

## **Parricide in Nineteenth-Century Finland: Cultures of Violence and a Crisis of Authority**

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This chapter uses a case study of a nineteenth-century Finnish parricide to analyse the societal concerns and discourses that arise from its discussion. The court records of this case are compared to both a wider range of material on the abuse of parents in eighteenth-century Finland and to specific reports of the aforementioned case in the Finnish press? The official records and scandal reports are combined to reveal the contrasting expectations and values of familial bonds at different stages of life. Parricide is placed in the context of rising homicide rates, the violent knife-fighting culture in Ostrobothnia, and the related social crisis that included economic stagnation and the devaluation of traditional authority. <sup>1</sup>

### **The parricide in Ala-Härmä**

On 26 April 1848, two brothers and their father went to strip some pines in Wuoskoski, a village in the Parish of Ala-Härmä. The parish lay in the Uusikaarlypvy district of Ostrobothnia in western Finland. The man and his two sons had been working in the forest to prepare the pines for the following year's tar production by cutting away part of the trees' bark. The older brother sent his younger sibling, who was 16 years old, to fetch some vodka (*brännvin*) from a nearby farmstead. When the younger brother returned with a bottle, the older brother drank most of it very quickly, but he offered some to his father, who apparently accepted the offer. As the first bottle ran out, the older brother once again sent his sibling to get another bottle. Though apparently not altogether willing, the younger brother obeyed. When the boy returned again, his brother emerged from the forest saying that there was no point going back in again; their father had gone to a neighbour's house on a binge. The younger brother was somewhat disconcerted by this, and, along with some

workers who saw and joined them, they decided to go into the forest nevertheless. There they found the father dead and bloody, killed by several blows with a sharp object. When they looked more closely, they noticed the elder brother and his draw knife were covered with blood.<sup>2</sup>

The case was taken to trial on 24 May 1848 at Uusikaarlepyy rural district court. During the trial investigation, the older brother denied having killed his father, accusing first his younger brother, and then an unknown man who had demanded two silver roubles from them. The number of cuts on the father's body and the son's attempt to divert attention and lead people away from discovering the corpse led to the elder son being found guilty of his father's murder. He was initially sentenced to death but, according to the law of 1826, the death penalty was commuted to corporal punishment (whipping), public penance in Wasa, and finally transportation to Siberia.<sup>3</sup>

The family lived on a normal farmstead where quarrels had been constant. The condemned son was described as having been a lazy drunkard all his life. Both the lower court records and the Senate Justice Department noted that he had previously committed act of violence against his father. In the parish church records, the family comprised the 44-year-old father – who was occupied in farming and was the head of the household – his 46-year-old wife, and their five children: there were four sons aged 23, 16, 12, and five years – a fifth brother had died in infancy – and a daughter aged 18 years.<sup>4</sup> The relative ages of the family members were certainly not unusual at the time. The parents were by no means elderly or in need on care, but their children were young adults or nearing that age, as was usual in cases of parricide and violence against parents. In rural nineteenth-century Finland, adulthood was still considered a social rather than biological stage of life entered into by degrees rather than at a certain date or age. Full adulthood was created gradually, first by earning one's living, getting a farmstead of one's own or a position of authority at work, marrying, having children, and successfully bringing up one's children. Therefore, a 23-old son living at his parents' home was, while not in an unusual position in any way, also not yet considered fully adult. Nevertheless, he would try to gain greater independence to be considered more adult. The sons involved in the tragic events were 23 and 16 years of age – those most suitable for the heavy physical work of stripping bark from pine trees.

### **Authority and masculine violence in Southern Ostrobothnia**

The parricide in Ala-Härmä stands out against a general peak in the rates of violent crime and homicide across Finland at this time. The rates in Southern Ostrobothnia had been especially high from the end of the eighteenth century and continued to be so until the latter half of the nineteenth century: at their worst – from the 1840s to the 1860s – they increased the overall Finnish homicide

rate by a third. Within Ostrobothnia, the regions of Kauhava, Ala-Härmä, and Yli-Härmä displayed the highest rates of violent crime, with homicide rates on occasions being more than three times higher than those of the rest of the country.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that although Southern Ostrobothnia saw the heaviest crime rates, the rates also increased elsewhere in Finland – and also in Sweden – perhaps even earlier.<sup>6</sup>

The crime wave consisted of men – usually soldiers, the landless, and farmers' sons – who gathered in groups and wandered from one house or village to another in search of alcohol. They would turn up at crowded events like weddings or places like taverns where a fight could be picked easily. Their initial purpose may have been just to find some excitement, but these groups grew to become semi-organized, and they started to fight each other, the official authorities, and the more conservative population of the area. This led to performative violence, where the violence was not only spontaneous; fights were deliberately planned and picked in public places in order for the aggressors to show off and frighten people – witnesses would not readily testify in court for fear of retribution, since the judicial system rarely removed the offenders from local society. As the violence grew increasingly commonplace and it became ever more common to carry weapons like knives, heavy whips, and metal bars, the fights became deadly. Through violence and fear, these men held illegitimate power in a society that otherwise offered them very little.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Heikki Ylikangas has claimed that the area was facing an economic downturn and growing social inequality, which meant fewer chances for landless people and the non-inheriting sons of farmers to provide for themselves and gain independence in a society where paid work and service meant remaining under the authority of the master of the household. There was a discrepancy between what society expected of the younger generation – and even of what they expected themselves – and what was actually possible for them. Ylikangas claims that the resulting frustration was one of the causes of the aggression and violence. Ylikangas' interpretation brings to mind theories of anomie, but rather than there being a psychological trigger, he attributes the upheaval to a structure or general culture that allowed for violence when other social structures – such as efficient law enforcement – did not prevent it.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not it is possible to actually show that the economic challenges were really connected to violent crime at an individual or even local community level is another matter: Ylikangas presents a few case studies, but his overall interpretation has been criticized.<sup>9</sup> Reino Kallio, on the other hand, has claimed that the wave of violence was caused not so much by the bleak social prospects of the young men's generations, but by the hard and unyielding discipline organized in the villages and parishes, which Ylikangas in turn explains as the local populace's response to the violence.<sup>10</sup>

Another theory, presented by Juha Rajala for a slightly later period in eastern Finland, is the complete opposite: an economic upturn at the end of the nineteenth century brought new prospects and expectations, which in turn encouraged new innovations and experiments. These advances in turn corroded the conservative values of the established society, church, and authorities – and, presumably, the parents. This may actually also have been relevant to some of the Ostrobothnians, since tar production was still a source of wealth for many in the mid-nineteenth century, despite the fact that the Finnish tar trade had been facing a downturn since the British started importing their tar from North America. The main point to note is that here, too, the means of gaining a better position in society had to be taken into one's own hands, and not left to the authorities.<sup>11</sup>

While the theories presented as explanations for the violence in nineteenth-century Finland differ in their economic and social approaches, they all relate the violence to some form of disintegration of hierarchy and traditional forms of authority. This meant that it was no longer self-evident who could legitimately use violence in the society. A new culture of authority and status emerged in which new sorts of people sought power and legitimized it through the use of violence. People who had previously been on the margins of society or side-lined by authority began to use violence to gain honour and masculinity – if not according to the generally accepted standards, at least according to standards accepted by their own kind. A number of pre-modernists have nevertheless claimed that a subversive questioning of formal authority and political hierarchy had always been a part of peasant masculinity: to be a proper, masculine man, one had to have the courage to defy and deride the authorities. This was often accomplished while drunk: intoxication temporarily liberated the man from the simultaneous and even more pressing demands of hegemonic masculinity – of being steady, serious, and moral – and allowed men to fulfil opposing ideals. Kustaa H.J. Vilkuna suggests that it was the tightening of the rules of traditional hegemonic – that is, serious and steady – masculinity that caused the need for more intense and more frequent subversion during the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

While the parricide case in Ala-Härmä was obviously not part of the knife-fighters' activities – the son acted alone rather than while backed up by a gang, and in the secrecy of the forest rather than in public – the act took place in the middle of an area where violence was common, and exactly at the time when the violence peaked. While theories of frustration and anomie seem insufficient to explain the violence in general or in any one case – including the parricide at hand – it is possible to learn about the aggressive responses to the frustration displayed. This has indeed been part of the explanatory models of domestic violence, where social commitment and therefore both frustration and learning are at their strongest.<sup>13</sup> In premodern

societies, the disciplinary duty of the father or master of the household maintained ‘modest’ violence as a constant feature of the domestic sphere.<sup>14</sup> However, there are hints in the case description that suggest learning could well take place outside the home, too. The court records noted that the son was in the habit of drinking and being violent at home and elsewhere, although this was the first time he had come into contact with the officials. Violence was also an ongoing factor on the farmstead where the event took place, which the court records point out several times. The son had been moody and aggressive, and several witnesses reported they had seen him hit or threaten his father various times with items such as shovels, digging forks, knives, and firewood. There had even been a time when the father said he might need to flee the house and leave the farmstead to his son. Though it is not stated in the source material, it is possible that the son’s habit of ‘drinking and night-time visiting’ brought him into contact with the knife-fighting gangs that shared the same habits. However, the father had not been entirely submissive, for he had been seen chasing his son out of the house with an axe. The son had also talked to outsiders about killing his father, ‘for then I would be free to binge’. This reflects Garthine Walker’s claim that parricides were usually presented as lacking in compassion and seeing the parent as an obstacle – to an inheritance, marriage, or freedom – to be removed, but it also shows that life had become cheap some time ago in Ala-Härmä.<sup>15</sup>

Ylikangas also notes that the rates of criminal charges for non-lethal violence against parents have a reverse correlation with the knife-fighting. Ylikangas explains this not as evidence that aggression against parents declined when the knife-fighting increased, but only that charges were brought less often. Ylikangas connects this to a decline in parental authority and, to a degree, a separation of the young from the values of their parents’ generation, especially among the landed population. According to Ylikangas, however, the values as the targets of the protest themselves mattered less than the circumstances that made the young rebel in the first place – namely the lack of opportunities to be gained and therefore a lack of incentive to follow the established rules of society. In the gangs themselves, different rules of authority existed, based not on age or official recognition as within the established society, but on physical strength and fighting abilities. Nevertheless, some traits of traditional social hierarchy also survived in the gangs: the men in leading positions in the groups were often those who had access to land or came from larger farmsteads than the others. Soldiers and those coming from landless families had to settle for the roles of underlings. The social hierarchy was also emphasized by the fact that though the regular, established society did not like the knife-fighters’ activities, their parents often protected their own offspring by hiring them good lawyers – and the more money the parents had, the more efficiently they could keep their sons out of prison and in the village.<sup>16</sup>

In the Ala-Härmä parricide case, a crisis of authority within the family was evident and longstanding, although the reason is far from clear. The court records suggest that the son considered himself able enough to take of the farmstead and tried to persuade his father to leave it to him, both violently and verbally, and he was also disobedient in other ways. He had refused to see the chaplain to learn to read, although his mother had ‘spoken to him gently’ about it. The parents’ admonishments were not only futile, but also irritating, and, according to the testimonies, the son continually talked about them disrespectfully.<sup>17</sup>

Questions of freedom and submission also arise in the witnesses’ testimonies of how the son had spoken. He was reported to have raged that he would ‘sit in prison in Korsholma rather than there’ at the chaplain’s bench. He was reported to have premeditated the killing of his parents so that he would be free to binge on alcohol. These deliberations were reported in the court to make him look worse, of course, but they also reflect a counter-culture where masculinity was displayed not by the traditional means of skill, work, and family, which reflected the values of the established society, but by drinking and brawling, which reflected a notion of freedom and non-submission, perhaps also by the opposite of what was described as the mother’s gentleness.<sup>18</sup> It is said that toughness and hardness were valued qualities in Finnish nineteenth-century rural culture, representing power and security against other people but also against natural forces like illnesses. They were embodied, for instance, in the ability to go into a right kind of rage, one that would convince and frighten both human and spirit enemies, and men were reportedly more capable of hardness than women.<sup>19</sup>

In the court records, such a masculine culture is, however, only to be read in hints and side-remarks by a willing historian: the records do not subscribe to such an understanding of masculinity, but to a rather more sedate and dignified manliness – one represented by the judge and the scribe. Even less masculinity was included in the actions or descriptions of the victim, who had not been able to hold a position of authority. This is even shown in the son’s own testimony. He claimed he was innocent of the crime: the last he saw of his father was when his father ‘announced he was going to go to a nearby house to booze’,<sup>20</sup> and, turning away, the father had met ‘an unknown, short man dressed in a grey russet pullover’<sup>21</sup> who had demanded money. The son had left for another house where he had friends, fallen down, lost his drawknife, and hit his nose on the ground hard enough to bloody his clothes. Moreover, he said there had never been a disagreement between himself and his father, and he had been trying to ‘quietly restrain his father’s violent character when his frequent drinking frenzy made him want to persecute his neighbours’.<sup>22</sup> The meek expressions of quiet restraint and their contrast to the violent drinking frenzy – in addition to the suggestion that it was the father who had intended to go on a binge rather than himself –

indicate that he knew the values that would gain him sympathy in court. In cases of non-lethal violence in the previous centuries, the court had frequently looked for excuses for violence against parents, and blamed the parents for the escalation of the situation.<sup>23</sup> No sign of such sympathy can be detected here, not even at the point when the autopsy report revealed that the father had been intoxicated to an extent that could have influenced his death.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the son's excuses were recorded as part of the operations of a judicial system that was obliged to hear all sides to the matter.

It is hardly surprising that a parricide is a crisis of authority. The circumstances in Ostrobothnia also highlight that it was a long-term crisis that may have extended more widely than the family circle in which the killing took place. Since violent crime was a serious social problem at the time and it merited public attention, it is worth examining whether the public discussions awoken by parricide showed any sign of these concerns.

### **Newspaper articles on parricide in Finland, 1775-1850: Exotic honour and degeneration**

In order to see how parricide was discussed in the early nineteenth-century Finland, I have looked at the daily and weekly newspapers in Finland before 1850 for articles on parricide and their treatment.<sup>25</sup> Twenty-five Finnish daily newspaper articles mentioned parricide between 1801 and 1850.<sup>26</sup> The items appeared in a fairly regular frequency from the 1820s to the 1840s. I also searched for matricide,<sup>27</sup> but found only one article prior to the latter half of the nineteenth century. That was a recounting 'of a French crime history from the last third of the previous century', i.e. a matricide in St Omer, where the accused son and daughter-in-law had been pronounced innocent only after the execution of the son.<sup>28</sup> Two of the parricide articles were, however, verbatim translations of the same text in two different newspapers (it is noteworthy, however, that this only happened once). As most of the items were either completely fictional or human interest descriptions of past or foreign cultures or persons, it is clear that the number of newspaper articles in nineteenth-century Finland that mention parricide bears absolutely no reference to the real crime rates. Nevertheless, it may reveal a certain interest in the thematic. There seems to be an increase in the number of articles on parricide or mentioning parricide after 1820, but this is due to the increasing number of newspapers rather than to an increase in the interest itself; therefore interest in parricide appears sporadic but stable.

Neither the increase of violence in nineteenth-century Finland nor any subversive code of honour were directly discussed in the newspaper items concerning parricide. There was a set of items where parricide was sometimes related to a subversive code of honour, but never explicitly

connected to anything current in nineteenth-century Finnish society. Nevertheless, in the human interest items, parricide was indeed related to honour in a few exoticized descriptions of imaginary ancient ‘Viking’<sup>29</sup> or ‘Indian’ (‘Native American’)<sup>30</sup> warrior cultures. In these imaginings, violent death is presented as the honourable way to move from this world to the next, and if it was not arrived at in battle, it was the duty of sons to dispatch their fathers to the afterlife. Exotic honour also features in the story of Beatrice Cenci, a Roman daughter who avenged her rape on her brutal father in the sixteenth century, retold in *Åbo Tidningar* in 1821.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it is likely that these stories were related to an infatuation with the ‘strange’ and exotic, which was simply and much more profoundly connected to reading for pleasure, a phenomenon that was spreading fast among new social groups and classes in nineteenth-century Finland. Moreover, the subversive code of honour where authorities can or even must be killed, was always situated somewhere else, or in the times well past.

Most of the items discussing parricide of any form did not relate it to any kind of honour; in fact, the opposite was true. The eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century newspapers had few regular editorial staff, and they were often filled with various kinds of entertainment writing without much apparent coherence, such as excerpts from historical records or historical narratives, overviews of themes of current or human interest in some part of the world, and dramatic fiction stories often with a moral lesson. In these stories, the role of parricides is to add drama.<sup>32</sup> Some stories were proposed to be ‘true’, but included romanticized or scandalous tones found in the tabloid press. Examples include a description of ‘Ali Pasha’s life and deeds’ after his death, where parricide was used to mark moral degradation,<sup>33</sup> and a story of a French tobacco workshop owner and her son in St Omer, a sensation story of social problems and unsolved crime in history half a century previously. In the latter article, the writer hinted that though convicted, the son of the dead woman may have been innocent since the licence for the tobacco business – the family’s livelihood – belonged to the mother, and therefore the son had an economic motive to keep the mother alive rather than to kill her. Where this story did not portray the son as lacking in morals, it presented the parricide as revealing the corruptness of the drunken, dead mother and the judges, whose error had sentenced an innocent man to the gallows.<sup>34</sup> Considerations of poverty and economic motives were important in the story, and probably reflect the rising inclusion of these matters in considerations of law and criminology. In these stories, parricide is a sign of moral degeneration and corruption rather than the choice to do evil.<sup>35</sup> This also applies to the three articles that reported the Polish uprising in the January and February of 1831, which all – while not naming parricide directly – started by describing the fatherly care of the Monarch (not, however, the Emperor) or the Government, and then proceeded to describe the degeneration of the rebellious ad hoc military troops in the way they



had killed their superiors.<sup>36</sup> Following the Finnish War of 1808–9, Finland ceased to be a part of Sweden and instead became a Russian grand duchy; it was important to display the loyalties that were now expected.

Only six newspaper articles related to real crimes of parricide that had taken place in Finland. Like the total amount of newspaper articles, but for a different reason, this cannot be taken to represent the actual crime rate: it is evident that not all parricides made it into the newspapers. The first item in this group was actually a blunt note on the causes of death of people in the previous year: it included the number of executed prisoners, one of whom was executed for parricide.<sup>37</sup> There is no further report of this crime, which makes it evident that not all crime was reported in the press. Likewise, items on causes of death are in no way regular in the newspapers of the time. The newspapers sought to report what they thought would advance their circulation and glossed over the material with some moralism,<sup>38</sup> and sometimes they just filled empty spaces with whatever was available. It is therefore evident that a report of a parricide in an early nineteenth-century Finnish newspaper was a matter of chance, and the real crime rate of parricide was much higher (0.06-0.07 per 100,000 cases per year) than the newspapers would suggest.<sup>39</sup>

Of the remainder of the six articles on actual crimes of parricide in Finland, two different papers note verbatim the rising crime rate in the Uusikarlepyy district, where seven death sentences had been passed in 1848, including one for parricide.<sup>40</sup> A further three articles in the same year were devoted to reporting the Ala-Härmä case described above.<sup>41</sup> One of these articles was just a short note. The other two articles were rather more elaborate; apparently, they had considerable value for the newspaper and reading culture, which, at the time in Finland, seems to have relied heavily on crime reports and scandal. Below, I will make use of this case to further clarify the debates and discussions around parricide in nineteenth-century Finland.

### **Reporting the Ala-Härmä case: Ignorance and ineptitude**

When the Ala-Härmä case was reported in the newspapers, the emphasis changed somewhat. Whereas the court records were mainly concerned with the facts, the newspapers took a moral stance. The case was reported as evidence of the ‘thousand times-repeated message that ignorance, ineptitude, laziness, and drink are the origins of a crime that does, from time to time, stain our Fatherland with human blood’.<sup>42</sup>

*Helsingfors Tidningar*, and *Maamiehen Ystävä* both reported the case: the latter’s report was spread over two editions of the paper. *Helsingfors Tidningar* was launched in 1829 as the first Swedish-speaking newspaper based in Helsinki, and it was soon able to acquire and maintain the

position of the leading newspaper in Finland. Between 1841 and 1860 – that is, at the time of the parricide case in question – it was run by Zachris Topelius, who was an eager proponent of Finnish culture and responsible for literary items from fairy tales to novels and landscape descriptions. Topelius' personal interest in '*schönlitteratur*' is visible in the newspaper's content: its writing is sometimes described as being more comfortable and natural in its style than the other Finnish papers. Although Topelius later became known for his nationalist efforts, this was only well after his editorship that the newspaper was closed down in 1866 due to censorship. *Maamiehen Ystävä*, on the other hand, was a Finnish-language newspaper based in Kuopio – a smaller town in eastern Finland – that included small treatises on agriculture and short texts on history, geography, and technology to educate and enlighten the Finnish-speaking peasant population. The paper was launched with J.V. Snellman as its chief editor, but, by the time of the crime concerned here, it was run by the local senior high school (*lukio*) teacher in Kuopio, Joachim Zitting, who had the advantage of a better knowledge of the Finnish language. The content of the paper was educational, and the news items were often borrowed from other papers – as seems to have happened with the 1848 parricide case, too: the article in *Maamiehen Ystävä* is a Finnish translation of the item published in Swedish in *Helsingfors Tidningar*, save for a couple of small additions. While both papers published readers' letters and guest authors' texts, the authors' names are never mentioned: nevertheless, it is likely that the Swedish item was written by Topelius for *Helsingfors Tidningar* and translated into Finnish by Zitting for *Maamiehen Ystävä*.<sup>43</sup>

The two newspapers gave the case a full description spread over three pages in *Helsingfors Tidningar* and two editions of the paper in *Maamiehen Ystävä*. This actually meant that it received a lot of attention in the rather modest Finnish newspaper media of the time. The author is aware of the attention value of the case, as well as the related danger of being accused of abusing it. The reports therefore start with an apology. The description begins with a note that the crime was so horrible, it had been unthinkable in the times of Solon, and while it was fortunately very rare in Finland, one case had nevertheless taken place. The author states that he is not reporting the case because of the passion and scandal possibly related to it, but to point out the old, thousand-times repeated and still insufficiently acknowledged dangers of ineptitude, laziness, and alcohol abuse. This moralist stance suited the educational purpose of the papers, but it may also have served to pacify the official censorship in Finland, which, though milder than at the end of the nineteenth century, was wary of raising public scandal and disturbance in any way. Indeed, officialdom was even more wary of anything implicating an assault on the authorities. In the patriarchal order, parricide was, after all, seen to stem from the same root as regicide.

A crisis of parental authority was indeed presented in the newspapers, with the blame levelled at the mother and father. The reports refer to the parents' 'carelessness' and negligence in the upbringing of their children, because these were the original causes of their children's laziness, vileness, and drunkenness.

The role of alcohol was obvious in the case and apparent also in the court records: the crime had been committed while both the perpetrator and the victim were under its influence, it was the reason the younger son had been sent away, and very it likely had been the source of conflict between the father and son. The descriptions do not tell where the vodka was obtained, but apparently alcohol was available nearby and it was not difficult for a 16-year-old boy to get hold of first one and then another bottle of vodka. Home distilling had been legalized in 1787, but in 1800 the right to distil alcohol in rural areas was limited to those who owned or farmed land. However, this meant there were many people who had that right. Selling alcohol was forbidden in rural areas in 1829, but it was widely known that the trade continued in secret, and sometimes the authorities turned a blind eye, for many of those involved in it were the poor, itinerant, and landless; their number often included widows and old servant women no longer capable of other work. The authorities weighed the balance of the disruptive behaviours that alcohol encouraged and the savings in parish poor relief when these people supported themselves. Nevertheless, documents also reveal that it was not only the poor who were involved in the illegal alcohol trade, the landowners and the clergy were too. Temperance movements were starting to gain in appeal in the mid-nineteenth century. Their ranks obviously included the newspaper editors, but there were many people across the social spectrum who did not support the movement. While there were people in the country who thought a real man could drink and remain honourable, their number did not include Topelius or his presumed readership.<sup>44</sup>

The trial records show that the court was interested in the role of alcohol mainly to find out what had happened and who was present, but the newspapers tried to make more of it. It is also evident that alcohol was related to the rest of the violence in the household as well, although it is impossible to say whether the amount of alcohol consumed by the family was really out of the ordinary. The court records noted that both the father and the son were drunk when the father was killed, the father even considerably so. In the newspaper items, nevertheless, the drunkenness was blamed on the son, and the father is stated to have been 'usually not especially keen on misusing strong drink'.<sup>45</sup>

The newspaper articles also refer to the tar exports of the region, which brought wealth, but also drew the peasant population to the inns and taverns of the town of Uusikaupunki, which were the source of vodka and trouble. The town inns were, the articles said, the main cause for why the

peasants were ‘not even more industrious’, as the papers politely put it. The educated circles in nineteenth-century Finland had adopted the internationally prevalent view that towns were dangerous and corrupting – they had a negative influence on the morals of the surrounding countryside.<sup>46</sup> In the emerging nationalism of mid-nineteenth century Finland, towns were considered a source of general depravity, whereas the pure and poor but hardworking countryside represented real, uncorrupted Finnishness.<sup>47</sup> They may have been correct as far as alcohol was concerned, although it is rather difficult to determine, since legal control over selling and consuming alcohol was different in rural and urban areas. Ala-Härmä was almost 50 kilometres away from the nearest town of Uusikaarlepyy, and although the trip could be made on horseback in one day, it was most likely not the source of alcohol for the people of Wuoskoski village. Indeed, although the educated newspaper writers – Topelius the foremost – had adopted the view of towns as the source of depravity, in reality Finnish towns presented lower crime rates than the countryside until the last quarter of the century. It was in the Ostrobothnian countryside where violence reigned, not in the towns.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the nearby town was presented as a source of infectious laziness and all the sins that followed from it: drink, avarice, greed, and violence. Garthine Walker and James Sharpe have shown on the basis of early modern English pamphlet literature that tales of murder and parricide presented a discourse of the sinner whose lesser sins – such as liking a drink too much – gradually led to greater sins, which in turn led to the gallows.<sup>49</sup> Though Walker and Sharpe worked on earlier material, there is a similar discussion in the present material. Nevertheless, this discussion is mitigated by another discussion – one on upbringing, ignorance, and ineptitude.

When early modern cases of non-lethal violence against parents in Finland have been studied, there has been a strong tendency to blame the parents and the poor upbringing they provided. A similar trend has been seen elsewhere, in early modern England and in today’s discussions, for example.<sup>50</sup> Blame was laid on the parents in a similar manner by stating that ‘as far as the lack of care by the parents can be judged by the vanity of the children it is likely that ... [the parents] did not watch over their sons’ education carefully enough’.<sup>51</sup> This had led, according to the newspapers, to ignorance and ineptitude in the eldest son, who was ‘untrained in reading a book’.<sup>52</sup> Ignorance and ineptitude (*okunskap* in Swedish, *taidottomuus* in Finnish) is a completely new feature in the nineteenth-century reports. Ineptitude also comes up in another of the cases – the reports on French criminal policies and statistics, which note that almost all of the parricides ‘possessed no skills’. It was an extension of the laziness, possibly also a result of the rising interest in criminological social explanations. Nevertheless, it refers not to occupational or trade skills or anything that could directly make a person’s future look brighter and circumstances easier. Rather,

the skills and learning talked of in the newspaper reports directly and outspokenly refer to mechanical reading skills and, first and foremost, Christian teaching. A lack of skill was also not a problem in terms of actually earning a living, for, although described both in the court records and in the newspapers as spending his time in useless and vain pursuits in the village, at the time of the murder the culprit had been in the forests preparing for tar production. The point was that, along with the rudiments of Christianity, the value basis of the established society – including parental authority and patriarchal hierarchy – were also drummed into the pupils.

This already highlights that the interest in skills was not about reducing crime by altering people's circumstances, but instead teaching them the right values of social hierarchy and peace. The same is suggested by the Ala-Härmä case, where the problem is presented more as one of a want of will than ability. The son did not want to learn, and refused to try or accept help. He was said to have raged when his mother suggested that he should see the chaplain to learn under his instruction. The church communion books confirm, indeed, that the eldest son of the family had not been able to manage any part of the required pieces of learning, not the ABC, the Catechism, the table of duties, questions and answers, or David's Psalms. These were supposed to be first memorized, then read from the book and finally understood, and marks were given even for partial accomplishment, but the eldest son of this family had not gained even a partial mark. While the newspapers blamed this on the parents, the church record shows that the family's other children performed in a much more satisfactory way.<sup>53</sup> Whether the eldest son suffered from some kind of learning difficulty is impossible to tell: the pedagogical thought of the time would not have recognized such impediments. It was not the circumstances, but the son's personal qualities and moral failure that were to blame above all else.

Several scholars, including Garthine Walker and James Sharpe, have suggested that avarice, jealousy, impatience, self-indulgence, and lust – all of which might ultimately lead to murder – were understood to be common emotions in the early modern world, although this perhaps began to change in the eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries, when parricide became pathologized with other forms of extreme violence. The horrible stories about parricide that circulated in popular print in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries were warnings about the brute that potentially lies within all humans beings. This grim view of human nature is also visible in the ideas of discipline, the purpose of which is said to have been to curb the innate evil in children.<sup>54</sup> The discourse on parental blame on the one hand and Christian education on the other – which were evident in the reports of the parricide case in Ala-Härmä – suggests that in mid-nineteenth-century Finland, people still thought of negative emotions such as avarice, impatience, and self-indulgence as being natural to all humans. Nevertheless, people also thought

that these sins did not randomly threaten just anybody; rather, people could be protected from their own natural emotions and those of their children through a proper upbringing.

The ideas of honour should also be looked at against this background. Some of the exotic parricide stories related the killing of old men to the honour code of exotic warriors, but then this form of killing a parent was presented as a final act of filial obedience – a submission to the values of a culture sufficiently alien to pose no threat to the contemporary culture. The general background of the crime wave has been related to the emergence of a new kind of subversive masculine power drawing on violence, and this may have formed a background for the interest in real or mythological parricides. The reports of real and contemporary crime, and the parricide in Ala-Härmä on the other hand, showed no understanding or recognition of a violent code of honour of any kind. If there was one in the background of the crime, it can only be constructed by a researcher willing to find hints of a masculine subculture in some of the lines attributed to the murderer – the ostentatious refusals to obey and take guidance from the parents or the chaplain, and the way the son was reported to have thought himself capable and entitled to be the head of the farm. The purpose of the newspaper reports was the exact opposite – to make the offender look unmanly.

## **Conclusions**

Parricide is presented here against a background of locally widespread violent crime. In the area, human life had become cheap, and the long-term crisis of legal and parental authority extended beyond more than just one family. This upheaval may have been related to the reduced prospects and frustrated hopes of economic and social success offered by established society's rules. While it is impossible to prove that the bleak prospects of the younger generations had much to do with this particular case, the public discussions awoken by parricide seem to mirror these concerns, albeit in an ambiguous way.

The court records' attention centres on the events, the drinking of alcohol, and the reputation of the people concerned in terms of previous violence and threats in the household. When the case was reported in the newspapers, the emphasis changed somewhat. Whereas the court records were mainly concerned with evidence, the newspapers took a moral stance. The case was reported as evidence for the 'thousand-times repeated message that ignorance, ineptitude, laziness, and drink are the origins of a crime that does, from time to time, stain our Fatherland with human

blood'. There was a heavy emphasis on parental blame, but also on the moral failures of the son who was too lazy and obstinate to bother to learn to read his catechism, and was thereby driven to drink. The notes on bad parenting, parental failure, and negligence seem at first to conflict with the emphasis on patriarchal hierarchy. Feelings of fear and disgust are created towards the boozy, lazy, and useless son, but little empathy is extended towards the parents, either. As they had failed in their duty to bring up their son, the son's disgrace was theirs, too. Consequently, the parent's role is ambiguous in the newspapers: the patriarchal framework and parental authority, which was continuously compared to other kinds of authority in society, demanded that parents should be held in honour, but at the same time, their son's crime showed a failure in parenthood that undermined their honour.

The trends of increasing violence in nineteenth-century Finland have been connected to a general undermining of authority and the birth of subversive codes of honour among social groups that questioned the traditional hierarchy. A similar notion of an exotic or different, violent code of honour is visible in some of the newspaper items, but only in as far as the newspaper items dealt with unusual and far away cases. When parricide was close to home – close to the existing society in nineteenth-century Europe and Finland – it acted as proof of moral degeneration and the evil nature of man. This evil could, however, be countered through education and schooling, which not only taught the proper values on authority and violence, but also provided the basis for the new, emerging Finnish nation as well.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been written with the support of the Academy of Finland.

<sup>2</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>3</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives); Senate Justice Department to the Governor in Vasa. Senate Justice department decisions 1848-49, DA:46, pages 471-474. National Archives of Finland. The transportation to Siberia is to be understood in the context that, from 1809 to 1917, Finland was a part of the Russian Empire.

<sup>4</sup> Church Records, Ala-Härmä Communion Book 1846-1852, Wuoskoski by Nykarleby Pastorat, 530. National Archives of Finland.

<sup>5</sup> See, however, a crime rate comparison by Juha Rajala, 'Yhteiskunnalliset ongelmat 1800-luvulla', in *Suomen historian kartasto*, eds. Pertti Haapala and Raisa Maria Toivo (Helsinki: Karttakeskus, 2007), 200-201, for 1863, where the rate for the Härmä region and Kauhava was 5.0-9.9/10 000 but

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where Kurikka and the Swedish-speaking areas north from Kristiinankaupunki displayed rates from 15/10 000 upwards.

<sup>6</sup> Mona Rautelin, 'Brott mot liv i Finland på 1790-talet', *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* 82, no. 2 (1997): 176-197; Eva Österberg, 'Kontroll och kriminalitet in Sverige från medeltid till nutid. Tenderser och tolkningar', *Scandia* 57, no. 1 (1991): 65-87.

<sup>7</sup> Heikki Ylikangas, *Väkivallanaallon synty. Puukkojunkkarikauden alku Etelä-Pohjanmaalla* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Ylikangas, *Väkivallanaallon synty*, 145, 288-310; Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> Eva Österberg, 'Criminality and the Early Modern State in Scandinavia', in *The Civilization of Crime. Violence in Town and Country since the Middle Ages*, eds. Eric Johnson and Eric Monkkonen (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 35-62.

<sup>10</sup> Reino Kallio, *Pohjanmaan suomenkielisten kylien oltermannihallinto: tutkimus vuoden 1742 kyläjärjestysohjeen toteuttamisesta* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 1982) and esp. Reino Kallio, *Häiriköintiä ja henkirikoksia. Etelä-Pohjalaisnuoret paikallisen kurinpidon kohteena sääty-yhteiskunnan aikana* (Helsinki: self-published, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Juha Rajala, *Kurittajia ja puukkosankareita. Väkiältä ja sen kontrollointi Kannaksen rajaseudulla 1885-1917* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), 70-71; Martti Lehti, *Väkivallan hyökyaalto, 1900-luvun alkuvuosikymmenten henkirikollisuus Suomessa ja Luoteis-Virossa*, Oikeuspoliittisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja 178 (Helsinki: Oikeuspoliittinen tutkimuslaitos, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Kustaa H.J. Vilku, 'Viina miehen mitta: Vapaa-ajalla rakennettu miehekkyyys 1550-1850', in *Näkymätön sukupuoli. Mieheyden pitkä historia*, eds. Pirjo Markkola, Ann-Catrin Östman & Marko Lamberg (Tampere: Vastapaino 2014), 92-113; Kimmo Katajala, 'Oliko talonpoika rivo sälli? uuden ajan alun ihmisen uudelleenarviointia', *Historiallinen aikakauskirja* 93, no. 2 (1995): 99-106; Jonas Liliequist, 'Masculinity and Virility Representations of Male Sexuality in Eighteenth Century Sweden', in *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for advanced Studies, 2007), 57-81; Ann-Catrin Östman, *Mjök och Jord: Om kvinnlighet, manlighet och arbete i österbottensk jordbrukssamhälle ca 1870-1940* (Turku: Åbo Academis Förlag, 2000); See also Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Gelles, 'Domestic Criminal Violence', in *Criminal Violence*, eds. Marvin Wolfgang & Neil Weiner (London: Sage, 1982), 225-226.



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<sup>14</sup> For earlier periods see, e.g., Jonas Liliequist, “Violence, Honour and Manliness in Early Modern Northern Sweden,” in *Crime and Control in Europe from the Past to the Present*, eds. Mirkka Lappalainen & Pekka Hirvonen (Helsinki: Publications of the History of Criminality Research Project, 1999), 192; Philip Grace, *Affectionate Authorities. Fathers and Fatherly Roles in Late Medieval Basel* (Basingstoke: Ashgate, 2015), 135-155. Note, however, that already in the sixteenth century resort to physical discipline was thought a sign of failure to educate by words and example, and by the late eighteenth century, views that, on the basis of Pierre Poiret, explicitly stated that education by force taught nothing circulated in Finland in manuscript form. University Library Helsinki, Manuscript collection C III, 22, 5 (2). The following quotations are from the same source. I would like to thank Dr. Päivi Mehtonen, who pointed this manuscript out to me, with it reference, and who is currently working on it.

<sup>15</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives). Quotation ‘det har jag och tänkt, på det jag måtte wara fri at supa’. *Helsingfors Tidningar*, (onds. 30 aug) 1848.

<sup>16</sup> Ylikangas, *Väkivallanaallon synty*, 188-189.

<sup>17</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>18</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>19</sup> Laura Stark, ‘Emotional Causality in Dynamistic Finnish-Karelian folk belief’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 41, no 3 (2016): 369-387.

<sup>20</sup> ‘fadren ... yttrat sig ärna gå till Ojanperä hemman för at supa’. District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>21</sup> ‘Okänd kortväxt mansperson, klädd i grå vadmals tröja’. District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>22</sup> ‘på fredlig wäg sökt stilla ethrätten aff han wåldsamma lynne, när denne under des softa inträffande dryckesvrede tilstånd förföra sig å dess omgifning’. District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).

<sup>23</sup> Raisa Maria Toivo, ‘Abuse of Parents in Early Modern Finland: Structure and Emotions’, *Journal of Family History* 41, no. 3 (2016): 255-270.

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<sup>24</sup> District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24.May 1848, §6. Vaasa Provincial Archives.

<sup>25</sup> The first newspapers in Finland were published in 1771. All of the newspapers published between 1771-1910 are digitalized and usable at the digital archive of the Finnish National Library at <http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/sanomalehti?language=en>. I found no items concerning parricide from the eighteenth century; the first item dates to 1801. The archives are searchable using keywords, but the image reading search engine is still in learning process: it misses some things. Therefore the following presentation is not based on an exhaustive source material; nevertheless, since the search engine does not leave anything out systematically, the results form a representative random sample.

<sup>26</sup> *fadersmord* in Swedish, *isänmurha* in Finnish, but one must also take into account the varying orthography of the time: sometimes parts of the words are written separately, sometimes with a hyphen, sometimes together, etc.

<sup>27</sup> *modersmord* in Swedish and *äidinmurha* in Finnish, and various typographical forms.

<sup>28</sup> *Åbo Tidningar*, April 12, 1824, (no 28, pg.1-3).

<sup>29</sup> *Morgonbladet*, November 15, 1847, (no 86, p. 2-3); Mythical ‘Viking’ and Valhalla symbols seem to have been very popular themes in fiction writing at the time. See also e.g. *Helsingfors Morgonblad*, February 25, 1833.

<sup>30</sup> *Turun viikkosanomat*, September 3, 1825 and September 10, 1825. ‘Indian’ was used to represent Native American but the description had as little connection to any real Native American culture as the Viking image had with any real iron age Nordic culture.

<sup>31</sup> *Åbo Tidningar*, October 24, 1821.

<sup>32</sup> *Åbo Tidningar*, December 1, 1821; *Åbo Tidningar*, March 13, 1824.

<sup>33</sup> *Åbo Tidningar*, January 8, 1823.

<sup>34</sup> *Åbo Tidningar*, April 12, 1824, (no 28, pg.1-3).

<sup>35</sup> See, however, Marianna Muravyeva’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>36</sup> *Finlands Almänna Tidning*, January 11, 1831; *Helsingfors Tidningar*, January 19, 1831; *Finlands Almänna Tidning*, February 10, 1831.

<sup>37</sup> *Åbo Tidning*, August 28, 1802.

<sup>38</sup> See also Garthine Walker, ‘Imagining the Unimaginable: Parricide in Early Modern England and Wales, c.1600-c.1760’, *Journal of Family History* 41, no. 3 (2016): 271-293. This seems to be a feature of parricide reporting today as well. See Kathleen M. Heide, Denise. P. Boots, ‘A Comparative Analysis of Media Reports of U.S. Parricide Cases with Officially Reported National Crime Data and the Psychiatric and Psychological Literature,’ *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 51, no. 6 (2007): 646-675.

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- <sup>39</sup> Estimate presented in Hannu Säävälä, 'Isänsä surmannut poika – psykiatrinen tutkimus' (PhD diss., University of Oulu, 2001) and Lehti, *Väkivallan hyökyaalto*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Åbo Underrättelser*, July 28, 1848.
- <sup>41</sup> *Helsingfors Tidningar*, August 30, 1848; *Maamiehen Ystävä* no. 36, September 9, 1848 and no. 37, September 16, 1848.
- <sup>42</sup> *Maamiehen Ystävä* no. 36, September 9, 1848.
- <sup>43</sup> *Suomen lehdistön historia 1: Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905* (Kuopio: Kustannuskiila Oy, 1982); Matti Kinnunen, *Sanan valtaa Kallaveden kaupungissa I. Kuopion sanomalehdistön historia 1844-1917* (Kuopio: Savon sanomain kirjapaino Oy, 1982).
- <sup>44</sup> Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, *Juomareiden valtakunta 1500-1850* (Helsinki: Teos, 2015), 43.
- <sup>45</sup> 'icke särdeles was begifwen på misbruk af starka drucker'. *Helsingfors Tidningar*, August 30, 1848. The same note also in the court records. District Court Records: Lower Keski-Pohjanmaa, C4b 24. May 1848, §6. National Archives of Finland (previously Vaasa Provincial Archives).
- <sup>46</sup> Peter Burke, 'Culture: Representations', in *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History*, ed. Peter Clark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 438-454; see also Keith J. Hayward, *City Limits: Crime, Consumerism and the Urban Experience* (London, Sydney and Portland, Oregon: Routledge, 2004), 89.
- <sup>47</sup> Vilkuna, *Juomareiden valtakunta*, 30
- <sup>48</sup> Vilkuna *Juomareiden valtakunta*, 57; Rajala, 'Yhteiskunnalliset ongelmat'.
- <sup>49</sup> James A. Sharpe, "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present* 107 (1985): 144–167; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in Early Modern England', *Past & Present* 153 (1996): 64–107; Garthine Walker, 'Everyman or a Monster? The Rapist in Early Modern England, c.1600–1750', *History Workshop Journal* 76 (2013): 5–31; Walker, 'Imagining the Unimaginable'. Grace, *Affectionate Authorities*, 99-100.
- <sup>50</sup> Toivo, 'Abuse of Parents'; Walker, 'Imagining the Unimaginable'; Amanda Holt, 'Adolescent-to-Parent Abuse as a Form of "Domestic Violence": A Conceptual Review', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 17, no. 5 (2016): 490-499.
- <sup>51</sup> 'får man af barnens wanart sluta till föräldrarnas vårdlöshet, är det sannolikt att ... icke med den efterson som wederbörde wakat öfwer sönernes uppfostran'. *Helsingfors Tidningar*, August 30, 1848, 2; *Maamiehen Ystävä*, September 9, 1848, 3.
- <sup>52</sup> 'okunnig i bokläsning'; 'kirjalukuun ihan harjautumatoin'. *Helsingfors Tidningar*, August 30, 1848, 2; *Maamiehen Ystävä*, September 9, 1848, 3.

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<sup>53</sup> Church Records, Ala-Härmä Communion Book 1846-1852, Wuoskoski by Nykarleby Pastorat, 530. National Archives of Finland.

<sup>54</sup> Sharpe, “‘Last Dying Speeches’”; Lake and Questier, ‘Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric’; Walker, ‘Everyman or a Monster?’; Walker, ‘Imagining the Unimaginable’; Grace, *Affectionate Authorities*, 99-100.