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The Violent Finn: Cultural Images and New Research Directions

Le Finnois violent : représentations et nouvelles directions de recherche

Abstract: In historical criminology, Finland has traditionally been linked with the cultural area of Eastern Europe and its relatively high homicide rates. The reasons for violence are often linked to the culture of alcohol consumption and notions of honour, and there is even speculation that it might have a basis in behavioural genetics. But the main methodological challenge of violence studies has been to establish an effective link between agency and structure. This article discusses a survey study on serious violence in Finland from 1930, and draws on a case study on parricide and a sample of over 1,200 violent perpetrators. It aims to show that individual experiences can form a basis for structural analysis. The results suggest that those with previous convictions had patterns of behaviour and living environments that set them apart as a different group from others in society.

Résumé : La criminologie historique classait traditionnellement la Finlande dans l'aire culturelle est-européenne caractérisée par un taux relativement élevé d'homicides. Cette violence est souvent attribuée culturellement à la consommation d'alcool et à certaines conceptions de l'honneur ; et certains vont jusqu'à penser qu'elle aurait son origine dans la génétique comportementale. Mais le principal défi méthodologique posé aux études sur la violence était d'établir un lien effectif entre passage à l'acte et

environnement structurel. Cet article enquête sur la violence extrême en Finlande depuis 1930 et s'appuie sur une étude de cas concernant les parricides et un échantillon de 1200 auteurs de crimes violents. Il visait à montrer que les expériences individuelles pouvaient constituer la base d'une analyse structurelle. Les résultats obtenus suggèrent que les personnes ayant été antérieurement condamnées avaient des tendances comportementales et des conditions de vie qui les différenciaient des autres groupes au sein de la société.

Keywords: Finland, Early Twentieth Century, Violence, Homicide, Parricide, Living Environment

Mots-clés : Finlande, premier vingtième siècle, violence, homicides, parricides, conditions de vie

The “other” plays a major role in defining identity, and often neighbouring nationalities or minorities act as a mirror. One typical feature of Finnish national identity has been that the other is found within the main culture as well. Matti Peltonen has, for example, shown how the image of a drunken Finn was a myth created by the educated nationalistic elite and temperance movement, whose aim was to educate the ‘forest people’.¹ The problem of alcohol is often discussed in the same sentence as violence and high homicide rates. One of the most popular Finnish rock tunes of the 1980s is *Tuhansien murheellisten laulujen maa* [The Land of a Thousand Sorrowful Songs] by Eppu Normaali. The lyrics tell the story of a young man following in the footsteps of his fathers and resorting to alcohol and violence. According to songwriter Martti Syrjä, the band were making an ironic comment on the self-defeating mentality of Finns. Most people, however, took the lyrics at their face value to be a description of the way things were in reality.²

Besides the strong cultural connotations of alcohol and violence in Finland, the link between them is a statistical fact long known in criminology. One of the standard texts of modern historical criminology, and often cited, is by Manuel Eisner. He compares a large amount of data on violent crime from various countries from the Middle Ages up to the present.³ Eisner’s map of the homicide rates in European cites an older study by Veli Verkko, a groundbreaker in Finnish

¹ Matti Peltonen, *Kerta kielon päälle: suomalainen kieltolakimentaliteetti: vuoden 1733 juopumusasetuksesta kieltolain kumoamiseen 1932* (Helsinki, Tammi, 1997).

² Minna Nikunen, “Viimeinen erhe: suomalainen henkirikos ja itsemurha”, in *Suomineiton hei!*, eds. Tuula Gordon, Katri Komulainen, Kirsti Lempäänen (Tampere, Vastapaino, 2002), 269-291.

³ Manuel Eisner, “Long-Term Historical Trends in Violent Crime”, *Crime and Justice. A Review of Research* 30, 83-142.

criminology. Verkko linked Finland to the Eastern European cultural area with its high homicide rates. In the spirit of nineteenth-century moral statistics, Verkko concluded that there was something ultimately biologically determined in the Finnish national character that caused a weak tolerance for alcohol, which in turn explained the high homicide rates.⁴

The main flaw with Verkko's view is that his theory rests on the idea of a general folk character for the Finns, which is more a social construct created by the nineteenth century national revival movement than a sound scientific category. Interestingly, views similar to Verkko's have regained some popularity recently, when the ideas of behavioural genetics made their way into the social sciences. A British anthropologist living in Finland, Edward Dutton, speculated on alcohol-related violence among Finns in *Helsingin Sanomat* 2010.⁵ He concluded that in their weak tolerance for alcohol, Finns could be compared to aboriginal people like the Greenlanders. Dutton's views were understandably met with a furious response in newspapers and the social media, which no doubt reflects the sensitivity of the issue in the Finnish sense of national identity. Dutton's argument was criticised from both cultural and genetic perspectives. Nevertheless, there is no smoke without fire, and in 2014, medical researchers did in fact report that many Finnish perpetrators of violent crime carry a gene mutation that could be a risk factor for violent behaviour. The experts evaluating the results were, however, very careful and stressed that it is often misleading to explain individual behaviour, let alone that of larger populations, on the basis of medical facts alone.⁶

Perhaps it is hardly surprising that interpersonal violence has been one of the most studied academic topics in Finnish social history. In the 1970s, Heikki Ylikangas launched a new internationally oriented wave of historical criminology in Finland. In 1976, he published his study on knife fighting in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ostrobothnia, Western Finland, which was influenced by the functionalist sociology popular at the time.⁷ During the past two decades, interpersonal violence has been discussed in various academic contexts, and a general picture of its various manifestations is now relatively well known from the sixteenth century to the present day. The subject has been addressed both qualitatively in

⁴ Veli Verkko, *Homicides and Suicides in Finland and Their Dependence on National Character* (Copenhagen, 1951). On Verkko, see Risto Jaakkola, *Veli Verkko. Moraalistaatistikko ja Suomen ensimmäinen kriminologi* (Helsinki, 1986).

⁵ *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21.2.2010.

⁶ On discussion, see <http://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2014/10/29/finnish-violent-gene-study-experts-respond/>

⁷ Heikki Ylikangas, *The Knife Fighters: Violent Crime in Southern Ostrobothnia 1790-1825* (Helsinki, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1998).

cultural studies and quantitatively in historical criminology.⁸ Internationally there is also a vast amount of literature on interpersonal violence.⁹ Comparisons have chiefly revealed that Finland differs slightly from the overall European pattern of declining homicide rates. In the long-term, this development has been discussed in the context of the ‘civilisation process,’ coined by sociologist Norbert Elias in the 1930s. According to standard interpretations, the growth of economic interdependency and the monopolised control of violence by increasingly centralised nation-states gradually led to a decline in the violence of everyday life. In Finland, the overall picture of development has been similar to Western European cases, but there have been many short waves of violence like the rise of homicide rates in the 1920s, when alcohol was completely prohibited. Regional variations have been considerable too, which has cast some doubt on the general image of the ‘violent Finn’ and given it a somewhat mythical element, like that of the ‘drunken Finn.’ Indeed, the relatively high overall homicide rate for Finland during the nineteenth century was actually down to a large number of knife fighting incidents in just one single province (Southern Ostrobothnia).¹⁰

Despite the high quality of studies on interpersonal violence, there are some fundamental challenges that remain difficult to solve. Debates on explaining the reasons for violence are often heated and tend to resort to the nature versus nurture fallacy. Universal human nature is actually one concept now used to explain behaviour in historical studies – a subject traditionally concentrated on the culturally

⁸ Martti Lehti, *Väkivallan hyökytalo: 1900-luvun alkuvuosisjäymmenten henkilikkollisuus Suomessa ja Luoteis-Virossa 2001* (Helsinki, Oikeuspoliittinen tutkimuslaitos, 2001); Olli Matikainen, *Verenperijät: väkivalta ja yhteisön murros itäisessä Suomessa 1500-1600-luvulla*, (Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2002); Anu Koskivirta, *The Enemy Within: Homicide and Control in Eastern Finland in the Final Years of Swedish Rule 1748-1808* (Helsinki, Finnish Literature Society, 2003); Juha Rajala, *Kurittajia ja puukkosankareita: väkivalta ja sen kontrollointi Kannaksen rajaseudulla 1885-1917* (Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2004).

⁹ One standard, although not unchallenged, reference is Martin Daly & Margo Wilson, *Homicide* (New York, 1988). On more recent studies, see for example, Pieter Spierenburg, *A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from Middle Ages up to Present* (Polity Press, 2008); Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Harvard University Press, 2009); Jeffrey Adler, *First in violence, deepest in dirt: Homicide in Chicago, 1875-1920* (Harvard University Press, 2006); Martin Wiener, *Men of blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin* (University of Michigan Press, 2010); Richard McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland* (Liverpool University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Olli Matikainen, “Moralilastoston paluu? Prokuraattorin kesrtomusten oikeustilastot 1800-luvun puolivälin suomalaisen rikollisuuden kuvaajina”, in *Monelta kantila. Ilkka Nummelalle omistettu jublakirja*, eds. Jari Ojala, Jari Eloranta, Heikki Roiko-Jokela (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2010), 285-295.

specific.¹¹ Indeed, cultural relativism has recently been fiercely criticised, among others, by Gregory Hanlon.¹² In violence studies too, the concept of human nature has been popularised, for example by the cognitive scientist, Steven Pinker, in his best-seller *Better Angels of our Nature* (2011).¹³ Unlike many social and behavioural scientists, Pinker takes historical studies and historical evidence seriously. He is inspired by the civilisation process theory developed by Norbert Elias and opts for a positive interpretation of civilisation history. Pinker stresses that the generally improved circumstances for living have cleared the way for better sides of human nature such as empathy and have led to an overall decline in violence.

In the social sciences, it is challenging to establish a link between agency and structure. In a standard historical study of violence, the researcher aims to sketch the basic structures and patterns explaining the phenomena. In the case of a quantitatively oriented study, this could mean, for example, the construction of homicide rates and their comparison to economic variables like grain prices. A result of such study may be that the change in socio-economic structure affects human behaviour to varying degrees. Meanwhile, the qualitatively oriented researcher, more interested in the cultural meanings of violence, might spend time in the archives reading masses of court records. The qualitative researcher might thereby come to the conclusion that notions of honour shape behavioural patterns. In both cases, these structural researchers then pick an individual case study to illustrate their argument.

The risk of this structural approach is that the actors described remain marionettes within the structure. This has invited criticism from those who support the idea of universal human nature and argue that violence in mainstream social history is only explained by either the social or cultural. It is therefore possible to take a more atomistic point of view and focus on a limited sample of individuals. A clinical study of violent perpetrators may serve as an example. Both the social environment (childhood experiences), as well as biological facts (neurotransmitters) could be studied in detail. The limit of such an approach is that it is difficult to see how individual pathology can help us to understand violence as a wider problem in society. In other words, violence remains only the psychiatric problem of an individual. Criminologist Janne Kivivuori draws attention to key methodological

¹¹ John Carter Wood, "A Change of Perspective: Integrating Evolutionary Psychology into the Historiography of Violence", *British Journal of Criminology* 51 (3) (2011), 479-498.

¹² Hanlon, Gregory, "The Decline of Violence in the West: From Cultural to Post-Cultural History", *English Historical Review* 128 (531) (2013), 367-400.

¹³ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature. The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes* (Allen Lane, 2011).

challenges these new approaches face. He advocates social studies that integrate biological theories with methods from the empirical social sciences; he boldly proposes that crime in a modern welfare society is perhaps better explained by individual and biological facts than in most historical societies.¹⁴ The idea behind the argument is that in a modern welfare society, socio-economic circumstances are more evenly distributed. In these more favourable circumstances, those people who carry individual or (in some cases) genetic risk factors are those who are most likely to resort to crime and violence. Such a strong hypothesis is, of course, very difficult to prove since the effects of environment and biology on behaviour are in practice impossible to analyse separately.

Lost opportunities in a 1930 survey on Finnish violence

It is obvious that the nature versus nurture dichotomy is misleading when the focus should really be on finding the interaction between these two. Despite this common knowledge, there have been few attempts to tackle this problem in historical studies of violence. Of course, the historian has no access to the genetic make-up of individuals and access to the personal details of people in the past is always more or less limited. The basic idea to examine the interaction between individuals and their environment more closely is nevertheless reasonable and by no means a novel approach. In 1913, Professor of Criminal Justice Antti Tulenheimo published a report on Finnish criminality based on a survey of the circumstances of crime and its perpetrators in the industrial town of Tampere. He believed that “the bodily and mental character of a criminal should be clarified, and the way society has affected that individual.”¹⁵ Tulenheimo was among the first who introduced international criminological discussions to Finland. He warned about the rise of a criminal subclass and the political consequences if social problems such as the increasing numbers of landless people were left unsolved in Finland. According to Tulenheimo’s “gate theory,” the rise of criminality and the way that individuals became criminals followed a domino effect. In other words, a criminal career might start with petty thefts, but these would inevitably lead to progressively more serious crimes and end in homicide.¹⁶

The bloody civil war of 1918 seemed to fulfil these fears of the lower classes rising up and, after independence, and the fragile young democracy was under severe political and social pressure. The rising homicide rates led the government to establish a special committee in 1930, led by Tulenheimo’s colleague Bruno Salmiala

¹⁴ Janne Kivivuori, *Rikollisuuden syyt* (Nemo, 2013), 362.

¹⁵ Antti Tulenheimo, *Rikostilastollisista yksityistutkielmista. Kaikuja Hämeestä VIII* (Porvoo, 1913), 61-94.

¹⁶ Tulenheimo, 1913, 74.

(Sundström).¹⁷ The committee launched a survey on serious violent crime in Finland based on two large samples from the years 1904-1913 and 1920-1927. Information about the crimes and perpetrators was collected from the records of the Court of Appeals, which was in practice the institution that handled all serious crimes.¹⁸ The questionnaire followed the ideas represented by Tulenheimo in the 1910s. Theories of heredity, typical to race theory and early twentieth-century criminology, clearly affected Tulenheimo's conclusions when he said that the "misery of the crowds is not only the breeding ground of criminality, but also the ground of individual misery and substandard heredity."¹⁹ Of interest were, among basic personal details information on family, education, political activity, work, housing, previous diseases and criminality of the perpetrator. Unfortunately for later researchers, those collecting the questionnaires received many with questions unanswered, and so the survey was left with many gaps and flaws. Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn seemed to indicate that disintegrated families, poverty and lack of education went hand in hand with morals. The idea of a feedback mechanism between individuals and their environment was strongly present in the project.

Beyond the interests of research, the 1930 committee also had a political mission. The chairman of the committee, Professor of Criminal Justice Bruno Salmiala, was an active right-wing nationalist politician. The committee was interested in the possible effect of political agitation behind acts of violence. However due to lack of information, the collectors were usually forced to leave the parts on perpetrator's ideology or political activity blank. This was the case at least in the 1904 – 1913 sample studied for this article. Strong evidence on the connection between political agitation and interpersonal violence was, however, found in the fact that the survey recognised some notorious Red Guard leaders who already had criminal history before civil war of 1918. Shoemaker Kalle Henrik Tanner ordered the executions of prisoners when he was the chairman of a Revolutionary Court in Toijala 1918, and was finally executed himself at the hands of Whites when they took revenge. His early life remains relatively unknown, but what we do know is that Tanner stabbed his fellow inmate in Turku prison 1904, where he was convicted for several crimes of theft and burglary. He was described in the questionnaire as a "degenerate" person with "unnatural sexual instincts."²⁰

¹⁷ See Jussi Pajuoja, "Suomalaisen väkivallanaallon huippu 1920- ja 1930-luvulla", in *Oikeutta ja historiaa Heikki Ylikankaan 50-vuotisjublakirja*, eds. Lars D. Eriksson et al. (Porvoo, 1987), 173-185.

¹⁸ Komiteamietintö, 1931 numero 16. *Tutkimus rikollisuuden lisääntymisen syistä*; Lehti, 2001, 38-40.

¹⁹ Tulenheimo, 1913, 68.

²⁰ Kaarle Henrik Kaarlenpoika Tanner. The original questionnaire is located in Finnish National Archives, according to the name of the perpetrator: Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives)

Salmiala's committee published its report in 1931 and produced a mass of descriptive statistics, but the report was uninspiring. The original idea of finding the interactive mechanisms behind violence were not adequately analysed, and according to the report, the only "certain" fact seemed to be that rising homicide rates were in one way or another linked to alcohol.²¹ One of the committee members, Viljo Hytönen, was a leading temperance movement activist; and at the time of the report, opposition to the unpopular prohibition law – which had clearly added to the rise in criminality – had reached a climax.²² Perhaps for these reasons, alcohol overshadowed other social aspects and indeed has continued to do so in later Finnish discussions on interpersonal violence.

Martti Lehti is one of the few who has analysed material from the 1930 survey in his dissertation on homicide in Finland and Estonia; he presents a sound statistical analysis of the information that the survey actually does provide, for example, on detailed homicide rates and their regional variation. With this, Lehti then squarely addresses the main question that the 1930 committee was unable to answer in its report, concluding that the wave of violence Finland experienced during the first decades of the twentieth century was the result of "rapid social and economic change, and the pressures it put on young people in the form of uncertain prospects for the future, and a new set of competition-oriented values."²³ This conclusion emphasizes, once again, the idea of interaction between structure and agency. But how can such a macro-level interpretation be verified on an individual level and prove that structural change is the principal factor affecting agency?

Parricide as a case study

To render agency more visible, we need to narrow the scope and take a bottom-up view from a particular case. Parricide is rare and a seemingly marginal kind of homicide. In the 1904-1913 sample there were 16 persons (1.5% of all homicides) convicted for killing a parent (father, mother, step-parents, or in-laws). The sample is thus merely the tip of the iceberg, but nevertheless these cases are noteworthy for illustrating the typical social, judicial and media context of homicide in early twentieth-century Finland.

With the exception of some spectacular case studies, like that by Michel Foucault of Pierre Rivière in nineteenth-century France, violence between adult

Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto; On Tanner in civil war, see Marko Tikka, *Terrorin aika. Ajatus kirjat* (Jyväskylä, 2007).

²¹ Komiteamietintö, 1931.

²² Viljo Hytönen, *Suomen raittiusliikkeen historia* (Porvoo, 1930).

²³ Lehti, 2001, 395.

relatives has raised relatively little attention in the historical study of violence.²⁴ At first sight, this seems to be a marginal phenomenon, which has usually been linked to non-modern societies or abnormality.²⁵ From the modern point of view, Kathleen Heide has identified three types of parricidal offender: the seriously mentally ill, the abused, and antisocial personalities.²⁶

It is true that seriously mentally ill offenders do figure heavily in the cases of parricide, and this was probably accentuated by the fact that in early twentieth-century rural Finland, the mentally ill were often living with their families. Of the *non compos mentis* offenders, 32-year-old Kalle L., having killed his mother in Rantasalmi, could not understand his act or make a distinction between right and wrong. He had been in a “lunatic asylum” earlier on, but “for some reason” he was sent back home.²⁷ Meanwhile, 43-year-old Juho R., from Himanka, had suffered serious brain damage at the age of three, when he nearly drowned. He was described as a deaf mute, who could reach a state of “pathological rage.”²⁸ The description of the act of killing his mother was so macabre that it seemed beyond any doubt that he was irresponsible for his actions. These cases therefore did not usually attract public attention, since they could not be connected to the wider issues of society and morals. One particularly shocking case of filicide from 1912 required explanation, however. It took place in Kesälahti, when Aapeli J. (age 28) killed his father and his brother’s wife and two small children with an axe. According to psychiatrist Christian Sibelius, brother of the famous composer Jean Sibelius, the offender was suffering from *dementia praecox*, a psychotic disorder widely discussed in medical journals at the time. Aapeli J. was thus declared “insane” and committed to an asylum for being “very dangerous to the environment.” The local newspaper, *Karjalatar*, however, explained the tragedy more heatedly in religious tones; for not only was the traditional Lutheran hegemony being seriously challenged in the early twentieth century, but the north-west district of Lake Ladoga was also caught up in

²⁴ Michel Foucault (ed.), *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...: a case of Parricide in the 19th century* (University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

²⁵ Jonas Liljeqvist, “The Child who strikes his own father or mother shall be put to death’. Assault and verbal abuse of parents in Swedish and Finnish Counties 1745-1754”, in *Morality, Crime and Social Control in Europe 1500-1900*, eds. Satu Lidman & Olli Matikainen (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2014), 19 - 42.

²⁶ Kathleen Heide, *Understanding Parricide: when Sons and Daughters Kill Parents* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁷ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto. Kalle L.

²⁸ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto. Juho R.

various religious movements. According to the *Karjalatar*, the sermons of lay readers on sinners and damnation turned Aapeli J. to “act like a beast.”²⁹

A more general observation from these cases is that events followed a similar pattern to that of violence between non-relatives. For example, a drunken brawl over a seemingly minor matter was common among male relatives. Usually the situational context for violence between close relatives was private, but brawls also occurred in public drinking situations. In rural Suojärvi (1909), for instance, Feodor K. lethally stabbed his father after a disagreement over who was paying for alcoholic drinks.³⁰ The sentence was six years imprisonment, as it was for a similar case in the more urban context of Helsinki, between Einar L. and his father in 1912.³¹

More severe sentences were handed down if economic motives were involved, however, which was often the case in violence between close relations. For instance 32-year-old Wilhelmia N. from Uusikirkko was judged harshly by both the judicial system and public opinion for killing her father, a local farmer called Henteri H. He had been planning a new marriage, which caused tension in the household and threatened to complicate the inheritance. Wilhelmia hit her father lethally with a wooden stake, and in court she tried to explain that everything happened suddenly and without premeditation (“in one swish”). The *Karjala* described how the poor wife was crying after her husband and children, when she was eventually taken away to prison “probably forever,” as she received a life sentence for murder.³² Another life sentence was passed in 1908, when Felix B. hired a poor worker to kill his father, who was a wealthy estate owner. They had had disagreements and the son clearly wanted his father’s wealth. But because there was a highly-charged political atmosphere in Finland at the time, many newspapers speculated that the murder was a political one, and socialist agitation was seen to be the cause.³³

One violent offender who was not typical was 39-year-old musician Adolf I. from Helsinki. He was married, belonged to at least the lower middle-class, and was one of the few perpetrators who had more than an elementary school education. However, there did seem to be things wrong in his life, as previous sentences for drunkenness and fraud showed. He was living in the household of his mother-in-law Edla ●, who was running a small milk shop. Adolf I. was described as a “drinker,” who took a knife to his mother in-law when she accused him of being idle.

²⁹ *Karjalatar*, 1.8.1912.

³⁰ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Feodor K.

³¹ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Einar L.

³² *Karjala*, 20.6.1907.

³³ *Työmies*, 8.7.1908.

Fortunately the victim survived, and the offender got off with a two-year sentence.³⁴ A household with several generations under the same roof could clearly create tensions, especially when economic worries and extensive use of alcohol came into the picture. Meanwhile in 1907, during a drinking party in Rauma, things got confusing when, in a fight over money, Lovisa S. joined forces with her son-in-law Karl R. against her husband. Beating the husband to death earnt the wife a three-year sentence and the son-in-law two years.³⁵

In another case, tenant Juho L. from Lieto got involved with an “unpleasant party” of “drunks and tramps,” and with these new friends he aimed to make off with property from his family’s cottage one Saturday evening in December, 1910. His wife and sons refused to give up the family belongings, until at one point he got shot by his 20-year-old son Johannes L. with a shotgun. Johannes had been treated in hospital some time earlier for his “weak nerves,” and was diagnosed with a disease known as *dystrophia muscularum progressiva*, which was seen to lead to weakened body functions. The Court therefore judged him to be only partially responsible for his crime, and Johannes L. was condemned to a year and a half in prison. As usual, newspaper coverage drew strongly moralistic conclusions, but in this case the local *Turun Sanomat* was sympathetic to the offender, who had been “forced” to shoot his lowly father in defence of home and property.³⁶

Youth problems and juvenile violence was a discussion raised in many larger cities and towns after 1900. This reflects the demographic change occurring at the time, along with increased urbanization and a breakdown in old forms of authority.³⁷ Two similar cases of juvenile violence happened at Christmas in 1911. Single mother Ada R. was hit by her 16-year-old son Eino with an axe, after she accused him of drinking on Christmas eve in Helsinki. She survived, but Eino R. was given a 6-year prison sentence, which was severe for attempted manslaughter.³⁸ Two days later in Tampere, 17-year-old Kalle S. arrived home from his work at the local shoe factory and began criticising his mother for making the evening meal too slowly. A fight ensued with his father, whom he eventually stabbed to death, and Kalle received 4.5 years of prison. As a mitigating factor, the perpetrator had in his rage acted “without full reason,” but the local newspaper *Aamulehti* was quick to take a moralistic and patriarchal point of view, noting that Kalle S. already had an antisocial reputation and

³⁴ Hufvudstadsbladet, 19.2.1905.

³⁵ *Länsi-Suomi*, 14.4.1908.

³⁶ *Turun Sanomat*, 20.12.1910.

³⁷ Kari Koskela, *Huligaanit. Katuelämää Sörkkässä suurlakosta sisällissotaan* (SKS Helsinki, 2002).

³⁸ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Eino R.

had been “cruel” to his parents earlier.³⁹ Meanwhile, in Pyhäjärvi 1909, the widow Maria K. criticized her 17-year-old son Juho for being an idle good-for-nothing. The verdict for homicide was six years in prison.⁴⁰

In some cases, the cause seemed to be provocation, as in “enough is enough.” In Luumäki 1905, Mikko R. chastised his stepsons for reading an almanac on one particular Sunday in January 1905, and hit 15-year-old Jalmari U. and his brother with a piece of firewood.⁴¹ It is not clear whether the case reflected hostility towards reading and education, but this was not uncommon among the rural population at the time. Jalmari reacted by attacking his stepfather with a knife, and was sentenced to four years imprisonment. In April 1913, Viktor P. was visiting his mother in Helsinki, and he soon noticed that his stepfather, carpenter Bernhard J. had been hitting his mother. In revenge, Viktor lethally beat his stepfather, but the sentence was only 10 months in prison perhaps because the victim was a notoriously violent person, who had been earlier convicted for manslaughter.⁴² In another case, 18-year-old Aleksander D. had had enough when his father, Simo D. came home drunk and assaulted him and his mother in Viipuri. Newspapers reported the event as another “revolver drama,” since handguns had become more common in Eastern Finland in the early twentieth century. When he had picked up the gun, Aleksander D. had been lying in his sickbed suffering from tuberculosis. Under these mitigating circumstances, the verdict for patricide was two years in prison.⁴³

From agency to structure: mission impossible?

In the early twentieth-century psychiatric, judicial and public discussions surrounding parricide cases, various explanations were put forward to explain the violence, and a key factor was seen to be interaction between individuals and the environment. The life history of the perpetrator seemed to be of great interest to both the judicial process and newspapers. But analyses of parricide also show that there was no single type of life history or motivation common to all cases. Some cases were connected to the mental or criminal character of the perpetrator, while in others the perpetrators and victims were both average citizens with no previous

³⁹ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Kaarle S.; Aamulehti, 1911.

⁴⁰ Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Juho T.

⁴¹ *Karjala*, 25.2.1905.

⁴² Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto, Viktor P.

⁴³ *Karjala*, 23.12.1906.

crime history. Meanwhile, social and economic tensions between generations were felt in both the rural and urban contexts.

It is therefore quite a challenge to apply ideas derived from individual case studies more generally to the structural level. The main hypothesis here may be described as the disintegration theory. Under economic and social pressure, the behaviour of individuals changes and this can lead to aggression. Furthermore, Tulenheimo's gate theory argues that circumstances create the conditions that cause people to start behaving like criminals; similar results have been found in modern criminology. In addition, labelling and exclusion from the community can lead to changes in individuals' images of themselves, their cognition, and their identity.⁴⁴

Both my disintegration hypothesis and gate theory go some way to providing reasonable explanations for these individual life histories. They are also supported by the criminological literature, but we are still missing a link between random individual cases and a macro-level hypothesis. On the basis of the 1930 survey, we have information on 1,218 people who committed serious violent crimes in the period 1904-1913. The key question is whether the survey is relevant to modern analysis. Martti Lehti has compared the homicide rates from this survey to judicial statistics and according to his results, the survey contains roughly two-thirds of the all homicides committed in Finland in that time. Both sources, however, show the same trend.⁴⁵ Bearing the limitations of the source material in mind, the database based on the 1930 survey can thus be treated as a fair sample of perpetrators of violent crime in Finland as a whole and provide the basis for further hypotheses.

If disintegration hypothesis and gate theory have any relevance at all, there should be some differences between the kind of perpetrators and the acts they committed, which correspond to their life history. The crime register of previous offenders (18% of all perpetrators) is one of the more reliable variables produced by the 1930 survey, since the register was in most cases available to collectors filling in the questionnaire. Fines for single petty crimes (9 % of all perpetrators) were not recorded as systematically and it is thus a much less reliable variable. In the following examples, all three groups of perpetrators (i.e., those with a previous crime history, those with none, and those who were fined) are treated separately.⁴⁶

Descriptive statistics derived from the database give results typical to violence studies, as Martti Lehti has already shown. The vast majority of perpetrators

⁴⁴ Kivivuori, 2013, 303.

⁴⁵ Lehti, 2001, 41-44.

⁴⁶ All following tables and graphs are based on a database on offenders. Information is based on questionnaires and is collected for years 1904-1913. Kansallisarkisto (Finnish National Archives), Rikollisuuden syitä tutkimaan asetetun komitean (540:73) arkisto.

were unmarried, lower class young men who had got involved in a drunken brawl.⁴⁷ Former prisoners were more “wild” and more likely to come from a town (Tables A and B) than perpetrators without a recorded crime history. From a modern point of view, it might appear surprising that the Swedish-speaking minority was so commonly represented among prisoners (Table C), but this fact is mostly explained by the urban nature of most criminality and that the capital Helsinki was still relatively full of Swedish speakers at that time. The relationship between perpetrator and victim (Table D) also shows a similar variation in environmental context between the groups.

Table A: Percentage of perpetrators from the local area (n = 1218)

Native	Yes	No
Prison (n=224)	51	49
Fines (n=113)	60	40
No crime history (n=881)	65	35

Table B: Percentage of rural and urban perpetrators (n = 1218)

Urban	Yes	No
Prison (n=224)	47	53
Fines (n=113)	33	67
No crime history (n=881)	22	78

Table C: Percentage of perpetrators according to their ethnicity (n = 1218)

	Finnish	Swedish	Others
Prison	87	10	3
Fines	93	5	2
No crime history	92	7	1

⁴⁷ Lehti, 2001, 143-233.

**Table D: Percentage of perpetrators according to their relationship to victim
(n = 1218)**

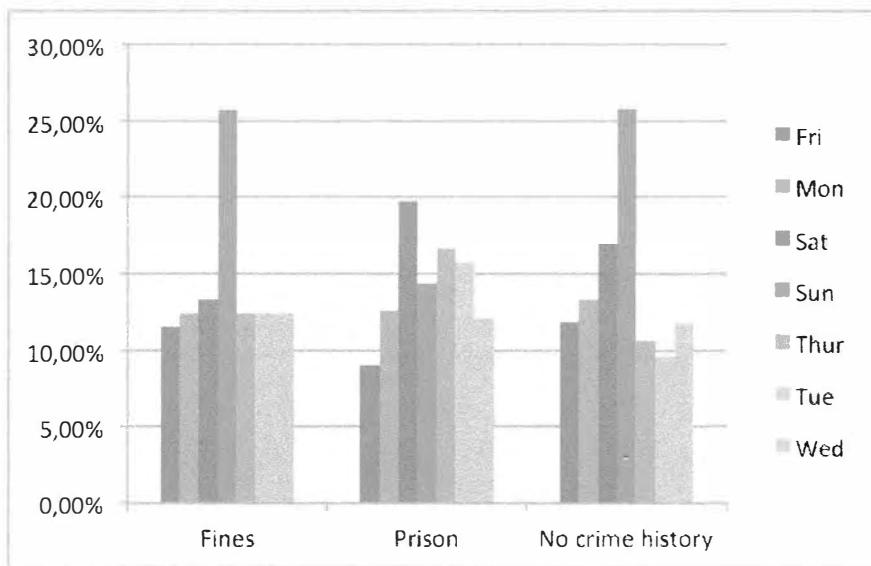
	Family	Known	Unknown
Prison	6	69	25
Fines	5	75	20
No crime history	8	78	14

The social context of violent crime can be roughly divided into four groups (Table E). A private context means the crime was committed with no other parties present, which was usually the case with a family-related homicide. The typical private gathering leading to a homicide seems to have been a meeting where a small group of men sat together drinking and playing cards. In public gatherings, there was a larger crowd of invited people present for a public celebration (e.g., a wedding or dance). In an open context, the parties met on the street or somewhere without premeditation. A surprisingly clear result is the relatively low number of former prisoners committing homicide at a public gathering. In other groups than former prisoners, there is also a remarkable peak in crimes committed on Sundays, which was the free day when public gatherings mostly took place (see graph 1).

**Table E: Percentage of social contexts for perpetrators of violent crime
(n=1218)**

	Private	Private gathering	Public gathering	Open
Prison	15	25	9	51
Fines	12	32	25	31
No crime history	13	24	26	37

Graph 1: Percentage of perpetrators committing violent crime according to day of week (n = 1218)



There is considerable variation between groups according to social background and occupation. The most interesting observation is that tenants rarely committed homicide, but many of the perpetrators were sons of tenants (Tables F and G). This fact could be linked to the weakening of ties within rural communities and the crisis facing tenancies in the early twentieth century.⁴⁸

Table F: Percentage of perpetrators according to father's occupation (n=1218)

	Farmer	Tenant	Skilled worker	"Worker"	Vagrant	Others
Prison	10	15	23	42	5	5
Fines	20	20	20	37	1	2
No crime history	28	26	10	33	1	2

⁴⁸ See classic analysis in Viljo Rasila, *Suomen torpparikysymys vuoteen 1909: yhteiskuntahistoriallinen tutkimus* (Helsinki, 1961).

Table G: Percentage of perpetrators according to their occupation (n=1218)

	Farmer	Tenant	Skilled worker	“Worker”	Vagrant	Others
Prison	3	2	14	64	16	1
Fines	12	5	6	65	9	3
No crime history	15	5	8	66	3	3

These results suggest that people with previous convictions formed a separate group, whose patterns of behaviour and living environments diverged from others in society. One possible avenue for future research into violent crime would be to re-evaluate the thesis by Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti about what constitutes the classic subculture of violence from a Finnish contextual perspective.⁴⁹ This could be done by returning to the individual level to study the life histories and social backgrounds of criminals in order to more precisely establish the interactive connection between individuals and their environment. How were criminals recruited? Is criminality hereditary? Tracing back over 1,000 family histories is beyond the scope of this article, but well-preserved Finnish census records do offer some attractive possibilities in this respect, and the 1930 survey could act as a springboard for such research.

⁴⁹ Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti, *The Subculture of Violence* (London, Tavistock, 1967).