



**LIVING
AS A
SUB-
HUMAN
IN
SWEDEN**

RITT GOLDSTEIN

THE AUTHOR:

Ritt Goldstein is an American investigative journalist that has lived in Sweden since 1997. His work has appeared widely, including in America's *Christian Science Monitor*, Spain's *El Mundo*, Sweden's *Aftonbladet*, Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald*, Hong Kong's *Asia Times*, and a number of other global media outlets.

He has also had the honor of having one of his articles read in its entirety on the floor of the US Congress.

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This winter, the temperatures here in Falun, Sweden, were sometimes below minus twenty (Celsius), but that's relatively warm compared to some aspects of what everyday life has become. With the accompanying photo shouting forcefully against what indeed seems to exist for many, accepting its message means that illusions about Swedish justice and integrity fade, uneasily being replaced by haunting questions. Of these, by far the biggest question revolves ever more unsettlingly around the security of one's life and property, not to mention concerns regarding what Sweden's future may hold for those of foreign origins.

According to the online dictionary Merriam-Webster (MW), the noun 'subhuman' refers to "a subhuman being", with the first known use of the term being in 1937, a time marked by the ascent of 'far right' power, the horrors it meant. Much has been written about the rise of Europe's far right, its impact upon Muslims and other minorities, but prejudice remains an empty word until one experiences the crushing weight that can come of its actions. Times change and so do countries, with this journalist's own experiences in 'progressive' Sweden suggesting far worse circumstances than many imagine.

While an ever increasing number on our planet find themselves drawn to 'Nordic noir', the novels of Sweden's Stieg Larsson, few appreciate how much fact is contained in Larsson's fiction. Larsson's references to Nazism, the Swedish bureaucracy's capacity for brutalization, do exist for a reason.

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A far right legacy

Contrary to Sweden's image as a fastidiously correct bastion of progressive thought, seldom appreciated facts of this nation's history highlight there's indeed another and far darker side to this state. It is a side that's neither very pretty nor nice, but one that a well-known newspaper editor here privately told me he believes the country is again reverting to. It is a side that created the world's first racial biology institute in 1922, the Statens institut för rasbiologi (SIFR), the SIFR subsequently associated with the forced sterilization of 63,000 (over 90% being women) in a program only ending in the mid-1970s. And, it is a side that even allowed some Swedes to serve as Nazi concentration camp guards at Treblinka, a death factory where 900,000 Jews were 'exterminated'.

Of course, it can be argued that such things are in the past, but the past is too often merely prelude for the future. Emphasizing the point, visiting the website of the UK's Independent highlights that even in 1996 it published an article titled *Sweden is 'hotbed of neo-Nazism'*, thus footnoting a portion of why Nazism was indeed a theme Larsson strongly touched upon.

In real life, Larsson was a journalist specializing in the far right, his novels reflecting an all too appropriate concern regarding the direction his homeland was drifting, the ever stronger currents carrying it to the darkest of regions.

As for where such currents have led, on just 29 January the Swedish daily *Expressen* headlined "Politiker slogs blodig – av nazister" (Politician beat bloody – by Nazis). The politician, Daniel Riazat of The Left Party, is from the small city of Falun, an old regional capitol in North Central Sweden, and the city where I write this.

While I have lived in Falun for many years, over the last five years it has become a place I can barely recognize.

When I first came to Sweden in 1997, to Falun, I truly found it to be 'the closest place on earth to heaven'. The city of Falun itself was picture post-card perfect, and still is, a majestic 17th century church standing sentinel at the town square, and endlessly pristine lakes, mountains, and forest but a short drive away. Falun's physical attributes, the places in it that once whispered something special to me, they remain outwardly unchanged; but, my



11 January 2012: photo of protest in front of Sweden's Parliament against Court discrimination The Swedish portions of the sign read: Cronyism in Uppsala. Nonsense in law; Nonsense in justice; Who cares about minorities in Uppsala District Court; To lie under oath is risk free in Uppsala District Court. I will have Justice. – Photo by 'A Concerned Swede'.

experiences of the last years drown out the warm whispering I had once heard, today's reality screaming of a place far closer to hell on earth than heaven.

While many of those native Swedes one meets in Falun remain among the most decent people any of us might ever encounter, there are growing numbers that are not. Increasingly, it seems a separate 'set of rules' can be applied to those not native born of Swedish ancestry, with a widespread and growing acceptance of abuse being the most troubling attribute of all. Over the last years, there are those that have come to consider the abuse of some their right, a right they won't be denied, and Falun's 'good people' have yet to come to terms with this, let alone act to stop it.

In the Swedish-film version of Stieg Larsson's 'Dragon Tattoo', there is a scene where a torture/murderer explains himself, noting: "I'm taking whatever I want...I love the disappointment in their (his victims') eyes – it doesn't seem to fit with what they planned. They always seem to think that I'll show mercy. It's a fantastic moment when they finally realize they're not getting away".

While the above excerpt is fiction, the fact of blatant abuses of power here is too often quite real and has been documented. A 'cultural milieu' evolved effectively allowing those holding key positions within the municipality to be essentially above accountability, such a phenomenon far from limited to Falun. Worse still, the abuses coming of this appear increasingly 'normalized', with those perpetrating them typically not wearing swastikas but suits.

Graphically highlighting how Sweden's reality can parallel Larsson's fiction, in 'The girl with the dragon tattoo' there is a scene where the heroine's court-appointed guardian, a respected attorney, brutally binds and rapes her. Larsson's work repeatedly contrasts Swedes' 'proper and noble' image with a far more disturbing vision, that of those that ruthlessly use their position to victimize the vulnerable, in this case such a reality brutally depicted by events about a year ago. At that time, the former police chief of Uppsala County, a major city area in Central Sweden with one of the country's most prestigious universities, was sentenced to six years imprisonment for a string of serious sex offenses.

According to an article titled "Ex-police chief given lighter sentence" in the *Local*, Sweden's major English-language news site, the court found the former chief guilty of "aggravated rape, rape, assault, pimping, buying sex

and attempting to buy sex.” The article noted that the crimes included the rape of a seventeen year old girl, with the court determining that the “girl spent much of the rape tied up”, paralleling the fictional account of Larson’s heroine, Lisbeth Salander’s, being bound and raped.

The article also noted that the ex-chief was “one of the Swedish police’s top authorities on ethics and morals”.

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Disturbing aspects of America’s Deep South

In considering ongoing events, I often think of Hollywood’s depiction of ‘troubled towns’ in the US’s Deep South of another era, places where bigotry, corruption, and casual violence were simply a way of life. The ‘insularity’ of the fictional Hollywood communities, and the quite real Swedish ones, is likely more than coincidence, as is the suspicion, the xenophobia, with which those from outside such communities are typically regarded. Such towns can exist almost as a world unto themselves, ‘the rules’ that they live by being their own.

According to professor Olle Lundin of Uppsala University’s faculty of law, a change has occurred over the “last 20 or 30 years” in Sweden’s municipal governments. Lundin perceives what he terms “entrepreneurial politicians” today dominating many of Sweden’s municipalities, politicians he sees with a taste for building “shiny, big things”, but often a disregard for both their constituents and accountability.

In Falun, there have been substantive cuts to education, elderly care, and a host of social programs, but the municipality is spending millions on a huge, competition class ski jump (though it will be seldom used), a project which is surrounded by a corruption scandal and city employees on contractor paid junkets. The details of the scandal were sufficiently outrageous to make national news, especially as such conduct has typically remained beyond the public’s eye, and as Lundin noted, municipal accountability is a problem in Sweden.

I had contacted Lundin as he recently wrote a report on municipal accountability and controls, a report commissioned by an “expert group” established by the national government’s Finance Department. He says a structural problem exists, one with “no division of power within the local government”, no system of appropriate checks and balances accordingly.

Of course, returning to America’s Deep South, the ‘good ol boys’ did

things in their own ways too, the typical town bosses effectively lords over what they saw as their manor.

At the heart of Sweden's corruption problems are "people who have become too familiar" with each other, according to Prosecutor Nils-Eric Schultz of Sweden's National Anti-Corruption Unit, with what's perhaps best described as "cronyism" appearing to have blurred the boundaries of law for many. "If you are 'well-connected' locally ... there might be people then who are prepared to 'bend the rules' to give you favors and maybe they get favors back. And we know that this happens in municipalities," separately added corruption expert and political scientist Staffan Andersson of Sweden's Linne University.

What's occurring around me could be taking place in the Mississippi of the 1960s. The 'good ol boy' corruption, the Ku Klux Klan, and the 'genuinely proper and decent' people that live in the midst of this. But for most of those in Mississippi (or rather, most of those that were white), it wasn't until much later that they came to appreciate how very wrong so much was, with the majority seeing nothing wrong with it at the time, especially abuse directed at a black or an 'outsider'.

In November, an English-language version of an article from Aftonbladet was published in the *Local*, its title alone suggesting aspects of what's occurring: 'Swedish society forces 'immigrants' to emigrate'. Emphasizing the point, a February 2012 report by Statistics Sweden, the government's statistic bureau, found more Swedish emigrants in 2011 than at any other time in the nation's history, including during the peak of the country's 19th century mass exodus, The *Local* headlining "'Most Swedish emigrants ever in 2011': report".

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Far Right in historic strongholds

Here, in Falun, the January Nazi attack took place about a forty minute drive from town, and it's known that throughout this region, Dalarna, there are increasing pockets of far right activity. Of course, in just December, a procession of neo-Nazis, their flag carried proud and high, even boldly paraded in uniform through the streets of Stockholm, glaringly marching past the Jewish Community's headquarters, decrying a perceived 'Jewish conspiracy'.

Before his untimely death, Stieg Larsson had repeatedly expressed

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reservations regarding the future for Sweden's women, immigrants, and Jews, fearing a return to the abuses once common. I fear he was right.

Today, most of Sweden has some far right activity, the geographic pattern of it quite similar to that which existed during Germany's Nazi era, the 1930s and '40s. The least activity is in the far North, the heaviest in the far South, with parts of Dalarna known as having substantive activity as well. In describing the local attack against Riazat, one of the national papers, *Expressen*, quoted a witness as observing: "We sat in Folkets Hus and had coffee and talked, then people with flags, knives and bottles suddenly pushed their way in, said the witness. – They went to Daniel and hit him in the head with a bottle and kicked and beat him. People screamed and cried."

When I spoke with Riazat following the attack, he noted that during the confrontation he had considered the "events at Utoya" (site of Norway's Breivik massacre), and that an anti-racist demonstration was planned. Riazat also spoke of the far right's "increased aggressiveness", and to this observer, for the last years such societal currents have been all too evident, and encompass far more than those which are actually members of a far right group. In August, the major Swedish newspapers eliminated their 'comment' sections that had long typically followed articles here, the media widely reporting this done to end the growing number of anti-immigrant diatribes being posted.

The above events provide blatant examples of issues readily recognized, a darkness known from other places and eras; but, perhaps far more insidious are the evils that aren't so obvious. As the far right has grown, it has brought subtle but disturbing changes, changes in the attitudes, the actions, of a people I had once thought I knew.

On the positive side, at the subsequent February demonstration Riazat spoke of, the sponsoring group, Dalarna mot Racism (Dalarna against Racism), counted 800 people and even Swedish Radio did cite 'hundreds' in attendance. But while some are increasingly awakening to aspects of the problem, the fact that a very heavy police presence was required to ensure safety speaks volumes, as does the 'perspective' of many.

During a conversation with a young man here that seemed quite intelligent, decent, he began expressing his admiration for Hitler's SS, trying to explain it for me. Perhaps helping to explain such logic, a recent poll found that over 25% of Swedes between 18 and 29 admired the idea of a dictator-

ship, and I was more than surprised when a well known figure that was considerably older recently argued dictatorship's benefits as well. Among those that are older, a fellow I know recently tried to explain how a book he read revealed 'Jewish control' of the 1930s financial system, actually believing such antisemitic idiocy. But, the most disturbing aspect of these incidents – each occurring quite separately from the others – was the complete lack of malice among those embracing such absurdities. These 'otherwise good people' completely failed to recognize the wholly inappropriate nature of what they were saying.

Remarkably, such people continue to consider themselves 'progressive', the implications of their beliefs escaping them. And history does show there have been 'dark periods' for this Nordic nation, times when the conscience, intellect, and integrity that is often synonymous with Sweden becomes eclipsed, eclipsed by something far different.

In a 21 March article, the Falun newspaper *DalaDemokraten* headlined 'Similar to bourgeois politics in Nazi Germany' (Liknar borgerlig politik vid nazityskland), the article addressing Daniel Riazat's comparison of what could be termed the 'social Darwinism' of Sweden's ruling political parties (the Alliance) with German politics of the Nazi era.

Given what's ongoing, it's little surprise that a party where uniforms and swastikas were seen at meetings until 2001, the Sweden Democrats (SD), entered the nation's parliament in the last general election, 2010. Further highlighting the disturbing accuracy of Stieg Larsson's dark vision, prior to his death he predicted that 2010 would be the year the SD did enter parliament.

As part of the far right celebration of SD success, a 'Sverigedemokraterna' (Sweden Democrats) webpage can be found with the heading 'Grattis Stieg Larsson!' (congratulations Stieg Larsson). Though, in many ways, the SD themselves, neo-Nazis, and all others that have willingly branded themselves as far right, yet remain only a small part of today's problem, a circumstance that a 'bad election' could quickly change. The willingness of so many – so many who would never consider being part of such groups – to sympathize with the most discriminatory and anti-democratic agendas, would seem of considerable concern, part of that concern certainly being these individuals' future electoral preferences.

In the 2010 election, there were only about six thousand registered SD members, but the party received about 340,000 votes, 5.7% of the total.

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'The banality of evil'

For too many here, it appears that beyond the issue of appreciating the implications of what they are saying, many also completely fail to appreciate the implications of what they are doing. Of course, political theorist Hannah Arendt long ago addressed what such questions have led to, their impact upon Nazi Germany's bureaucracy, the victims of it, with Arendt describing "the banality of evil" that a detachment from ones actions can bespeak.

It was 1963 when Arendt first revealed her analysis, her book "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" explaining how the unthinkable could indeed occur. The Jerusalem trial of Nazi mass-murderer Adolf Eichmann provoked many unsettling questions, including those of how a man found to be 'sane' becomes a willing participant in 'the unthinkable', in genocide.

Arendt's key revelation was that those bureaucrats responsible for committing nightmarish acts, acts in the performance of their duties, were often quite ordinary, not the 'madmen' one would like to believe. She revealed these people as essentially simple functionaries that did what they felt 'was expected of them', not bothering to examine the horrific implications of their acts.

An everyday example was provided by a newspaper in Southeast Sweden just this February, *Barometern-OT* headlining "Vi är inte djur, vi är människor" (We are not animals, we are people) in a report on the housing conditions some faced, a problem I myself am too well aware of. This failure to enforce safe housing laws being but one example of the widespread banality of evil that seems to permeate so much of the bureaucracy here.

Over the last five years, I have seen and often experienced an explosion of the worst kinds of discrimination, though what much of the world terms 'corruption' plays an undoubted role too (in Sweden, only bribery is officially termed corruption). What I am describing is an insidious lessening of ones very humanity, a 'discounting' in the eyes of many individuals, businesses, and the organs of government. Even in healthcare, there exists a fairly newborn belief among too many that those of foreign origins can be dealt with in any manner that's expedient, a December headline reading "Somalis 'shut out' of Sweden's health system" in the *Local*.

I won't point out the consequences that denial of healthcare can mean, but I will note that Swedish law provides free healthcare to every resident, the fact that a whole group can be excluded screaming of the bureaucratic abuse enabling such nightmares, the 'banality of evil' that Arendt described.

I'll add that over the last year and a half, I too have had substantive problems with the healthcare system, but this is not to say that discrimination in healthcare never existed here earlier, only that it is another area where the circumstances appear to have rapidly deteriorated. While a body called Socialstyrelsen is responsible for healthcare oversight, only recently I received the decision upon a complaint I had made. The decision rejected a complaint, but it was not the complaint I had made, erroneous facts and statements remaining in the decision's 'facts' even after I had earlier pointed out such errors, the Socialstyrelsen process I witnessed being one that I can only describe as a 'cruel charade'.

As to the 'official breadth' of Sweden's 'discrimination', an interesting document was prepared on the subject not that long ago.

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The blue-gold glass house

In 2005, the Swedish government published the results of its investigation into 'structural discrimination', *Det blågula glashuset* (The blue-gold glass house), the report finding discrimination existing in the "labour market, the housing market, mass media, the political system, the legal system, the educational system and welfare services such as the social services and health care."

Det blågula glashuset explicitly blamed "widespread denial" among Swedes, coupled with a tendency for "blaming the victim" as reasons for structural discrimination's existence. The report noted that other societies had come to terms with similar discrimination issues following what it termed "eye openers", citing a key instance in the UK as an example...

A very important example is The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in Great Britain which in 1999 examined the failures of the police in the investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young "black" man who was murdered by a gang of "white" men.

Sweden does not lack such events, but they have not functioned as "eye openers" in the same way. I believe that the most important reason for this

is a widespread denial.

While growing societal hostility towards those not native-born is a topic Swedish media has only sporadically confronted, at the end of the Northern Summer both a major Swedish website and The Local ran an article titled 'Immigrants in Sweden are treated as a homogenous, deviant group'. The work was written by Salam Zandi, international liaison officer for Sweden's Mälardalen University, and it addressed how a perspective today exists in Sweden whereby "immigrants are transformed into 'the others'", any negative conduct occurring outside of this nation's social norms simply being "attributed to immigrants" in the minds of many.

Reinforcing Zandi's observation, 'Det blågula glashuset' had observed: The overriding picture of immigrants in the media is that they constitute a "threat" or a "problem"... the media creates "Swedishness" through the ascribing of negative traits to "The Other". Swedes are all the things that "The Others" are not.

With a pattern existing which widely places those of foreign origins outside Swedish society, and in a position where negative values are indelibly painted upon both them and anything associated with them, an effective societal group of 'subhumans' (what Nazi Germany had termed "undermensch") is created in the minds of many. When I contacted Zandi, the potential significance of this had not escaped him.

In a voice of obvious concern, he observed that it's "very important to signal that the process (of dehumanization) has started, started through some political efforts, but it has cultural roots...it is very easy to see it come to 'a mass understanding'". Zandi added that a growing perception of lesser value in anything that is associated with, or the product of, an immigrant "is the most dangerous framework, you can't fight it with logic."

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'Human being' has one definition

Highlighting a further effect of the current milieu upon some, particularly the young, Zandi remarked that in responding to issues raised by his daughters, he often reminded them that the term "'human being' has one definition". I can only speculate upon the pain a father must feel when repeatedly compelled to say such things, the pain that his daughters must feel with each suggestion that their ethnicity makes them less than others.

Events I have witnessed, my own experience, suggest that having dis-

cernible foreign origins in Sweden has now, too often, at best become seen as a mark of 'lesser humanity'. At worst, having foreign origins can be seen as effectively tantamount to a form of criminality, a form of criminality viewed by increasing numbers as deserving of 'punishment'.

Footnoting some of the cultural psychology in play, there is a Swedish word that many use to refer to groups that are anti-immigrant, 'främlingsfientligt'. While this word is often translated as 'xenophobic', a literal translation would be 'enemy of strangers'. Of course, as Norway's Breivik massacre illustrated, once declared 'the enemy', virtually anything can be done to those so designated.

In mentioning Breivik, I should add that *Expressen* reported some months ago that it's believed he lived in Sweden, doing so during a period when he formed a "large part of his political opinions". The *Expressen* article is titled "Terroristen Breivik bodde i Sverige" ("The Terrorist Breivik lived in Sweden"), providing further commentary on aspects of the current environment.

Recounting some of my own experiences – those of a sixty-year-old, Jewish, university educated American journalist – are useful in further illustrating a reality that few Swedes beyond Stieg Larsson have broached.

Upon receiving permanent residency here in 2006, I was assigned a rental apartment with Falun's municipal housing authority, Kopparstaden, the majority of rental apartments in Sweden being held by such municipal firms. Though I complained of a 'funny odor', and though it's illegal to rent an apartment with odor problems, I was assured the apartment was fine, that I just needed to scrub it. I was also informed by the local immigration authorities, those that had assigned me the flat, that it was this apartment or no apartment, Sweden having a decided rental housing shortage.

Having no reason to doubt the integrity or goodwill of the local authorities, I accepted the apartment, scrubbed as suggested.

Months later, desperately ill and after enough 'scrubbing' to severely injure a shoulder, I discovered that the flat was contaminated with "powerfully elevated" levels of toxic mold, plus chemical contaminants. One noteworthy lab analysis revealed "unusually high levels" of chloroform and benzene, the benzene level alone being over six times the Swedish and EU limits for ambient air.

The phrase 'finding an apartment here is a killer', has acquired wholly new meaning for me, a meaning I can only speculate how many others

of foreign origins here may appreciate. However, several years ago I was informed of a scandal in another community, one where newcomers were knowingly fed into bad apartments.

I won't comment upon 'Swedish hospitality', but I will relate that Falun's municipal housing company, Kopparstaden, confiscated all of my belongings from the contaminated flat, doing so without providing any compensation. As the confiscation was carried out without my knowledge, it was some time later that the chairman of a major Swedish University's property law section wrote there was no legal basis for such an act, but such 'formalities' seem irrelevant in Falun.

As to what I did receive from Kopparstaden, a chief physician certified me in 2008 as 75% disabled from "building related symptoms".

One might well argue that both my health and property were wrongfully taken from me. With no recourse, I found myself forced to hire an attorney, took Kopparstaden to court. While the court found that I had indeed been severely injured by Kopparstaden's flat, I actually lost the case, despite seemingly overwhelming evidence. As to how that could occur, the local media reported that the Court had heavily relied on the verbal testimony of Kopparstaden's employees, discounting substantive evidence directly contradicting their accounts.

The largest local paper, *Falu Kuriren (FK)*, wrote: "What surprises Söderman (my attorney) is that the district court put so much emphasis on what Kopparstaden's own employees testified in court. This action is built on that it is precisely those employees who have misbehaved, so they are talking in their own cause."

FK added, "All witnesses are sworn, of course, but according to Åke Söderman it's usually the case that the testimony of the parties to the proceedings is considered relatively lightly. Instead, it is independent witnesses, expert reports and medical and forensic evidence that should have the largest weight in law."

FK subsequently printed an opinion article titled "Municipal loyalties more important than the law?" (*Kommunal lojalitet viktigare än lagen?*)

As highlighted by both government reports and the photo accompanying this article, not to mention my own experience, Swedish courts can prove devastating for those of foreign origins. Perhaps the worst aspect of this problem is that it's known, officially criticized, but yet seems to remain effectively tolerated.

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'Judicial agencies are aware of the problem'

In 2008, the Swedish government's 'Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå' (National Council for Crime Prevention) came out with a report that confirmed discrimination in the Swedish Court System against those from abroad, 'Det Blågula Glashuset' earlier raising the issue. At the time of the 2008 report's release, the *Local* quoted a Council spokesman as observing: The essential judicial agencies are aware of the problem, but discrimination can be difficult to work against and correct. Highlighting and fighting discrimination in the judicial system is one of the most important confidence building measures to which judicial agencies can devote themselves," said Jan Andersson, head of the Council for Crime Prevention.

Since my first bad Kopparstaden apartment, I have had two more in a row after it, despite medical certificates highlighting the profound danger this represents for me, the "furthest negative" consequences it means. Physician records of my coughing blood emphasize the point, and if I was an animal, it's likely those responsible would have been prosecuted under animal protection statutes, but, I am too often perceived as effectively just a 'subhuman in Sweden'.

Notably, though there are excellent safe housing laws in Sweden, the relief of these safe housing laws has remained beyond my reach. Kopparstaden and the city of Falun have repeatedly misrepresented the severity of circumstances, with those higher authorities that reviewed these cases repeatedly accepting their statements at essentially face value.

It has often seemed that virtually every attempt to achieve redress through official action is governed by an unwritten rule, one which states 'those of foreign origins are always wrong' ('blaming the victim'), with elaborate games of charades appearing to be dutifully performed in hopes of obscuring this. Of course, faced with such conduct, I eventually took evidence of what is ongoing to a prosecutor.

While the prosecutor in question found that both Kopparstaden and the city of Falun had indeed made false statements – court decisions being based upon these statements – Swedish law actually states that one must be provided "special notice" prior to testifying, that the testimony must be compelled, for criminal penalties regarding false testimony to apply in environmental cases.

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An excerpt from Environmental Prosecutor Anders Gustafsson's email reads: The WSP (lab) report speaks of very ample presence "mycket riklig förekomst" (very high abundance) of mold at Kvarnbergsvägen. Even if the kommun's/KopparStaden's denial that there is any problem with the apartment was erroneous, my previous conclusion remains, that since the kommun hasn't been obliged to give the information no crime has been committed.

While disappointing, I appreciate that Gustafsson went as far as law allowed, but my opinion of other prosecutorial efforts is somewhat different.

Earlier, I had pressed another criminal complaint against Kopparstaden regarding the injuries I'm suffering. That complaint was dismissed without investigation, the Falun prosecutor which handled that case feeling my account of events differed too much from Kopparstaden's to be accurate.

According to the 2008 report done by Sweden's National Council for Crime Prevention, those of foreign background are routinely "seen as less trustworthy than ethnic Swedes", such a perspective tainting the manner in which any evidence is perceived. Beyond this, in towns where corruption questions are known to exist, other factors come into play.

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'Hate... we have entered the process'

While non-whites and muslims were the first to face the recent upsurge in discrimination here, I am indeed a jewish, white person of US origins, yet have certainly found myself effectively treated as a 'subhuman' by many. As Sweden has increasingly shifted towards 'the right', I have increasingly encountered events that seem direct from the 1930s, but the 'broader growth' of such issues has not gone completely without notice.

Writing for Stratfor this September, George Friedman observed that: European nationalism has always had a deeper engine than simply love of one's own. It is also rooted in resentment of others. Europe is not necessarily unique in this, but it has experienced some of the greatest catastrophes in history because of it. Historically, the Europeans have hated well. We are very early in the process of accumulating grievances and remembering how to hate, but we have entered the process.

Returning to some concrete examples of what is ongoing here, in September two men were charged with attempted murder in two separate "hate crime" assaults, both upon men of South Asian origins. The events

occurred in Västerås, a city in central Sweden once best known for its religious piety and cathedral, with a swastika tellingly drawn upon the bag of one victim, the fellow told to “go home”, according to Swedish media.

Though I personally have not been told to ‘go home’, I have often been asked if I planned to, and have had three separate and severe vandalism incidents at my current contaminated Falun flat. However, none of these vandalism incidents left signs of a forced entry, and nothing appears to have been stolen.

Upon contacting the local police, when I tried to get an investigation pursued after the first incident, an officer told me to speak with my landlord, Kopparstaden. After the second incident, I was told the same by a different officer, that officer adding that the incident couldn’t be investigated by police for six to twelve months. After the third incident, officers did come by and took some samples for a lab analysis.

Following a two month delay, the lab findings that have so far come back indicate “acetic acid”, a solvent, on three of the four samples taken, though what it was combined with has yet to be determined. The health effects were not pleasant.

Last winter Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), Sweden’s leading conservative paper, headlined, ”Vi bor sämre än djur här” (“We live worse than animals here”). The article reported upon housing conditions faced by some in a primarily immigrant area outside of Stockholm, noting that the residents were “afraid” to complain. As for this journalist, I live in a ‘better area’ where few immigrants do, and crime is essentially non-existent, but I too am living ‘worse than an animal’, and do well understand why some are “afraid” to complain.

Again, being of foreign origins can be seen by some here as tantamount to a form of criminality, a form that seems increasingly to be perceived and understood as deserving of punishment, apparently even within Sweden’s justice system. The 2008 ‘Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå’ (National Council for Crime Prevention) report on the justice system discrimination faced by those of foreign origins observed: “The material from both the Discrimination Ombudsman and from judicial agents also describes a number of cases of people with foreign origin that have been treated in a condescending, rude, disrespectful, arrogant or contemptuous manner by the police, prosecutors, defense lawyers or judges. The examples that occur in the National Council’s different materials show that these responses are not only

offensive to the victims, but also affect the potential these people have to be heard and believed, and to achieve redress through the justice system on an equal basis as people from the majority population.” (translation of the Swedish text)

I can only speculate upon the full extent of severe discrimination in Sweden towards those of foreign origins, but believe it is more severe in some areas than others, more severe against some groups and individuals than others. While there are ample structures at the national level that ostensibly exist to preclude these types of threats, my own experience has been that all have assumed a posture of passivity towards such issues, issues spawned by what many see as a pervasive and expanding Swedish xenophobia.

According to Merriam-Webster’s definition, xenophobia is defined as “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign”. Of course, a widespread embrace of xenophobia would explain a perceived sense of legitimacy in ‘punishing’ any of foreign origins encountered.

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Discrimination Ombudsman and discrimination

Notably, Sweden has a Discrimination Ombudsman’s (DO) office to address the consequences of such prejudice, but Summer 2011 news reports indicated that the organization had at least a third of its personnel leave it, complaints of a “bad working environment” and “dissatisfaction” with DO leadership cited as figuring prominently in the departures. Highlighting the nature of events further, in 2010 one of the DO’s own foreign-born investigators sued it for ‘discrimination’.

According to court documents, a DO investigator of Eritrean origins, Ms. Weini Nobel, accused a supervisor of repeated racial slurs, an ethnic slur, and terming her an “opinionated bitch”. Nobel made DO complaints regarding the incidents, with the documentation highlighting that she charged one incident was not even investigated, and in the second she was provided “completely contradictory statements about the investigation”. Even though Nobel herself was a DO investigator, and remains one, she lost the initial case.

When contacted, Nobel refused comment at this time due to yet ongoing litigation, but it would appear that Sweden’s Discrimination Ombudsman discriminates. My own complaint to them was immediately dismissed

without investigation, a practice that's reportedly not uncommon in cases involving discrimination on the basis of foreign origins.

Footnoting events, I was informed several years ago, by a Swedish member of parliament, that I could only hope to win a court case against Falun's municipal housing authority if I was a native-born Swede. In my own appeals to both national and regional authorities regarding the documented "life-threatening" circumstances I am forced to endure, "completely contradictory statements" and completely erroneous findings by such authorities have dominated, suggesting the depth of danger ones life and property may face here.

Despite hard evidence to the contrary, what Prosecutor Gustafsson termed "erroneous" testimony is simply accepted by the authorities here at every level. The photo on Page 5 of this essay seems to indeed describe circumstances many Swedes of foreign origins currently endure.

Given the levels of documented official misconduct, coupled with the effects of xenophobia and the far right politics increasingly in play, in an admission that seems little short of surreal, I confess that unless the pattern of abuse I'm enduring is broken, my very survival actually is in jeopardy. The fact that such a circumstance can happen, that events are occurring in 'plain sight', emphasizes the 'disconnection' allowing the local banality of evil to truly bloom.

In a way, personally witnessing and documenting such a social phenomenon is almost worth such severe suffering, the key word being 'almost' ... not to mention that death is an experience a bit more final than I would currently care to partake in.

In Falun, the board of my housing company, Kopparstaden, is comprised solely of municipal politicians, and the city of Falun has a similar governing body. Both the Falun municipal board and the board of Kopparstaden were presented with substantive evidence of wrongdoing, but – as of this writing – neither has acted nor expressed any interest in doing so. Though asked to comment for this article, neither group chose to; however, an exchange with a very senior Falun political figure is revealing.

When I was asked if I wanted "an apartment (a new apartment) or revenge", I replied that I wanted justice, which then was immediately equated with 'revenge' by the politician in question. Though I am now permanently disabled, enduring what might arguably be termed 'torture/attempted murder' in plain sight, the Falun executive felt it wholly inappropriate that

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I would seek criminal prosecution and incarceration for those that, in this Falun politician's eyes, were merely doing "something stupid".

Clearly, the thought of a 'foreigner' actually asking for the appropriate laws to be enforced carries substantive negative attributes in itself, suggesting how far beneath those native born someone of foreign origins is perceived, the effective license this provides to those inclined towards abuse.

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'Very early National Socialism (Nazism)'

It would seem that for those of foreign origins considering living, working, or investing in Sweden, a number of profoundly disturbing questions exist. Questions regarding the shape of Sweden's future are certainly not least among these, especially with rising unemployment and financial hardship fanning far-right scapegoating. And in March, it was widely reported that Sweden's economy has taken an unexpected downturn, is heading into recession.

Today, there are far right parties in every parliament in Scandinavia, but Sweden's is the only one among them with neo-Nazi roots. Following the SD's 2010 election, political scientist Cristian Norocel, of both Stockholm University and the University of Helsinki, told me that much within the Sweden Democrats' agenda paralleled "very early National Socialism (Nazism) in Europe."

As I have watched events that defy my belief, I can't but recall that in Germany's 1928 election the Nazi party received only 2% of the vote, though, Nazi messages of scapegoating and hate succeeded in bringing Hitler to the Chancellorship by 1933. While such allusions may seem extreme in themselves, more recent headlines further highlight my reasons for them.

In June 2011 a headline read "Swedish kids invited to neo-Nazi summer camp"; in July, there was "Swedish neo-Nazi site charged with hate speech"; and, in August, even Fox News headlined "Swedish Child Given Swastika Tattoo With Fast Food Kids Meal". While such headlines speak for themselves, a further one in August, about a visiting UK family, adds more still.

The circumstances were a return visit to Sweden for the couple, the pair first having visited in 2003, having a "wonderful time"; thus, their return this summer with their children. The family was of Indian extraction, however, and this trip was quite different from the first, today's environment

yielding a headline in the Local that read ‘We never had a single conversation with a Swede’. However, while the article reported that Swedes wouldn’t speak with them in other than the course of business, it did note that on this trip they found they were “being stared at”, the father also noting that at one point he was concerned for his children’s safety.

The threats I daily face I do not attribute to neo-Nazis or the Sweden Democrats. In my opinion, the issues I face originate with official misconduct and the xenophobia that’s long existed but has explosively grown here, the perceived legitimacy many feel in viewing foreigners as a ‘lesser species’, as essentially ‘subhuman’, lending a perceived sense of legitimacy to whatever ‘punishment’ misguided individuals are inclined towards. “The issue is, unfortunately, in this country more cultural...definitely more cultural than political”, Zandi had observed, expressing a belief I too hold. But, this is definitely not to say that the Swedish far right isn’t making the most of what could potentially be this nation’s ‘fatal flaw’.

In explaining the environment here, and beyond the ‘true fiction’ of Stieg Larsson, the most useful analogy that repeatedly comes to mind is indeed Hollywood’s portrayal of ‘troubled towns’ in America’s Deep South, places riven with the kinds of bigotry and corruption that were effectively just a way of life for some. While fictional, many such films did accurately depict the casual malice and brutality that could readily be shown ‘outsiders’, or those blacks that ‘didn’t know their place’. They also highlighted the opportunities these towns’ victims had for justice, the role of local strongmen in determining what ‘justice’ was.

As to how much of a parallel in fact exists, Swedish National Television has a sitcom called “Starke man” (Strong man) which lampoons the social and corruption issues such towns exhibit, although in a ‘very sanitized’ way. And though ‘Starke man’ is quite funny, the brutal reality which too many face here is far from amusing.

Being jewish and having lost the European side of my family in the Holocaust, I have often considered how such horror could occur. There were many Germans of the time that were neither mad nor monsters, so how could such a nightmare become real? In recent months, I believe I have come to appreciate how the German people could let the horror of Nazism rise, and my belief is that they didn’t understand that they were ... until it was too late.

As *Det blågula glashuset* observed, a combination of widespread denial and ‘blaming the victim’ yields a blindness not readily overcome.

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I have met many good and decent Swedes, with some of these people of the sort that there are none better. But, even among these, there are few which seem to comprehend the darkness now descending, one left to hope the strength of truth will awaken many more.

UPDATE: *In a further comment upon the changing nature of Sweden, the latest polls show the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD) as now the country's third largest party, their popularity gaining an added 35% in the most recent poll. They had an increase of 40% during April/May, and now 35% for May/June ... 'Sweden Democrats third largest party: poll' - the Local <http://www.thelocal.se/41236/20120604/>*

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