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COMBATING UNCERTAINTY, COMBATING THE GLOBAL: SCAPEGOATING, XENOPHOBIA AND THE NATIONAL-LOCAL NEXUS

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Abstract

This article deals with scapegoating and xenophobic action. Locating and transferring blame can be tempting strategies in periods of political, economic and social disorder. In order to illustrate his arguments about scapegoating and xenophobia as reactions to political and societal uncertainties in a rapidly changing world, the author discusses recent outbursts of violence in Moscow, which bear this out with brutal clarity. Attention is also given to a less dramatic, yet disturbing, case of budding xenophobia in a municipality in southern Sweden. The author argues that Othering is an omnipresent phenomenon and that the differences between the two cases concerning distrust on the part of the majority populations towards marginalised Others might only be one of degree.

Introduction

Much current research tends to nurture the idea that the influence of nation states is overall on the wane, squeezed as they are between globalising influences and the concomitant greater assertiveness of local belongings. Ulrich Beck (2000: 14), for instance, argues that "globalization means one thing above all else: *de*nationalisation". Basically, I concur with this analysis, provided that it is designed to point out a discernible, long-term trend. However, what seems to be overlooked in much of the literature and above all in the general public debate, is that we may well be talking of processes that could take several decades to complete. In this sense, there seems to be a lack of awareness that the sandwiched position of the nation-state might in the interim give rise to rather violent recoils, as national identities seek to assert themselves and stave off perceived dangers. Jan Aart Scholte (2000: 160) is certainly one of those who displays recognition of the processes that might occur in this context: "[N]ations have remained buoyant and show little sign of disappearing". What has happened, he concedes, is that the bond between state and nation has loosened up to a certain extent (Scholte, 2000: 164). The state has not "withered away" as predicted by Marxism in quite another context, but it has "withered somewhat" (Waters, 2001: 158).

In discussing the effects of this process, Ole Waever and Morten Kelstrup (1993: 69-70) some years ago sketched a scenario where the national *states* are on their way out, but where national *identities* struggle to defend themselves from local, transnational and global pressures. As they (1993: 69-70) pointed out, "[l]eft behind we find nations with less states, cultures with less shell". This might add up to a situation where, for the first time in world history, national sentiments are widespread among sizable collectives of individuals, at the same time as there are dwindling numbers of territorial state frameworks to defend and promote them. Such a world would be volatile and unpredictable indeed, for we are here entering the realms of *terra incognita*.

Before we pass into this unknown domain, however, one might well envisage that promoters and defenders of the national rally to defend their cherished values against the perceived onslaught of globalism and its representatives. In Giddens' (1999: 20-35) vocabulary, our times are fraught with risks of a never hitherto experienced magnitude and variety. Globalisation, being perceived as a cause as well as a symptom of many such risks, seems to have prompted nationalists all over the globe to take reactive measures. "The more that distance and borders have disintegrated, the more national differences have seemed precious", maintains Scholte (2000: 164). The globalising world, he goes on to argue, "has left some people feeling torn and lost" (Scholte, 2000: 226). The consequences of such feelings of loss are well worth delving into.

Considerable attention has in recent years been awarded the so-called processes of glocalisation, whereby substantial effort has been spent analysing the global-local nexus (Robertson, 1992). My own preference is instead to study the somewhat neglected national-local nexus, where I assume national and local identity structures interact and reinforce each other. Together they combat the unknown, which one way or another is perceived as emanating from the global. I hold that there is a need to study these defensive mechanisms, as they might be expected to generate tensions and conflicts in the interaction between majority and minority groups. As Cris Shore (2000: 232) rightly admonishes, "[l]ike decapitating the mythical hydra, the break-up of old nation-states may simply replace them with a plethora of new nationalisms often more xenophobic and ethnically exclusivist than that from which they seceded".

Class-segmentation further complicates the picture (Erlingson, 2001: 142-143). Arguably, national elite groups stand to gain the most from globalisation. They are in a position to enjoy to the fullest the new possibilities offered by rapid mobility, instantaneous communication, and truly global networks and flows. Hence they become ever less willing to associate their fate with that which takes place within the narrow confines of state borders. They shred their previous nationally based loyalties and fend for themselves; a process which Reich (1992) has labelled "secession of the rich". The less well-to-do classes are left behind and are prone to feel it. They do not really have the choice of slipping anchor and leaving the national behind. Instead, it might be a natural reaction for them to more strongly assert the national belonging, and thus assemble closer together with compatriots in defence of the national and its symbols (cf. Bloom, 1990).

There is surely a danger associated with this class-segmentation. Embittered feelings of defence not only make for more ardent nationalist argumentation, but xenophobic views are also more likely to find fertile soils among those groups in society who in their daily lives have the least contact with collectives that are labelled outsiders and strangers (Hartmann et al., 1974; Van Dijk, 1987). As an added complication, relatively low levels of education are often regarded as factors affecting the susceptibility to accept prejudice at face value (Wigerfelt and Wigerfelt, 2000).

All in all, globalising influences on a world previously defined securely in territorial terms have already fostered considerable insecurity among many (Scholte, 2000: 227), and there are few signs that the picture will brighten in the near future. "The challenge for social research is to examine the intricate interplay of globality and territoriality", argues Scholte (2000: 60). It is my contention that it is recoils to the defence of the national against perceived Others and Strangers that is one of the most burning issues to be studied in this regard.

In the remainder of this paper, I shall address the phenomenon of scapegoating, as it illustrates how adherents of the national and the local can unite in the defence against forces perceived as sinister and foreign. In order to do so, I will first make some necessary clarifications regarding the related concepts of images, stereotypes and scapegoats, so as to develop my interpretation of their theoretical and analytical value. I will then turn to two empirical cases, both of which illustrate the dynamics of scapegoating: namely, the Moscow riots (referred to in Russian media as pogroms) that took place in late October 2001, and events indicating budding xenophobia in the Swedish municipality of Markaryd during the spring of 2002.

Images, Stereotypes and Scapegoats – Some Conceptual Clarifications

As argued in previous work on the subject, I understand images to be cognitive and affective conceptual lenses, organising devices and information filters. I thereby take issue with a prevalent tendency in the literature about images to define away affective factors from this theoretical domain (Petersson, 2001: 7). There is, however, one more element that needs to be kept in mind, namely that these images are socially constructed. Hence they stand to be deconstructed, reconstructed or reconfirmed in daily life, whenever fixity or change is called for. Theorists dealing with images within belief-system theory have often pointed toward the great degree of permanence characterising images (cf. Petersson, 1998: 42). They are construed as self-reinforcing devices that structure incoming information to make it fit with prevailing beliefs. Information that threatens to challenge existing beliefs is either discarded altogether or bent to fit with the existing body of knowledge. Images are thus considered to be "extremely change-resistant" (Elgström, 1998: 12) and are regarded as being "perpetuated" (Hirshberg,

1993: 78) on a continual basis. I argue, however, that the concept of images must include the notion of fluidity as well as stagnation, since there is potential for both.

As a matter of course, images of people with whom we frequently interact gradually become more solidly entrenched. We are privy to first-hand information on which to base these images, although, of course, we filter and interpret this knowledge according to our own pre-existing beliefs. Most of the time, we thus have a rather firm basis for our conceptions of the significant Others in our closest proximity. Regarding those of whom we do not have first-hand information, we are left to base our images on hearsay; that is if we have reason to have any opinion at all. There should be a substantial potential for fluidity in our conceptions of individuals and groups with whom we do not regularly socialise. However, human history is rife with examples of collectives of peoples who are looked upon with suspicion from the very outset, and who are not given a shred of opportunity to refute negative preconceptions about them. The plight of Jews and the Roma people through centuries of wilful maltreatment should obviously be mentioned here. In these cases, the images adhered to by the different in-groups quite simply do not allow for change. They have been frozen into stereotypes, comprising "beliefs about characteristics associated with social category membership" (Austers, 2002: 274). And this is exactly what I would like to posit here, namely that a "stereotype" can best be understood as a "frozen image".

It is reasonable to hold that there is a spectrum of Others relevant to identity construction, ranging from good and benevolent to evil and malevolent (Harle, 2000). Similarly, there is reason to argue that stereotypes come in different varieties, and that they need not necessarily be negative. What is it, then, that makes certain stereotypes stick? As argued by Gilens (1999), most stereotypes are acquired not through first-hand acquaintance, but are picked up through mechanisms of hearsay that is conveyed through relatives, the education system, or the media. In such a manner, individuals can subscribe to stereotypes about a group of people, even if they have never met a single representative of that group (Gilens, 1999: 161). This makes the prospects for the potential flexibility of images to be realised seem poor. Many media analysts, however, would argue that the media are not very likely to shape stereotypes *de novo*, but rather they catch on to and reinforce ideas that are already part of popular wisdom (Hartmann et al., 1974; Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1995).

To further narrow down the conceptual domain, it should be pointed out that enemy images, which are the ones predominantly addressed in the literature on images (cf. Harle, 2000), constitute a kind of negative stereotype. Not only are the Others in this respect not part of Us, they are wicked and evil at that. Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995: 152) argue that one can discern different stages in the media treatment of marginalised groups. Most crucially, they posit that initial relative neglect is likely to lead successively to the ascription of threatening traits onto the Others, which will then result in some kind of confrontation phase.

Consequently, an enemy image might prompt representatives of the in-group to take pre-emptory action and nip the growing threat, perceived as emanating from the Other, in its bud. However, an enemy image might well connote that the enemy is a formidable one with whom one would do wisely not to pick a fight. If this is the case, the image thus sustained is not prone to lead to confrontation. The Others who are perceived as weak, on the other hand, find themselves in a precarious position. I would argue that this is the case with individuals and groups of individuals who are subject to scapegoating. Conceptually, scapegoating can be understood as a certain kind of enemy image, and also a negative stereotype. Indeed, there may be a short distance between, on the one hand, embraced and reinforced stereotypes of this variety and hostile action that is perceived as preventive, on the other. Several externalities influence the eventual process of scapegoating, and I shall turn to the subject of contextual factors below. Suffice to say at this point, that given existing feelings of frustration, uncertainty and wrath, the presence of scapegoating phenomena might produce a highly explosive mix.

To sum up the conceptual discussion so far, I envisage images, in principle, to be socially constructed, but also under several circumstances as relatively impervious to change. They are most notably cemented in the years of upbringing, as well as through the education system and the media. Images that have become frozen in such a manner are here labelled stereotypes. When the universe of stereotypes is envisaged as a continuum, going from a positive to a negative pole, enemy images are those stereotypes that take on a heavily negative value. Finally, I argue that collective scapegoat images may be particularly harmful to individuals and groups perceived to be in a vulnerable position. It is to this kind of phenomenon that the remainder of this article now turns its focus.

Strangers and Scapegoats

The concept of the Stranger is hard to come to terms with, fraught as it is with uncertainty in all its aspects. "The ambient security focuses on the fear for personal safety; that in turn sharpens further, on the ambivalent, unpredictable figure of the stranger", argues Bauman (1998: 142). There is it a tendency for individuals to try to explain this uncertainty, or at any rate give it a face, by focusing on negative characteristics. These are often given prominence in the perception and assessment of the stranger. "A significant characteristic of someone classified as 'them' is to let [him/her] be manifestly different from the surrounding society, to possess a feature that stands out and which can be stigmatised" (Argounova, 2001: 48-49). The stranger is taken to epitomise all that is bad, inferior or deteriorating in society. For, if perceived problems in society are seen to be connected to common roots, the stress brought about by societal transformations may become easier to handle for troubled individuals. Only rarely are fights picked against looming windmills; instead it is much more convenient to turn on

groups that are already marginalised and excluded. As pointed out by Barber (1995: 182): "'Foreigners Out!' is an easier slogan to sell than 'McDonald's Out!'". Single, vulnerable groups are thus easy prey.

Scapegoating is, according to Tatyana Argounova (2001: 51) "the process by which bad luck, diseases, misfortunes and sins are symbolically placed on an object, animal or person". This definition can no doubt be used as a preliminary basis for further discussion, but I believe it has to be amended in order to be fit for the analysis of contemporaneous processes. First, the victims of scapegoating most often need to be referred to in the plural. Second, and even more importantly, individuals performing the scapegoating are often quite convinced that the scapegoats are actually to blame for misfortunes of different kinds; there is in fact little that is symbolic about the way the process is perceived on the ground. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, even though animals constituted the original target in ancient times, the scapegoating of non-humans is not a very prevalent phenomenon in the contemporary Western world. The provisional definition I propose would therefore be "the process by which persons are ascribed the blame for the incidence of bad luck, diseases, misfortunes and sins".

The term "scapegoat" originally derives from a practice described in the Old Testament. A high priest laid his hands on a goat that was chosen by lot to take on the collective guilt of the assembled people, and then let it loose in the wilderness (Mellema, 2000). In this way, people were redeemed of their sins, which were all transferred to the wretched goat. People witnessing the ancient ceremony could hardly have regarded the goat as an enemy; it was merely a vessel, an animal chosen at random to perform an important function. When we refer to the scapegoating processes of today, where whole groups are targeted, it is hard to reach any other conclusion than that the scapegoats are ascribed malevolent traits. Being connected with bad luck, disease, misfortune and sins, these collective scapegoats indeed take on traits of an enemy.

The groups selected tend to be simply available; they are also likely to have some noticeable basic differences, as well as quite probably being internally disliked from the outset (Douglas, 1995: 63). Like conspiracy theories, enemy images can never be falsified. If information is presented that indicates the correctness of these particular stereotypes, the preconceived unfavourable impressions are taken to be corroborated. Information that does not quite match or even contradicts the stereotypes, on the other hand, can conveniently be interpreted as affirming the cunning and conniving nature of the enemy. They are even devious enough to try to manipulate us into believing in their good intentions, or so the argument might run. And once cast in the image of an enemy, the very presence of the targeted individual or group in the society of the majority is quite simply bad news. "The enemy's visitation on our borders is tantamount to impending pestilence", writes James Aho (1994: 109). The scapegoat becomes regarded as impure, as filth and excrement that should be flushed out by society as soon as possible (Sibley, 1995; Aho, 1994). The sooner this is done the better, or else the health of the majority is thought to be held at stake.

Negative stereotypes and enemy images are highly instrumental in upholding the borderlines that help collectives of people to establish their group identities (Sibley, 1995). Most often it is far easier for a group of people to agree on whom is not considered to be one of their peers than to establish positive criteria for membership of the collective. Thus, scapegoats, like excluded groups in general, contribute to reinforcing the feeling of togetherness among majority populations. That is why, according to Girard, scapegoating constitutes "the very basis of both psychological and social order" (quoted in Aho, 1994: 116). Chronic outsiders, such as the Roma people, serve to knit the insiders closer together. Regardless of whether they have been depicted as exotic and close to nature, or have been vilified outright, they have certainly suited this function. "The Gypsies are nearer to the animals than any race known to us in Europe", decried a British chronicler in the 19th century, no doubt feeling himself very enlightened (cited in Barany, 2002: 63). Throughout the centuries, the Roma people have been stigmatised as "lazy, uninhibited, deceitful, dirty, unreliable, and prone to theft and other criminal behaviour" (Barany, 2002: 63). And, in the process, the in-groups have been left to feel more confident about their own cohesion and perceived excellence.

The potential for scapegoats to make majority populations aware of what unites them becomes especially marked in times of unrest and trouble. In the Middle Ages, someone had to be blamed for the scourge of the Black Death, and so the Jews came in handy. Similarly, stories tell us that if, during previous centuries, violent storms threatened to smash a ship at sea, any present women were unceremoniously thrown overboard in order to placate the weather-gods. One need not travel that far back in time to encounter such phenomena of collective guilt-ascription. News reports of events occurring in the wake of the atrocious terrorist attacks on September 11 in 2001, for example, included one disturbing item about a white, middle-aged American. In a blinding fit of rage over what he had just seen and heard on the news, he walked down to the local kebab restaurant and shot the Arabic owner dead on the spot.

It is a well-known phenomenon that in turbulent times, there is a widespread tendency to reclaim one's perceived roots, and to try to re-embrace more deeply entrenched group identities. Human history is replete with such examples. After September 11, gathering around the American flag turned out to be a more compelling alternative to many US citizens than associating with more amorphous communities connected to the life-style symbols of globalisation. As Naomi Klein (2001b) points out (in spite of her claiming the demise of identity politics in her best-selling book, Klein, 2001a), the US national flag rapidly overtook the Nike swoosh as the most popular and widespread tattoo motif among American youths in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

Having thus explained and exemplified scapegoating it is now time to end the conceptual discussion and turn instead to the two empirical illustrations of how a perceived defence of cherished values may bring scapegoating in its wake.

The Tsarytsino Events

On 30 October 2001, a lynch mob consisting of some 300 young people stormed a market situated next to the Moscow metro station Tsarytsino. Out-door vendors, above all those presumed to be of Caucasian origin (i.e. originating from the Caucasus), were attacked. The police arrived on the scene after a while and fired warning shots, but more than 100 of the assailants escaped, continuing on to the Kakhovskaya metro station where they targeted a nearby hotel. The attackers yelled racist slogans and assailed dark-skinned persons – Chechens, Armenians, Roma people, Indians and Afghans. As a result of the atrocities, at least 3 people were lynched to death, and about 15 people severely wounded.

According to initial reports the mob consisted primarily of football hooligans, who chose this way to celebrate a victory. Later, however, it appeared that the group included a hard core, consisting of ardent members of the neo-Nazi party "Russian National Unity". The resulting press coverage made it clear that this was not an isolated event. Similar cases had recently taken place in the Russian cities of Kaliningrad, Krasnodar and St. Petersburg. On these occasions, Roma people and students of African origin had been subjected to the lynch mobs' wrath.

As is common in entangled situations in Russian politics, conspiracy theories flourished in the public debate. For example, it was maintained that the domestic intelligence service, FSB, had instigated the pogroms to play off extreme nationalists and anti-globalists against each other. It was held the intelligence service cared very little about both constituted groups ("FSB said...," 2001). Most commentators discerned other driving forces behind the violence. Ramazan Abdulatipov, for instance, a deputy of the Federation Council (i.e. the Upper House of the Russian Parliament) as well as a former cabinet minister of nationality issues, cautioned that the events of 30 October were a sign of an impending national collapse ("...as Abdulatipov warns...," 2001). The actions of the lynch mob should be assessed as something taking place in the wake of post-September 11 anti-terrorist campaigns, he argued. The carnage was proclaimed to be an expression of Islamophobic sentiment, spreading like wildfire in the country after the terrorist attacks against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon ("Abdulatipov decries...," 2001).

The leader of the ultra right-wing People's National Party, Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevskii, came to the defence of the lynch mob. The actions were, he claimed, "a natural reaction among young people to the massive influx of non-Russians to Moscow" ("...and polls suggest...," 2001). According to the decrepit logic of such conspiracy theories, he was quick to discern the hands of several sinister enemy groups behind the immigration situation that had made the young people react with violence. It was time, he said, for "the consolidation of the Russian people ... to stop the expansion of Jewish pan-Americanism" ("...and polls suggest...," 2001). Similarly, the notorious leader of the so-called Liberal Democrats, Vladimir Zhirinovskii, tried to exploit the events for his own

purposes. The incident, he remarked, showed how necessary it was to "cleanse Moscow" from "criminal groups consisting of people from the south" ("...and polls suggest...," 2001). Without going to these extremes, but still hinting at the same problematic, Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov said that the terrible actions should serve as a wake-up call to Russia, because the country does not have "a normal nationality policy" ("Actions of young...," 2001). He was less clear, however, on what such policy would contain. In essence, these political activists transferred the blame from the perpetrators to the victims.

According to their arguments, then, the violent extremists had merely taken commendable action to defend Moscow from the influx of foreign elements. One of the participants of these actions, a skinhead, expressed himself precisely according to such lines. The attackers were simply "ordinary Russians fed up with foreigners", he said, going on to add that he did not care that people were killed during the pogrom ("...as Russian papers continue...," 2001). Appalling as the latter statement might be, it still did not match the shock produced by an informal call-in poll conducted by TV6. It revealed that 87 per cent of the Muscovite respondents actually supported the actions of the pogrom participants (Taibbi, 2001). One witness to the Tsarytsino events explained the rationale: "The Russians have to defend themselves against the unbridled ways of the blacks. They just walk about here on our lands, hands in their pockets, fiddling with their money" (Ivashchenko, 2001). It should be pointed out that 'blacks' is Russian street-level slang for people originating from the Caucasus. The eye-witness was seconded by another man, who argued that "it is necessary to apply a little pressure on the Caucasians, otherwise they become too self-assured" (Ivashchenko, 2001). Statements like these bespeak the popularity of anti-Caucasian sentiments, and may also go some way towards explaining the statements made by highly profiled, vote-maximising political figures like Zhirinovskii and Ziuganov.

Assessing Tsarytsino

As discussed above, enemy images and scapegoating phenomena do not suddenly arise out of the blue. To be sure, they are social constructions, but as such they are inherited from and even reinforced generation after generation. These constructs find their institutionalised expressions in legends retold by parents, the media and history books, and figure in habitual modes of thinking and reasoning. They have a cumulative effect and possess formidable longevity, due to perennial and repeated chains of reconstruction. As enemy images and stereotypes of scapegoating can never really be falsified, all evidence collected from popular wisdom can be used as corroborating evidence.

The fault lines defining the conflict between Russians and Chechens date at least 150 years back in time. Old patterns of hostility and enemy images prevail on both sides

and have been used consistently by the two in the current secessionist war. I have elsewhere recounted how Vladimir Putin's landslide victory in the Russian presidential elections of 2000 was due primarily to his renewed war effort against the Chechen separatists (Petersson, 2001). Prior to the elections, several concerns had been voiced about the pending political collapse of the country. It became a prominent theme, especially in view of the increasingly rambling and irrational statements by his ailing predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. Major topics of concern included the following: the increasing separatist tendencies in different regions of the Federation; the mounting and seemingly ever present political and economic crisis; the particular threat emanating from Chechnya and the northern Caucasus; Islamic fundamentalism; organised crime; and, finally, the perceived impotence of Yeltsin's political administration.

The ingenuity of the Chechnya campaign was that it, in one masterstroke, took care of all these concerns. It combated the regionally specific threat, countered separatism and Islamic fundamentalism, and indirectly dealt with organised crime, as Chechnya had for several years been perceived as a hothouse of mafia activities. It should also be recalled that the forceful war effort was launched against the background of devastating terrorist attacks on apartment buildings in Moscow and other Russian cities and towns during the summer and autumn of 1999. The campaign stood in stark contrast to the first unsuccessful war on Chechnya during the period 1994-1996, and above all to the Yeltsin administration's subsequent wavering on the issue. And, since Putin had at times been criticised for not having a proper political platform, or even a political program indicating his preferred policies for dealing with the perennial economic and social crisis in the country, the Chechnya offensive had the tactical advantage of buying him time to consider these matters at a later stage. In sum, Chechnya was perfect. And Chechens were the ideal scapegoat for welding the Russian people together. Without being entirely convinced of what united them, Russian citizens could at least be fairly sure of whom they were not to accept in their community. By transferring blame for all the Russian Federation's present ills on this scapegoated category of people, uncertainty could be reduced, and the continued weakness of the country-heir to the once superpower the Soviet Union could be explained. In other words, the situation was ideal for everybody but the Chechens.

Moscow – and Elsewhere?

The domestic Russian debate that followed the pogroms of October 30 shows that people originating from the Caucasus were legitimate targets, as they epitomised the influx of perceived "foreign elements" into Moscow. As a contrast to Zygmunt Bauman's (1998: 75-76) "far-away locals", who tend to be associated with "murder, epidemic and looting", the Caucasians are not perceived as being far away, but are rather situated in the midst of Russian nationals. That is, the strangers are already there, the frightening far-

away locals have arrived, and they could cause mayhem. Indeed, there are certain physical attributes that may help to tell the foreign elements apart from the majority population; they have relatively dark hair and complexion. The victims of the pogroms of October 30 were killed as a result of the ensuing deadly logic.

But are the Moscow events really good examples of the effects of the dynamics resulting from the national-local nexus? I believe that they are. It is however less evident that they should be taken as indications of popular defensive reactions to the effects of globalisation. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, Russians and Chechens have been at each other's throats for more than a century, long before it became *à la mode* to discuss the phenomenon of globalisation. And the world out there seldom offers clear-cut examples to be used in our textbooks. Nonetheless, the aftermath of the Tsarytsino events show that arguments pertaining to the added uncertainty of globalisation could be found in the rhetoric of Russian extreme nationalist leaders. So, although globalisation may not have been the primary driving force behind the grisly acts at Tsarytsino, it provided part of the context, and it also supplied excuses for the action. And this is alarming enough.

It is my fear that these kinds of mechanisms can be discerned universally. Othering is an omnipresent phenomenon, even though the Russian case brings it out with unusually brutal clarity. In order to bear this out, I will now turn to a decidedly less dramatic, but still rather unpleasant case of Othering and budding xenophobia. It is to be found in my home country, Sweden.

Even in Sweden – the Markaryd Case

Sweden is certainly not immune to tendencies of xenophobia. In a trial election on the Internet in the spring of 2002, high-school students all over Sweden had the opportunity to cast their votes. In the final analysis, it turned out that the xenophobe party, the Swedish Democrats, got 3.8% of the overall vote. Also, in the general elections in September 2002, xenophobic political parties gained considerable ground at the municipal level, especially in southern Sweden. The Swedish Democrats more than quadrupled their total number of seats won in municipal representative assemblies. They also made headway in the parliamentary elections and gained 1.4% of the total vote.

In the following pages, I shall offer an account of other disturbing tendencies at the level of municipalities in Sweden, focusing on Markaryd in the southern part of the country. With less than 10,000 inhabitants, Markaryd ranks among the smaller municipalities in Sweden. According to official statistics for the year 2000, 10% of the inhabitants were born abroad, which is somewhat below the national average. There are no permanent facilities for receiving refugees and asylum seekers in Markaryd, but a temporary compound has occasionally been put to active use. There have therefore been notable swings in the numbers of refugees that have been received. There was a peak in the early 1990s in connection with the wars in former Yugoslavia; Markaryd received

284 refugees in 1994 for example. This can be compared to a downturn in the late 1990s; the municipality received a mere 4 refugees in 1999 ("*Välfärdsdata Kronobergs Län,*" 2000).

There was another crest in 2002. After having been closed for 18 months, the reception facilities in Markaryd were reopened in January. The Swedish Migration Board indicated to the municipal housing company that approximately 200 asylum seekers were to be expected during the year. In fact, the numbers skyrocketed, and already in March 341 refugees had arrived; 191 of them were located within Markaryd itself, while the other 150 were located in another village, Strömsnäsbruk, in the same municipality. The municipal authorities were harsh in their criticism of the Swedish Migration Board, arguing that the Board had failed to inform them about the size of the expected influx.

In early January there was a notable increase in shoplifting incidents in Markaryd. There was also a simultaneous rise in burglaries of private villas. A newly appointed municipal commissioner, Mr. Joakim Pohlman, representing the Social Democrats, was quick to make a statement about the situation. He observed that there had been 7 shoplifting incidents reported to the police during one single week in January, which in itself was as many as there had been during the whole of 2001. Apparently, asylum seekers had been implicated in several incidents. The commissioner's conclusion was rash. The perpetrators should be evicted from the country without further ado. The inquiry into their rights to gain asylum protection in Sweden should be aborted at once, he remarked (Askemyr, 2002b). Other leading politicians in Markaryd were more cautious and refrained from backing Mr. Pohlman's statements. The only exception was the representative of a local populist party called the Alternative, who agreed that asylum seekers should be automatically evicted if they committed any kind of offence, such as shoplifting, during the time of investigation (Askemyr, 2002a). Among the public, however, several voices spoke out in favour of Pohlman's suggestion. Anyone displaying a "criminal disposition" should be sent back immediately, said the writer of a letter to the editor of the local newspaper (Askemyr, 2002a). Local merchants also backed the idea of the municipal commissioner: "We are quite a few who support Pohlman, but everybody is afraid of being branded as a racist", remarked one shopkeeper, who wished to remain anonymous ("Handlare ger..., 2002).

Local representatives of the Swedish Migration Board tried to respond to the discontent, and indicated the possibility that the length of inquiries be shortened for people who had committed serious offences while in Sweden. They were less sure, however, whether cases of shoplifting belonged to that category. The local director of the Migration Board made an estimate that 5-10 of the 350 asylum seekers at Markaryd might be suspected of having a criminal record (Sandberg, 2002g).

In early February, the situation got more inflamed. The series of burglaries and shoplifting incidents proliferated. Another municipal commissioner, Mr. Jörgen Johansson, representing the Christian Democrats, remarked: "These burglaries are a tragic fact, and of course we do suspect that they have something to do with our guests

here in the municipality. But I do believe that even the Swedes make use of the situation [with a low level of accessibility on part of the police]" (Sandberg, 2002f). Clearly, the public was alarmed. Disabled people were among those who voiced their concern (Sandberg, 2002f). Parents were afraid of leaving their children at home on their own (Sandberg, 2002d). To make things worse, the community started to sizzle with rumours.

Matters came to a head in mid-April, when an armed robbery occurred in central Markaryd, in which a local taxi owner was assaulted by a man speaking "broken Swedish" (Hartwig, 2002a). Additionally, during the months of March and April, the local newspaper had reported several incidents at the reception facilities themselves. One asylum seeker was threatened with a knife by another refugee after having tried to talk the wrongdoer out of occupying himself with stealing and hoarding (Asylsökande Häktades..., 2002). A female refugee reported that she had been raped by two male fellow asylum seekers ("Asylsökande Anmälde..., 2002). And in mid-April, one worried asylum seeker spoke to a journalist at the local newspaper explaining that he felt wrongly accused, along with most other refugees at the camp. He desired to work and make himself useful. But, he conceded, "I know that there are sex criminals as well as thieves among the asylum seekers" (Sandberg, 2002a).

The Community Responds

In the Markaryd case, there was a clear response from the local community. Its representatives certainly did not sit idly by, waiting to become victims of new thefts and burglaries. Several strategies were formulated to counter the perceived threat. Neighbourhood action networks were established to prevent and forestall burglaries in private homes. There seems to have been a discernible risk for these initiatives to turn into vigilante action; on one occasion the police informed people in neighbourhood community action that "violence might be legitimate, but you do not have the right to knock anyone down" ("Initiativ från BRÅ...," 2002). The local merchants convened and drew up a six-point programme, which they presented to the municipal authorities. The first point was quite draconian, as it stipulated that all asylum seekers should be forced to stay indoors between 7 am and 5 pm, and that they should be kept busy during these hours in different compulsory activities. "All of us have to work, so we think it is proper that those who come here have to do so as well", the chairman of the local committee for prevention of crimes argued (Sandberg, 2002e). "They are parasites using our welfare system without having to do anything in return. They should be kept in compulsory activity programs eight hours a day", he later remarked (...), and continued, "I get annoyed as I go to work every day and see groups of relatively well dressed asylum seekers just drifting around" (Wallgren, 2002).

It seemed to be of no avail that representatives of the regional police authorities pointed out that the crime statistics could be questioned, and that the total amount of

reported crimes had actually decreased since the corresponding six-month period a year ago. It also seemed to be of little use that, in March, the police authorities reported that six persons had been apprehended for a series of burglaries in private homes in Markaryd. All of these burglars happened to be native Swedes (Karlsson, 2002; Sandberg, 2002b; Hartwig, 2002b; "Inbrottstjuvar fick...," 2002). It was instead another piece of information that caught the public attention, as a representative of the police conceded that the shoplifting incidents could in their entirety be attributed to asylum seekers (Sandberg, 2002c). According to the tainted logic of stereotyping, all criminality was thus attributed to the refugees, even though only a fraction of them had been implicated in the crimes, and for the pettiest variety at that, namely the shoplifting and not the burglaries.

In this poisoned atmosphere, more manifest and physical conflicts were only to be expected. Sure enough, in early April there was a violent incident as Swedish teenagers started a street fight with immigrant youths in central Strömsnäsbruk. What started out as a minor clash rapidly developed into an all-out fight. It culminated with assault charges and police action with patrol cars from the neighbouring towns Ljungby and Kristianstad called to the scene. The fight had apparently erupted as two teenage immigrants were pushed off their bicycles by Swedish attackers. The single most violent act of the incident took place as a Swedish 18-year old rioter beat an antagonist over his chest with an iron bar ("Svenskar och invandrare...," 2002). Even though it is of course hard to prove conclusively, it certainly seems as though it was the general climate of suspicion that finally resulted in this outburst of violence.

Concluding Remarks

It is easy to see how local media reports like those in Markaryd can be taken out of their context and used by adherents of stricter immigration policies. They can be used to feed xenophobic sentiments and to legitimise populist policies aimed at further marginalising and squeezing out refugees. The media have a huge responsibility to shoulder here. Unless they do so, they can easily turn into peddlers of stereotypes and unsavoury enemy images that can never be falsified. When confronted with a barrage of negative reporting about incidents and crimes purportedly committed by asylum seekers, readers, who were convinced from the outset that the foreigners ought to go home, were prone to become even more entrenched in their views, and those who were ambivalent on the matter were likely to start to wonder (cf. Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 57). Maybe the overall lesson from the two empirical cases recounted above is that Markaryd and Moscow are really not a world apart. The difference in the general distrust on the part of the majority populations toward marginalised Others might, in fact, only be a matter of degree. The street brawl in Strömsnäsbruk and the full-scale riot in Tsarytsino have at least two things in common. They both testify to the importance of studying the national-

local nexus in the age of globalisation. In addition, they both indicate how scapegoating phenomena may contribute to the ever-increasing vicious circle of suspicion and violence.

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