were periods when he was unable to live with his mother. He was 'in and out' of school. He was placed in a boarding school. He lived on the street. He committed gross violence and went to jail. As an adult, he lives on the dole. Stigmatization has also been an important issue in his life, especially his adult life, where he has constantly been labelled as representing evil. The only place where he feels respected is within his family and within the rightist underground. From early childhood he learned that it is possible to gain some sense of esteem by behaving in a threatening manner. This has become his main life strategy.

In many respects, Egil's biography fits the story of the wayward kid (Stierlin 1974). His quest for importance points to what he experienced earlier in life: neglect and rejection. He comes from an unstable home. He has learned everything about the street. He learned what was good and what was bad, not at home, but from his comrades in various gangs. He has seen and experienced a great deal of violence and knows everything about surviving on the street. His lifestyle is a way of survival, a solution to his lack of relations with people other than those who form part of his street life. His morals are the morals of the street. In his eyes conventional morals are false and full of lies about life. He has succeeded within the reality of the street, but has no experience surviving in any kind of conformist setting. However, Egil feels a deep loyalty towards his mother and grandparents and views them as the only people he can trust, no matter what happens.

Despite his bonds of loyalty, Egil has 'always done what I wanted to'. This is identical to 'doing your own thing', which, according to Stierlin (1974:160-161), could almost be called the credo of the counterculture. As Stierlin also argues, to do one's own thing often implies that other people's things are hurt. The counterculture advocates an authentic, non-competitive life (as pointed out by Stierlin, but also as Egil describes it). The participants in the counterculture are driven to stand out and catch the limelight. To do this they need to have values and act in a manner antithetical to the



values and behaviour that bestow prestige and importance in mainstream culture. This is evident in Egil, who has earned deference because of his uninhibited front-figure actions in violent confrontations with his opponents. Another side of the coin of the worship of comradeship and togetherness in the rightist underground is the glorification of power and violence, as seen in Egil's identification with terrorist movements. Egil knows that everyone is afraid of him, even his own comrades. He is very quick to hit people who offend him. On the other hand, he is afraid of being beaten up himself and is therefore always on his guard.

Frode has experienced excommunication in the form of anti-racist campaigns in his hometown. He was placed in the category of racists and eventually chose to leave in order to live with his friend from the rightist underground. He has been to jail for petty crimes and has experienced the treatment of school authorities that tried to ignore him.

## **5. The route to the radical nationalist underground**

The four life stories described above reflect different routes into the radical nationalist underground. There is little similarity in the stories told by these informants in terms of how and why they entered the underground. This variety illustrates the problem of using simplified psychological explanations for radical nationalist recruitment. Furthermore, biographies of former Nazi party members show diversity rather than uniformity (Abel 1938; Billig 1978:46).

Rein contacted the underground on his own initiative, based on an already established ideological adherence. Rein suggests that a psychoanalyst would have interpreted his entrance into the rightist underground as a reaction to his mother's death. However, another possible interpretation is that his mother managed to keep Rein from developing his ideological interests any further while she was alive. It might also be that he waited to take the final step because he did not want to upset her while she was ill.

Gunnar also contacted the underground on his own initiative. In contrast to Rein, however, he was not previously a National Socialist. He defined himself as a left-wing nationalist. He also differs from Rein in that he soon became

part of the collective of activists, whereas Rein always saw himself as different from the others.

Frode was part of a local gang that collectively joined the rightist underground when a racist politician held a rally in his hometown. He went on to become a more active participant in this movement than the gang members from his local community.

Egil became acquainted with a man who often helped him find a place to live, and he was influenced by the reactionary views of this man. Through him, Egil was introduced to young men who were interested in weapons. Later on, people from the rightist underground contacted him because of his knowledge of firearms.

## **6. The quest for belonging, acceptance and importance**

The need to be noticed by others, to feel important and to belong somewhere is present in all four stories. Gunnar says explicitly that acceptance and belonging was what he was looking for in all of the gangs he joined. Rein describes himself as a 'voluntary loner' during the years following his entry into the rightist underground and speaks with enthusiasm of the confidence he gained when he obtained positions of responsibility within the right-wing underground. The underground made him feel competent. Egil says that he did not fit in anywhere before entering the underground. One of his friends more clearly addresses the need to belong and find a meaningful direction as being guiding principles in Egil's life. Frode was already part of a gang before he entered the underground. However, it was within the underground that he specialized as a skinhead. This made him feel he was part of something bigger than the local gang which, in the meanwhile, had become seriously stigmatized within the local community.

## **7. The experience of being underclass**

National Socialism has been analysed as a middle-class phenomenon. For example, Lipset (1960) points to the middle-class votes obtained by the NSDAP. Regarding the support of the lower middle-class towards Nazi movements, Lipset asserts:

The petit bourgeois of these sections not only suffer deprivation because of the relative decline of their

class, they are also citizens of communities whose status and influence within the larger society is rapidly declining. From time to time, depending on various specific historical factors, their discontent leads them to accept diverse irrational protest ideologies – regionalism, racism, supra-nationalism, anti-cosmopolitanism, McCarthyism, fascism.

Billig (1978:53) criticizes this argument because it rejects the fact that the Nazis attracted votes from all sections of society before 1930. However, the postwar National Socialist movements have mostly attracted people from the working classes. This is in line with Inglehart (1971), who maintains that the working class is likely to lean towards the right rather than left in advanced industrial societies. Furthermore, current analyses of the connection between class and racist beliefs show that such attitudes are most prominent in the working class. However, the problem with all class explanations of adherence to Nazism or any other ideology is that not all people from the lower middle-class or any other class become sympathizers with this ideology (cf. Brustein 1996). Class is therefore part of the explanation, but can never be the only explanatory tool.

Brustein (1996) interprets people's joining the Nazi party in the 1930s as a result of their rational calculation that the party could address their material grievances. He says that the Nazi party's success was due to its ability to serve as a reservoir of hope for people who felt injured. Brustein claims that other authors pay too much attention to the Nazi followers' *passive* response, while ignoring the point that individual support to the Nazi party was due to their desire to improve their material conditions. However, he agrees that the Nazi party did not offer solutions to all social classes. Thus, people from certain classes of society were more prone to vote for the Nazis than those from other classes. A theory about the social origin of Nazism must be able to explain why workers, independent peasants, shopkeepers, artisans and academics joined the Nazi party instead of other parties and why the Nazi party did not draw equal numbers of members from all social groups.

Many authors have seen support for the Nazi party as a protest vote, arguing that individuals voted for the Nazis because of a state of need and the feeling that the more mainstream parties had deceived them. Brustein (1996) argues that the Nazi party received so much support that it cannot be interpreted solely as a protest vote. According to Brustein,

proponents of the thesis of the Nazi appeal to irrationalism have ignored how it appealed to people's material interests and have underestimated the degree to which the Nazi party received support from people with strong institutional ties. He says that although the outcome of the Nazism, the Holocaust, was irrational, we cannot overlook the point that individual sympathizers behaved rationally. Rational behaviour includes choosing alternatives that appear to be relatively favourable in order to achieve certain goals. Seen this way, the collective rationality of Nazism is the result of numerous rational calculations made by different individuals. Because people's perceptions of costs and benefits are formed by the extent and form of the information they receive, their choice of political party program will often depend on their factual interests. Associating oneself with the Nazi party implied a high personal risk of public boycott. Brustein argues that an initial condition for becoming a member of a high-risk party is the belief that it offers solutions to people's grievances. He says that it is often supposed that members of extreme movements make up a distinct subdivision of followers, and that their fanaticism predisposes them towards physical confrontations and a desire for martyrdom. There is no reason to doubt that zealous and fanatical people were among those who joined the Nazi party. However, most of those who joined did so as a result of a cost/benefit calculation, argues Brustein.

This explanation might hold for voting patterns, but it is not sufficient to account for youths who enter a stigmatized and militant subculture. The costs of entering are too high and there are no material benefits. The benefits are solely on the symbolic level: honour, importance, excitement and a sense of community.

Class divisions are not as evident in contemporary Norway as they were during the period of high industrialization, and the financial situation is not one of decline. Furthermore, not many people perceive themselves as belonging to a particular class. It is therefore interesting that many radical nationalists stress the class to which they belong to such an extent. This tendency seems to match a broader tendency in contemporary Norwegian society for racism to be most prevalent in the working class. Pedersen (1996) shows that ethnic prejudice in Norway tends to be most overtly expressed among young people who have fathers who are manual labourers.

I found being working-class to be a central

part of the radical nationalists' group identity when I conducted my fieldwork. Egil once even said that 'we are the real working-class movement in Norway'. Subjectively, they feel working-class, and they link this sense of belonging to certain types of behaviour (drinking, street fighting, etc.) whether these patterns of behaviour are typical of the Norwegian working-class or not. Many of the right-wing activists viewed themselves as providing a contrast to an intellectually defined middle-class culture. They considered the act of analysing something psychologically to be typical of middle-class people, whereas being working-class meant acting rather than discussing and analysing.

Being at the bottom of the hierarchy is thus a strong component of how these activists view themselves. Many of them, like Rein, use the term 'underclass' rather than working-class to refer to themselves, to show that they define themselves as standing 'at the back of the queue'. From the outside, it may seem that they have chosen this status voluntarily. By saying 'I do not want to work for this system', Egil seems to refer to unemployment as a matter of free choice. However, such a choice might be a way of rationalizing their inability to fit in with work life. This seems to be the case with Egil, anyway. He has been a welfare client for a long time; the path into work life may therefore seem frightening. Working means beginning a totally new life, one which is alien to him. Gunnar is the one of the four young men here who says most explicitly that he was not bright and therefore had problems at school. His colleagues at the fire station, however, value him as loyal and responsible. Gunnar's competence has thus been proved by his ability to do a good job. These youngsters stand in contrast to young people who are upwardly mobile. They are not oriented toward the future, but rather to a picture of how good everything was in the past. Their essential faith in tradition, 'the law of nature' and working-class community of the past (Fangen 1998) and their celebration of rituals is understandable, to quote Bourdieu (1984:111), 'because the best they can expect from the future is the return of the old order, from which they expect the restoration of their social being'.

Their view of themselves corresponds with their being interpreted as part of a culture that lacks resources. In their eyes, being part of an underground movement and mastering street life is an alternative path to the more conformist

and boring route of pursuing middle-class careers.

## 8. Loyalty to parents

According to Egil, several activists are 'victims of destiny'. Dysfunctional families are common. However, the activists were sensitive to this issue and said that they did not want me to focus too much on private matters. Some activists made ironic interpretations of their own backgrounds that they said should interest a psychoanalyst. The way they made these remarks made it clear that they did not like being interpreted this way. Previously in this essay, we saw Rein suggestion that his own entry to the underground one month after his mother's death would be of interest to a psychoanalyst. On other occasions, he ironically stated that the violence of his fellow activists might have something to do with their inability to achieve orgasm, thus explicitly taking up the hypothesis of Wilhelm Reich. He probably had not read *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, but had heard a reference to this type of interpretation on some occasion.

The radical nationalists' rejection of or self-deprecating remarks regarding psychological interpretations seem to be partly a reaction to psychological interpretations of them by others (the outside world). They are used to being labelled; they have been called morally stunted losers. Others have referred to them as suffering from the lack of a proper father figure. Yet others have branded them as having behavioural problems and being sexually inhibited. Their rejection of psychological explanations of their orientation and lifestyle is a form of defence against those who condemn them. In order to defend their culture they avoid psychological interpretations.

The activists do not explicitly rebel against their parents. Gunnar is the only one who appears to do so from time to time. He seems to be unable to live up to the expectations of his family. However, he receives some support from his mother. She says that, in contrast to other rightist activists, although the family disapproves of his participation, he dares to stand for his beliefs without hiding his identity. The four radical nationalists do not describe their parents' individual qualities. On the contrary, there is a sense of distance in how they talk about them. At the same time, they refer to their parents and grandparents with respect and say that they do not have any major conflicts with

them. Of the four men, Frode is the only who appears to be attached to his father.

According to my interviews and observations, it appears to be a general trend that Norwegian rightist activists do not identify very strongly with their parents. They identify more generally with their families' class background.<sup>11</sup>

In 1993–1994, the majority of the activists were secondary school dropouts. None of them attended school in a conformist manner. Some of them provoked the teachers with their attitudes; others were troublemakers. I asked twenty-five of the forty activists within the underground in 1993–94 about their current occupation. Four of them were still at school, one was involved in further education, four were permanently unemployed, one worked periodically and the other fifteen held typical working-class jobs. Among them were two girls who only worked part-time.

Since childhood, most right-wing activists had been involved with gangs that had committed crimes, mainly lesser offences. Most of them had taken part in street fighting, but some had not. There is no pressure to take part in fights. There are other, equally successful modes of achieving status. However, most activists practice kick-boxing, paintball and weapons training. They say that they do so in order 'to know how to defend ourselves'. A few participants, including some of the four men described in this essay, have been convicted of bombing, murder, violence or refusing to complete their military service. As for racially-motivated crimes, they have made threats against anti-racists by telephone, painted National Socialist symbols on and written slogans outside the homes of anti-racists. Some younger activists have been thrown out of the army for making racist remarks. Crimes that are uncommon or even absent among the activists are all related to drug use due to their strong stand against drugs. However, a few of them have been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol.

Most of the boys were involved with other provocative or delinquent subcultures before they entered the rightist underground. Some of the skinhead activists were previously anarchists, either as *Blitz* youth or as punks. Typical of these boys is their great interest in specific aspects of subculture, such as music and style of dress. They say they feel more comfortable with the skinhead style because it is more orderly than the punk or anarchist style. Some of them

were thrown out of the *Blitz* house because of their racist attitudes. For some activists, joining the rightist underground may be seen as part of a life-long spiritual or ideological quest.

Some activists certainly have extraordinary life stories. Their participation in the militant underground movement from an early age has marked their lives to such a degree that the transfer into an established adult life would be difficult to achieve.

## 9. Lack of ideological heritage

These stories also show that, at least at first glance, it is not possible to speak of an ideological legacy from parents or grandparents to the activists. As we see, none of the four right-wing activists described here has grandparents or parents who belonged to the National Socialist party during World War II.<sup>12</sup> However, the activists themselves flirt with National Socialist ideas and symbols. Rein and Egil are both influenced by National Socialism. Egil, however, distances himself from the non-Christian elements of the ideology. Gunnar and Frode do not admit openly to being National Socialists, but they do use Nazi salutes in order to provoke.

This finding is interesting in light of the fact that almost none of the activists expresses any feelings of rebellion against his own family. However, as we currently see in Norway, people are drifting from the Labour Party to the anti-immigrant Progressive Party.<sup>13</sup> In other words, being a Labour Party voter, as many of the parents in this study were, does not necessarily mean being pro-immigration. Therefore, the gap between the attitudes of the parents and their children in this regard is not necessarily large. This point is even clearer when we focus on their attitude towards immigrants rather than on Nazi symbols and ideas. All four men regard the fight against immigration as their most important task, as do the rest of the right-wing activists in Norway. When we focus on this issue, we see that there is no conflict between the youngsters and their parents. Frode thus does not interpret his own violence, racism and membership in a militant group as being a form of rebellion against his parents. He perceives his own anti-immigrant views as corresponding to those of his father. By viewing the situation this way, he seems to feel less guilty about his actions. The fact that his father confronted the deputy director of the school, his negative view of Frode and his racist actions has particularly

served to ease Frode's guilt. Frode says that his father does not object to his participation in the nationalist skinhead subculture. In other words, when Frode commits acts of violence or calls people names, his father views these actions as adolescent behaviour rather than as particularly bad. Frode thus confirms his father's attitudes, although he takes them further.

## 10. Revolt against authorities

Radical nationalism might be considered a form of youth rebellion. A relevant question to ask is whether this rebellion is targeted at parents or at the authorities. In the presentation of the young men's stories above, we saw that they are not in opposition to their parents. However, they express considerable resentment towards 'the system'. All of these men are working-class in terms of their own employment histories, and some of them do in fact belong to the 'lumpen' proletariat (unemployed, welfare clients, etc.). Egil is an example of the latter. He explicitly labels himself as a revolutionary and regards all authorities with deeply felt scepticism, as he reckons them all to be part of a conspiracy. He views himself as a person who reacts against unjust social structures, not against his mother's failure to provide him with safe surroundings. He blames 'the system', not his own caregivers. He is very critical of the unequal distribution of resources (money, etc.), and is almost hateful when talking (and writing in his fanzine) about the power of middle-class men to define people like himself and his fellow activists. We see in him a reactionary disposition, which reflects the threatened future of people from his class. He maintains a sense of pride by idealizing the past, as seen in his conceptualization of the Viking era (Fangen 1998; Fangen 1999a).

Other activists, such as Frode and Gunnar, have a petit bourgeois background. According to Bourdieu (1984:456), the petit bourgeoisie typically have a deep-rooted respect for the authorities, which limits their revolt. We see this attitude most overtly expressed in Frode. He does not refer to himself as a rebel, and is proud about the time he helped the police security service. However, his attitude is ambivalent. He commits petty crimes, although he argues strongly in favour of law and order in society. Gunnar is ambivalent as well. He sets store by doing a decent job. He is always the first one to leave the pub on work nights. He says there are

many nice cops who agree with them on certain issues. On the other hand, he loves to provoke and scare others by using nasty symbols. As with Frode, his opposition is toward the mass movement. It is by conforming to the appearance and values of the subculture that he lives out his resentment. This collective form of revolt resembles the pro working-class attitude of both Frode and Gunnar. It is not by standing out, by being unique, that they rebel. It is by joining the ranks, by being one of many in the right-wing movement.

There are many reasons to believe that the resentment these men feel towards 'the system' is something their parents have passed on to them. Egil's mother has 'seen through the falseness of the system', Frode's father 'knows what it means to be young' and supports Frode in his conflict with the schoolmaster. Gunnar's mother is proud because her son dares to stand up for his beliefs in public. Rein's father does not care, as he 'is not interested in politics'.<sup>14</sup>

## 11. Conclusion

When young people enter the radical nationalist underground movement, they choose a lifestyle that leads to exclusion. Their choice leads to downwards social and *moral* mobility. This is in complete contrast to those who chose to become members of the Nazi party in the 1930s. For them, their choice meant that they became part of a mass movement, which soon achieved hegemony. However, the radical nationalists choose to be part of an underground, excluded from the rest of society.

We see that there are no factors that automatically lead an individual into the underground movement. Indeed, a variety of processes may be involved. Both material constraints and psychological aspects contribute to an individual finding a certain milieu attractive. They also play a part in what kinds of political beliefs he adopts. It is possible that psychology plays an even bigger role when the group one enters and the ideology one adopts is marked by hatred and stereotyping of certain 'others'. However, hatred and its accompanying attitudes are closely linked with social processes, such as exclusion and stigmatization.

As defined earlier, a deviant or stigmatized career consists of both internal drives that attract an individual into the movement, as well as structural or environmental processes that make the route into the underground



easier than it otherwise would have been. The radical nationalists say that their quest for importance, acceptance and belonging attracted them to the underground. For some of them, the underground gave them the warmth and acceptance they did not experience at home. The underground also provides them with a kind of pride (or, alternatively, power) and collective solidarity. It is possible that this new environment partly reflects ideals they have internalized at home. They therefore only have to take these ideals a bit further and make them more explicit. Some activists may resolve certain conflicts within their families by entering the underground.

The radical nationalists take part in an underground world guided by norms and actions, which are in sharp contrast to the norms of most young people. Even so, they also live lives outside the underground. Moreover, the underground opens up parts of the black labour-market to them. This is seen in Frode's narrative, but is generally known among radical nationalists. Some of them still have relations with other people (family, peers or colleagues) outside the underground, but many of them hardly have contact with anybody other than other activists. They therefore live solely in an underground world with its own values far removed from those of the rest of society. Thus, they have placed themselves (as they also have been placed by others) firmly on the margins of conventional life.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I call them radical nationalist rather than 'neo-Nazi', as some of them stay aloof from the Nazi content prevalent in certain parts of the movement. I therefore talk of the radical nationalist underground movement, which is made up of several groups. These groups differ in terms of ideology, strategy, militancy and style. The entire underground movement consists of about 100 people. See my more detailed description of this underground in my thesis *Pride and Power – A Sociological Interpretation of the Norwegian Radical Nationalist Underground Movement* (1999b).

<sup>2</sup> I have changed some of the information about them in order to make it less easy to recognize them. In addition, I have left out details that are central to their life stories, but which would make them recognizable. In particular, I omitted data about criminal offences, prison terms and the roles they occupy within the underground. This might be construed as a failing of this discussion. However, my intention was to focus more on their backgrounds than on their later roles.

<sup>3</sup> A branch of the police specially trained to deal with armed groups in tense situations.

<sup>4</sup> NS, *Nasjonal Samling*, the national socialist party that existed until 1945.

<sup>5</sup> The so-called 'Left Party' in Norway is a liberal party situated in the middle of the political spectrum.

<sup>6</sup> 'Job-for-welfare' is work that is paid for by the Job Centre. The employer thus receives labour without having to pay for it. The workers receive a very low salary, but this is better than merely receiving unemployment benefits. The idea behind this scheme is that the 'job-for-welfare' will provide the employee with qualifications for future work or, if his current employer is satisfied with him, with a regular job with his current employer, once the period of work sponsored by the Job Centre is over.

<sup>7</sup> Grini was a prison in Oslo where people working for the resistance movement were held during World War II.

<sup>8</sup> NF: Norwegian Front, an extra-parliamentary National Socialist Party that emerged in October 1975 and was dissolved in 1979. In July 1979 it was replaced by *Nasjonal Folkeparti* (National People's Party), which was dissolved in 1991.

<sup>9</sup> National People's Party.

<sup>10</sup> *Blitz* youths: young people connected to the so-called 'Blitz house', a culture house for left-wing youths. A minor group within this house is the *Anti Fascist Action*, a group known to use violence as a tool for fighting Fascism, as associated with the right-wing activists.

<sup>11</sup> The parents of most of the activists I interviewed in 1993–94 were manual labourers. The activists themselves were proud of what they considered to be the working-class traditions of their families. Since 1995, having a petit bourgeois background has become more frequent within the rightist underground. Leading figures in the underground still report that the parents of these young people from well-off families also mainly do manual work. For example, some have their own plumbing firms. Most of these young people view themselves as being part of the working-class culture, in contrast to a middle-class lifestyle based on education and office work.

In 1993–1994, the majority of the activists were secondary school dropouts. None of them attended school in a conformist manner. Some of them provoked the teachers with their attitudes; others were troublemakers. I asked twenty-five of the forty activists within the underground in 1993–94 about their current occupation. Four of them were still at school, one was involved in further education, four were permanently unemployed, one worked periodically and the other fifteen held typical working-class jobs. Among them were two girls who only worked part-time.

Since childhood, most right-wing activists had been involved with gangs that had committed crimes, mainly lesser offences. Most of them had taken part in street fighting, but some had not. There is no pressure to take part in fights. There are other, equally successful modes of achieving status. However, most activists practice kick-boxing, paintball and weapons training. They say that they do so in order 'to know how to defend ourselves'. A few participants, including some of the four men described in this essay, have been convicted of bombing, murder, violence or refusing to complete their military service. As for racially-motivated crimes, they have made threats against anti-racists by telephone, painted National Socialist symbols on and written slogans outside the homes of anti-racists. Some younger activists have been thrown out of the army for making racist remarks. Crimes that are uncommon or even absent among the activists are all related to drug use due to their strong stand against drugs. However, a few of them have been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol.

Most of the boys were involved with other provocative or delinquent subcultures before they entered the rightist underground. Some of the skinhead activists were previously

anarchists, either as *Blitz* youth or as punks. Typical of these boys is their great interest in specific aspects of subculture, such as music and style of dress. They say they feel more comfortable with the skinhead style because it is more orderly than the punk or anarchist style. Some of them were thrown out of the *Blitz* house because of their racist attitudes. For some activists, joining the rightist underground may be seen as part of a life-long spiritual or ideological quest.

Some activists certainly have extraordinary life stories. Their participation in the militant underground movement from an early age has marked their lives to such a degree that the transfer into an established adult life would be difficult to achieve.

<sup>12</sup> In Norway, only one of the forty right-wing activists who were active in 1993–94 had parents or grandparents who had been members of the National Socialist party (*Nasjonal Samling*, NS) during World War II. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, it was more frequent for young right-wing activists to have an NS background. According to one person who, at the age of 20, started the *Nordisk ungdomsfront* (Nordic Youth's Front) in 1969, half of the young activists were of NS heritage (Bangsund 1984). The underground then had much stronger ties to the 'old' National Socialists. This path was therefore more plausible than it is today, where the 'old' Nazis do not want to have anything to do with the militant youth groups (Fangen 1997a). Since 1995, some children with an NS heritage have entered the rightist underground. Even so, at present right-wing activists in general do not have close relatives with NS sympathies. In Sweden, by contrast, several right-wing activists have fathers or grandfathers who belonged to the National Socialist party during World War II (Lööv 1993). There are even cases of families with three generations of National Socialists.

<sup>13</sup> A restrictive attitude against immigration might be seen more as a common trend in Norway than as an atypical feature, considering that the Progressive Party, whose immigration policies are restrictive, became the second largest party in Norway following the 1997 parliamentary election.

<sup>14</sup> Among the forty activists participating in the movement in 1993–94, a few had severe conflicts with their parents because of their attitudes. However, it was more common that parents either chose never to discuss political issues with their children, or that they (more or less actively) shared some of the attitudes of their children.

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