A Class Framing of the Norwegian Massacre of 22 July 2011

Michael Seltzer, Professor, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences*
Karl Fredrik Tangen, Associate Professor, Oslo School of Management**

Introduction

The point of departure for this paper is with the most horrendous act in modern Norwegian history – a bomb blast and a series of execution-style killings that took place in Oslo and on a nearby island. Before surrendering to the police, Anders Behring Breivik - a 32 year old Norwegian - murdered 77 persons – mostly youngsters he hunted down on the island before executing them with shots to the head. In a country of fewer than 5 million people, these fatalities were proportionally greater than the deaths caused by the 9/11 attacks in relation to the US population. Several hours before launching his attacks on the office complex housing Norway’s Labor government and the annual summer meeting of its youth organization on the island, Breivik emailed a 1,519 page manifesto entitled 2083: A European Declaration of Independence to scores of individuals and organizations. This document and the short video accompanying it now have been examined by scores of academics, journalists, and a range of commentators searching for answers to what motivated his actions. In addition, two teams of court-appointed psychiatrists examining Breivik have produced two diametrically opposed reports about his mental state. The first report which generated massive debate diagnosed him as paranoid schizophrenic while the second found him free from mental illness and culpable for his actions. When the trial concludes in late summer, it will be left to the court to decide which of these two reports to accept.

In the first part of our paper, we briefly touch upon a cluster of facts drawn from his manifesto, police interrogations, and interviews with former schoolmates, workmates and neighbors. Next, we focus on what largely has been overlooked or ignored in these and other accounts about Breivik’s life and motives – namely his positioning in the class system of Norwegian society and in particular, his upbringing as a member of the petit bourgeoisie on one side of the perhaps the most

---

* Michael.Seltzer@hioa.no       ** Karl.Fredrik.Tangen@mh.no
class divided capital in Europe. While Islamophobia, anti-communism, hatred of the Labor party, ultra-nationalism, and xenophobia have been identified as central motivating factors for Breivik’s actions, almost no attention has been directed to showing how these and related dispositions can be understood in terms of his upbringing and membership in west Oslo’s petit bourgeoisie as well as his rapid downward trajectory from his position in this class fraction. Rather than viewing Breivik as a single crazed fanatic with no reference to his social context, we wish to examine him both sociologically and historically as an actor in the class structure of Norwegian society. We wish to see if it is possible to understand aspects of his actions in relation to theories of status anxiety explaining extreme rightwing activism and fascism among members of the petit bourgeoisie fearful of losing their tenuous footholds between labor and capital. We also employ a frame informed by Norwegian history to explore possible links between Breivik’s beliefs and actions to those of earlier generations sharing his class background. In the 1920s and 1930s, members of west Oslo’s petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie were in the vanguard of proto-fascist and fascist organizations fighting against the growing political power of the Norwegian working class. Central among these was the Nasjonal Samling party led by Vidkun Quisling, a former army officer and defense minister. During the five year German occupation beginning in 1940, his puppet government led recruitment drives resulting in thousands of young Norwegian men volunteering to serve in the Waffen SS and other armed forces of the German occupiers of Norway. And as we shall see, those who joined to fight for Hitler became the subjects for conflicting psychiatric evaluations in the postwar period. But prior to examining these and other class-related factors, it will be necessary to begin with Breivik’s own rationale for his actions.

A natural but problematic starting point for this exploration is with the fifteen hundred page document Breivik sent to over one thousand email addresses the same day he launched his attacks. This is challenging because as we and other readers of this document have found nearly two-thirds of its contents have been excerpted and directly plagiarized from other sources, especially from the Islamophobic blogosphere. After sifting through its many cut and pasted pages, it is however possible to single out three main original contributions authored by Breivik. These consist of his claims about the 15,000 hours of study carried out prior to the attack, an account of his life and an annotated curriculum vita highlighting his career as businessman and investor, and a final part incorporating a vision of a Muslim-free utopia combined with a self-interview presenting his reasoning and plans for the attacks. In examining this part, it is possible to identify its three tropes. These focus on 1) the invasion of Norway by Muslims bent on conquering and enslaving its inhabitants and destroying Norwegian culture; 2) the betrayal of Norway by those in positions of
power who have opened the gates to welcome these invaders in the name of multicultural values; and finally 3) the need to defend Norway, its culture and traditional values by exterminating the current and future members of this traitorous political elite. His primary enemies, however, are not Muslim immigrants whose goal, he claims, is to conquer Europe and then the rest of the world by breeding faster than the native populations of their host societies. In Breivik’s world, they constitute the most serious danger to Norwegian culture and western civilization as a whole. Nevertheless, they rank second to the group he regards as most dangerous. These are ethnic Norwegians – mainly Labor party politicians – who together with liberals, leftists, cultural relativists, radical feminists and fellow travelers have operated as a fifth column allowing Muslims to enter Norway. Using the terminology borrowed from the American conspiracy theorist William Lind, Breivik describes members of this group as “cultural Marxists”. The feminists in this group are particularly dangerous for Breivik because they are out to destroy patriarchy. This, he argues, is one of the two pillars upon which Western civilization rests. The other is Christianity weakened he argues by cultural Marxists who have helped introduce youth priests clad in jeans conducting service in minimalist buildings looking more like warehouses than churches. To underscore the targets of his defense mission, Brevik opens the manifesto with a photo of himself armed with an automatic weapon posed in a shooting position where the badge “Marxist Hunter” is prominently displayed on his military-like uniform.

During the six months following the massacre and the opening of his trial in February, academics and journalists investigating Breivik’s life and the manifesto have generated a profusion of explanations for his actions. These have included among other things the eerie I-Pod soundtrack from the film *Requiem for A Dream* music he listened to while hunting down and executing his victims on the island; addiction to the computer games World of Warcraft and Battlefield 2; long-time use of bodybuilding anabolic steroids; the mix of ephedrine and caffeine ingested the day of the attack; rejections by Norwegian women who preferred men of immigrant backgrounds; his activities as a member and minor official in the Progress Party, Norway’s largest and most anti-immigrant political party; and of course, the usual suspects of his mother purportedly lacking good maternal skills and a biological father absent for most of his life.

A Life Spent on One Side of the Class Divide

Near totally ignored in all these explanations is an understanding of Breivik and his actions in relation to the class system of Norwegian society – and that of Oslo, in particular. He was born, schooled and lived nearly his entire adult life on one side of what easily is the most spatially class-
divided capital city in Europe. Beginning in the 1800s, the east side of the Aker River splitting Oslo in two became the home of the working class, while the river’s west side became the home territory of the Oslo bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie. With the exception of a Nordstrand, an enclave of villas on the heights overlooking Oslofjord, this split has continued up to the present day and is demonstrated in every election with the Labor party and other parties of the left dominant in Oslo’s east and the Conservative party equally dominant on its west side.

However, a much more dramatic indicator of this class divide is represented by the contrast between life expectancies of those living in these two parts of Oslo. A recent nation-wide survey of life expectancy in Norway carried out by Statistics Norway showed that while average life expectancy for a man living in the Sagene district in east Oslo was 68.4 years, the average for a man living in West Aker in west Oslo was 80.5 years. For women, this difference was not as pronounced but still dramatic: a woman in Sagene and Old Oslo in the east could expect to die at the age of 77 which was 6 years earlier on average before a woman living in Ullern on the highlands of Oslo west (Dybdendal & Skiri, 2005). These extreme differences in life expectancy in Oslo’s two sides represent an anomaly are found in a wider Norwegian society recently declared by the epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett to have achieved one of the highest, if not the highest, degrees of social equality in the world in terms of health and social indicators (2009). Given the history of this line of demarcation, it is not at all surprising that two distinct dialects or more precisely, sociolects – west and east Oslo – serve as linguistic markers of this class divide with the former more pretigious and the latter as more common and/or vulgar (Jahr 1990).

This class divide was much a part of Breivik’s life. As a newborn infant son of a diplomat father, Breivik lived for less than a year in London where his father was stationed. Then after his parents’ divorce, he moved with his mother and half-sister to Frogner, a district bordering the grounds of the royal palace containing perhaps the oldest and most exclusive apartments in west Oslo. Soon afterward at the beginning of the 1980s, he moved further westward with his divorced mother and half-sister further to Skøyen Vest, a newly built complex of 900 apartments in three story blocks constructed by OBOS, a massive housing cooperative and construction company with close and long standing ties to the Labor party.

Established in 1929 to provide decent and affordable housing for Oslo’s working class families, OBOS concentrated its construction projects for more than 40 years in east Oslo. But for political reasons as well as availability of land, OBOS in the mid-1970s first breached the class border with two housing projects. The first, Hovseter, a set of high-rise blocks, was started in 1974 while the
second, Skøyen Vest, comprised of 900 apartments arranged in three-story building, was opened early in the 1980. These two relatively small complexes made it possible for a relatively small number of working class families with membership in the OBOS cooperative to occupy a tiny niche in what long had been the home territory of Oslo’s bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. Scattered among these largely ethnic Norwegian working class intruders was a handful of working class families of non-Western backgrounds – mainly from Pakistan and India.

Consequently, Breivik’s childhood in sharp contrast to previous generations growing up in west Oslo involved contacts with members of the working class in Norway. At earlier times, a west Oslo boy like Breivik from a families headed by diplomat father and a military officer stepfather most likely would have little contact with working class people outside of shop employees and servants his family might employ. Breivik’s schooling began at Smestad School, a grade school enrolling members of the royal family. Later he went to Ris middle school. Both these institutions long have schooled the children of the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie of west Oslo and according to the Aftenposten newspaper, there are few places in Norway exhibiting as much wealth as families living in the villas arranged in the hills above these two schools (2011). Not surprisingly, both these schools have the reputation of being extremely snobbish and while Breivik was attending them, it was reported that youngsters from Skøyen west were teased and bullied for coming from “negerbyen“ (trans-lated “niggertown”). According to those who remembered Breivik at Ris, he much admired his wealthy classmates and was much concerned with dressing like them in the most up to date and expensive clothing brands. A photograph taken of Brevik at that time shows him in a classroom in front of blackboard onto which a large swastika had been carved. This may have reflected the fights reported to be taking place then between the boys of the ethnic Norwegian majority and the tiny minority of working class boys from immigrant and non-immigrant families living in Skøyen Vest (Moen 2012). During his final year there, the principal of Ris received a death threat from an anonymous neo-Nazi group for allowing an anti-racist organization to hold a meeting at the school (Lunde 1995:22). After graduating from Ris, Breivik remained in west Oslo first as a student at Hartvig Nissens gymnasium before transferring to Oslo Handelsgymnasium because he wished to study business.

Up to this point in his life, he was following a well-worn schooling and career path staked out by earlier generations of young men from the privileged class fractions of west Oslo. After Smestad, Ris and Oslo Handelsgymnasium, one went on to further degree work leading to middle to high level positions in law, shipping, banking, investments and related enterprises. But halfway into his final year at Handelsgymnasium in 1998, Breivik dropped out announcing to his classmates that he was wasting his time and talents in the classroom and that he was leaving to become a millionaire.
While still in gymnasium, he began his longest period of employment working for 6 years as a telephone solicitor at a large call center selling calendars, lottery tickets, magazine subscriptions and books. According to a friend interviewed by journalists from Russian Television, Breivik was easily irritated while working there by workmates from the Middle East and south Asia (RT 2011). The manifesto describes his life after leaving school as one where he was CEO of several firms, advisor to a foreign bank, and consultant to several different businesses. As the manifesto puts it, his business savvy and moneymaking triumphs in all these ventures made him a much respected and popular businessman among associates and friends.

But the police investigation of these claims have revealed that with the sole exception of one illegal enterprise not mentioned in the manifesto involving internet sales of forged university diplomas and transcripts, all Breivik’s business ventures and investment schemes ended in failure. Yet, despite these setbacks, his life on the surface was that of a successful young west Oslo businessman: he drove a BMW and lived in two modern and expensive flats near Frogner Park. It appears, however, that he financed this lifestyle with funds borrowed from banks to finance his various failed projects as well as credit extended him by more than a dozen credit card companies. At this time, Breivik also had several cosmetic surgical operations done on his chin and nose. He also continued with a regime of body building and anabolic steroid use begun when he was a teenager and much concerned friends recall with looking as he put it “big and strong.”

Finally, in September of 2006 after being declared bankrupt and in violation of a number of Norwegian banking and tax laws, he moved back to live with his mother in her tiny 2 bedroom apartment a few hundred meters from his childhood home in Skøyen Vest. After 8 years of failing to become a business success, he then spent the next 5 years jobless, financially dependent on his mother and isolated in his bedroom often in front of his computer screen playing computer games – sometimes up to 16 hours each day. In addition, he was much involved in debates and discussions on the Islamophobic blogosphere while putting together the manifesto and working out the rationale and details of his attacks.

The Politics of Those Terrified of Plummeting Down the Class Ladder

Aside from the failures of his various enterprises, there was very little differentiating Breivik from many other young men of his age raised as member of west Oslo’s petite bourgeoisie. He shared with them similar dispositions, aspirations and life chances. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, members of this class fraction are constantly weighed down by feelings of deficiency when it comes to their possession of economic, cultural and social capital but what they do possess in
overabundance are aspirations to increase these forms of capital. That however only concerns their possible upward trajectory in the class system. The possibility of downward trajectory represents one if not their greatest fear. Caught as they are between the working class and the bourgeoisie, they live in a perpetual state of frustration, resentment and most of all insecurity linked to their shaky positioning on an extremely slippery slope. As Barbara Ehrenreich so cogently put it, they are continually tormented by fears of falling (1970). And Breivik’s plummeting trajectory in the Norwegian class system may explain why time and again over several years while being supported by his mother, he rejected her urgings to register for unemployment support and other social benefits.

In the context of Norwegian society and its welfare system, going to “the social” to ask for financial support is still something many working class people do with great reluctance. But for those socialized in the values of and accustomed to life in higher strata of the Norwegian class system, a similar trip is unthinkable. To do so would dramatically symbolize just how far one had fallen outside bourgeois society.

By employing this class perspective, Beivik begins to resemble something other than the paranoid schizophrenic diagnosis given him by the court’s psychiatrists or the “lone nutter” label attached to him by journalists and others including the racist English Defense League. Viewed in relation to the class system, he assumes a form sociologists, political scientists and historians first began to describe when European fascism was on the rise in the years following World War I. At that time, there was much scholarly attention focused on the question of why ultra-nationalistic and anti-communist movements of this sort had their greatest appeal to certain classes and class fractions. Given the scorn for the Frankfurt school by Breivik and a number of Islamophobic writers quoted in the manifesto, there is a certain justice in the fact that the school’s Erich Fromm and Franz Neumann were perhaps the first scholars to argue that support for fascism by the German “mittelstand” could be linked to the anxieties and insecurities experienced owing to their positioning in the class system during periods of economic downturns and cultural changes (Fromm 1941; Neumann 1951).

According to the so-called status anxiety thesis developed by them and later refined by other social scientists, right-wing political movements incorporating anti-communist, xenophobic, and racist ideologies are especially attractive to those in middle strata resentful of the power and privilege of the bourgeoisie they aspire to join but fearful at the same time of losing their position owing to the growing power of the working class beneath them. Following WWII, a number of sociologists in the US applied theories linking these theories of status anxiety to the growth of right-wing political movements among certain sectors of the American middle strata (e.g., Bell 1963; Lipset 1963, 1960; Mills 1951; Trow 1958; Wallerstein 1954). Their research showed for example that the
most marginalized and threatened members of this class fraction were overrepresented among those supporting Senator Joseph McCarthy’s crusade against alleged communist sympathizers among the political elite personified by such Eastern establishment personages as Alger Hiss and Dean Acheson. The conservative commentator Peter Viereck put it another way in describing the resentment and hatred of middle class McCarthyites for the elite as “. . . the revenge of the noses that for twenty years of fancy parties were pressed against the outside windowpane” (1965:317). Empirical evidence for the status anxiety thesis in twenty-first century American society was provided by Val Burris in his richly detailed examination of the American Christian Right in one American state. Analyzing data from governmental records required by the state of Oregon for those financing political groups, Burris found that a key determinant for support for rightist politics was “. . . not the absolute level of one’s social status but the perceptions of threats to that status or the disjuncture between one’s current status and the status to which one feels entitled” (2001:50).

Turning back the clock to Norway in the 1930s and 1940s, studies have shown that the urban bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie and as well as some large landowners in rural Norway comprised the vanguard for several proto-fascist groups as well as the openly fascist Nasjonal Samling party headed by Vidkun Quisling. Fearful of losing their positions and privileges to the rapid growth of the organized working class which ultimately became in the mid-1930s Norway’s first Labor government, members of these class sectors – particularly the Oslo bourgeoisie and petit boureoisie - put their faith in this army officer and former defense minister who in 1931 used troops against striking workers. This support was evident in the membership showing “. . . clearly that N.S. was overwhelmingly an urban-based party” (Myklebust & Hagtvet 1980:621). Nearly fifty per cent (49.2) of the party’s membership from 1933 to 1939 came from Oslo (ibid, 622) and though exact figures are unavailable about their Oslo addresses, it is fairly safe to assume given the city’s longstanding class divide that they were to be found in west Oslo. An additional indicator of support for NS among Oslo’s middle strata - and an indirect indicator of their west Oslo roots - draws from a detailed study of party membership where it was found that

*Its appeal was directed to . . . ‘responsible people’ like policemen, military officers, doctors as well as active representatives of Norwegian culture and society: teachers, artisans, managers in industry and employees in the civil service* (Larsen 1980:607).

West Oslo, in fact, was the site where NS was official launched at a hotel by a tiny group of men identified as members Oslo’s upper and upper middle classes (Breivig 1970:24-40). Prior to this event a variety of proto-fascist organizations had been active in west Oslo. Already in 1933, students at four gymnasiums in west Oslo had formed their own version of Hitler’s NSDAP called the NNSAP
replete with storm trooper brown uniforms, riding boot and swastika armbands (Emerland and Roughvedt 2004:195). West Oslo residents had already been central in Samfunnsvernet (Society Protection), an organization of strikebreakers and private militias funded by the Norwegian bourgeoisie and equipped with steel helmets, rifles, pistols and clubs. Founded in 1923 as a counterweight to the organized working class, it existed until 1935 when it was officially outlawed by the Labor government after it was found that its members were receiving weapons training from military officers using equipment from the Norwegian armed forces. During these 12 years, Samfunnsvernet had enlisted 10,000 members and of these 5,000 were in Oslo (Johansen 1967:55).

Though critical of *middelstand* theories of rightwing extremism, two historians regarded as central to the scholarly literature on Norwegian fascism and proto-fascism provide some support for the status anxiety thesis in concluding that

*This remains our main contention: the N.S. was used as a vehicle for structuring a confusing world; it became a repository for ideals for reconciliation and escape for people who had experienced disruptions and disappointments in their aspirations and in their daily lives* (Myklebust & Hagtvedt 1980:644)

In order to understand the fears of the Norwegian bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie, it needs to be emphasized that in their eyes communism and the Norwegian Labor party were one in the same. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, this party had been a member of the Communist International until breaking away in 1923 but its supporters were still described by members of the Norwegian bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie as Bolsheviks. One of Quisling’s last acts as defense minister prior to launching Nasjonal Samling was to hold a speech in the Norwegian parliament identifying by name a number of Labor and Communist party politicians as “enemies of our fatherland and our people” (Dahl 1999: 83). Such declarations were welcomed by the Norwegian bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie terrified by the growing electoral power of organized labor and desperately seeking a champion to defend their interests and privileges. For a number of scholars, this class-based fear and hatred of the working class coalesced in making the party he headed function as a “. . . political *rear-guard action* against Labor party ascendency” (Myklebust & Hagtvet 1980:644) as well as “the hot-headed reaction against . . . acknowledgement of the Labor party as a legitimate partner in the political realm”(Torgesen 1966:29)

Following the national election of 1935 leading to the ascendency of Norway’s first Labor government, the nightmare long feared by the privileged classes became a reality. For Quisling and his followers, this election signaled the beginning of the end for Norwegian society. He declared that a combination of “wretched political leadership” and “international
communism” was leading to destruction of Norwegian society. And the solution he proposed was a project led by Nasjonal Samling to restore “the great Nordic race – the most valuable race of human kind” (Quisling 1941:21-33; Brevig 1960:15). The model for creating their future society was drawn nearly in its entirety from an imagined past prior to Danish and Swedish rule of Norway. Nasjonal Samling symbolized this with its sun cross flag patterned after the banner of Saint Olaf, the first Christian ruler of Norway. It also advocated replacing the customary Norwegian greeting of “hello” and “good day” with the old Norse greeting “Heil og Sæl” spoken with outstretched hand not unlike the Nazi salute.

For Quisling and his chief ideologue Gulbrand Lunde, holder of a doctorate in biochemistry and an executive in the canning industry, a new Norway governed by Nasjonal Samling would be cleansed of all foreign cultural elements starting with those inherited from Danish and Swedish rule. Quisling defined these influences in racist terms in declaring that Norway was “. . . threatened by culturally destructive forces of the unworthy races” (1940:15-16). For Lunde who was to become Minister of Culture in the puppet NS government during the German occupation, it was imperative to expel from Norway all Swiss chalets, Jugend style buildings, American jazz and Hollywood films, as well as every tiny bit of foreign culture which had in his words “eaten their way into the whole of the country in all fields” (Lunde 1942:35-38). His rationale for expunging these elements was that there existed in the Norwegian people, what he called “a will to be Norwegian” but this was smothered by the flotsam left by a series of cultural invaders in forms beginning with a

. . . thick layer of Danish fat. Upon it lies a Swedish layer and different kinds of foreign influences and there is also a rather thick English influence, and a Jewish and a Bolshevik on the top. All of this must be thrown out. We must scrape right to the bottom before we see something beautiful and joyful. . . It is only on this foundation that we can render something great and positive and bring Norway’s name to light among the world’s peoples (Ibid: 38)

In Quisling’s own words and italics, the central task of this cleansing project necessary to restore what he described as “the great Norwegian race” was to be “annihilation of the imported deadly communist revolutionary movement” (1941.:21-33; Brevig 1960:15). This appeal to combat communism with armed force featured prominently in the NS campaign to recruit young Norwegian man to fight alongside the troops of the German occupiers of Norway from 1940 to 1945 (Dahl, Hagtvet & Hjeltines 2009; Holter 1951; Knudsen 1967). Although exact figures are still unavailable, it has been reckoned that anywhere between fifteen and eight thousand Norwegians volunteered to join the Norwegian Legion, Regiment Nordland, and other units of the Waffen SS and other armed
units in the German armed forces (Blindheim 1977; Dahl 1972; Gogstad 2001; Sjåstad 2006). Of this number, 6,000 were accepted and fought in Russia, Poland and elsewhere. Approximately one thousand of these soldiers were killed during the war which is an instructive figure compared to the two thousand Norwegian ground troops killed fighting on the Allied side during the same period (Kontrast 1971:58).

At the present time, access to information about the identities, class backgrounds and homes of Norwegians who fought for the Axis is still restricted to a handful of historians granted permission to examine government archives. However one indication of where these soldiers came from in Oslo is found in a recent history of the Nasjonal Samling. This work book contains a series of photographs showing Norwegian members of the Waffen SS and other German armed units at various sites in Oslo. They are pictured at rallies, marches, sporting events, and listening to speeches by Quisling and other NS officials as well as German officers – all on the city’s west side (Dahl, Hagtvedt, & Hjeltnes 2009). Another less direct indication from the first study of these soldiers conducted in the post-war years showing that the majority came from the Oslo region and were better educated than the norm for the rest of the Norwegian population which again can be expected of young men from west Oslo (Gogstad 2001:230). Two studies by a psychiatrist who interviewed 348 of these soldiers imprisoned after the war found that 53% came from Oslo and had, as he termed it, “solid middle class” backgrounds (Frøshaug 1949, 1951). One analysis of the police interrogations of the Norwegians who had fought on the German side showed that the majority of those interviewed reported that the communist menace and the struggle against Bolshevism were central motives for enlisting on the German side (Gogstad 2001:232). Forty years later, a physician interviewing 181 of these former soldiers, then in their late 50s and early 60s, found that the majority (60%) cited anti-communism as their main motive for joining the armed forces of Germany (Stridsklev 1995).

If we now fast forward to the fifth of February this year to the first public statement made by Breivik at the opening of his trial, we clearly hear echoes of the anti-communist rhetoric of bourgeois Norwegian society of earlier times. On that day, Breivik introduced himself with the titles he used when surrendering to the police on July 22 in declaring himself to be “Commander Anders Behring Breivik in the Norwegian anti-communist resistance movement”. Using our translation of the court transcript, we hear Breivik elaborating on his role as:

...a military commander of the Norwegian resistance movement and a knight, Chief Justice of the Knights Templar of Knights Templar Norway and Europe...
After formally asking the judge for permission to read from a written, he began a pedantic explanation of his actions in the form of a lecture:

The attacks against the government buildings and against the Labor party was an attack against the traitors who are committing and planning to commit cultural destruction, which is deconstruction of the Norwegian ethnic group and deconstruction of Norwegian culture. Systematic deconstruction of the Norwegian ethnic group is the same at ethnic cleansing. The traitors in the Labor party are using political asylum, family reunions, granting of residence on humanitarian grounds and refugee quotas as tools for the Islamic colonization of Norway. As a result of this policy, Norway’s indigenous population, ethnic Norwegians, will be a minority in Oslo in the course of ten years. That is not a claim, but a fact...I represent the Norwegian resistance movement and Norway’s indigenous peoples and my ancestors have lived in this country for 12,000 years. We in the Norwegian resistance movement are not going to sit still and watch as we are made a minority in our country. We will not accept. This is unacceptable. We are going to fight against the traitors in the Labor party and against those political activists who work for other organizations supporting multiculturalism and Islamization. And now comes the conclusion: The attacks of July 22nd were a preventative attack to defend Norway’s indigenous people, ethnic Norwegians. As a militant nationalist, a cell commander of the Knights Templar and representative of the Norwegian resistance movement, I cannot accept guilt because I acted in self-defense for my people, my culture, my religion, my city, my country. I therefore demand that you release me at once and I wish to propose that the Norwegian Defense Department nominate me for the [military medal] of War Cross with Three Swords.

Déjà vu or Something New under the Sun

The point we are trying to develop is that rather than seeing Anders Breivik as a crazed mass murderer in the early years of the 21st century, he also may be understood as member of a certain geographically placed class fraction of Norwegian society who put into murderous practice certain ideas long prevalent among its members. Obviously, this raises the crucial question of why others of his class background sharing similar anti-communist, Islamophobic, ultra-nationalist, and xenophobic views did not join his murderous attacks against the Labor party and its future leaders. Perhaps one reason is that nearly all of Breivik’s soulmates calling for the blood of their shared enemies at their computer keyboards in the anonymity of cyberspace are so comfortable and protected in the safety of their homes that they have no reason to carry out the gory slaughters of their fantasized anti-communist and anti-Jihadist crusades. As the Australian commentator Jeff Sparrow has perceptively commented, the blogosphere provides concealment, space and a forum for legions of Milquetoasts to become mighty and bloodthirsty ‘Nordicwarriors’ calling for the extermination of Muslims, Marxists, immigrants, feminists and all others they blame for the insecurities of their lives (Sparrow 2011).
A trial currently underway in Sweden provides one illustration of the influence of these bloggers. There, Peter Mangs, a 38-year old Swede and avid reader of anti-immigrant blog sites, is being tried for a series of sniper attacks against immigrants in Malmo leaving 3 dead and 12 wounded. Like Breivik, Mangs failed to finish gymnasium and then immigrated to the US where he was financially supported by his father for more than 4 years while failing in his dream to be a successful musician. Breivik has written to Mangs and complimented him on being greatest resistance hero in Scandinavia - until of course Breivik’s own actions of July 22. Also Breivik has told police of his admiration for John Ausonius, the so-called “laserman” who killed one immigrant and wounded eleven others in the Stockholm-Uppsala area early in the 1990s. Like Mangs and Breivik, Ausonius was also a gymnasium dropout. And like Breivik, he speculated in the stock market and lived for a few years the life of a high flying finance man. And also like Breivik, he accumulated gigantic losses on the stock market and slid rapidly down the class ladder in Sweden. But unlike Breivik, Ausonius robbed a series of banks providing him with funds to maintain his Yuppie lifestyle.

Returning to Breivik’s ongoing trial, it may be fruitful to show that the current conflict among the court’s psychiatrists about the state of his mental functioning replays in many respects a debate that took place 60 years earlier in the Norwegian psychiatric community. Beginning immediately after the end of the German occupation in 1945, five leading psychiatrists began a series of research projects for the Norwegian Justice Ministry to determine “the frequency of psychoses, intelligence deficiencies and other psychic abnormalities” among soldiers who had fought for Germany as well as the tens of thousands of NS members convicted of treason (Gogstad 2001:199). One of its most prominent members, Professor Gabriel Langfeldt, argued that it was likely that NS members were psychopaths with “. . .abnormal drives and emotional lives” (Kroglund 2012:287). After observing a group of Norwegians imprisoned for fighting on the German side, Langfeldt wrote a newspaper report resurrecting archaic theories of criminality in describing his reaction to them:

*It was like gazing into a group of prehistoric men with their creepy stares and often deformed faces and dysplastic body types recalling Lombroso’s ‘born criminal’* (Kroglund:287-88)

Another member of this research group, professor Ørnulf Ødegård, claimed to have found in his study of 1219 NS members a greater than normal frequency of psychopathology among their kin and immediate families (1947), but his findings were not supported by the project’s other studies. In fact, these findings were directly contradicted by another of the member of the psychiatric group who conducted a study of 348 soldiers imprisoned at two facilities and concluded that less than 8 per cent of them showed signs of mental illness (Frøshaug 1949, 1951). Each prisoner volunteered to be
interviewed by the psychiatrist as well as examined by two psychologists who carried out a battery of psychological tests. These researchers found that this group to be slightly more intelligent compared to men of their same age in the general population. They were also found to be better educated than other men in the general population which may be interpreted as another indicator of their class background since working class Norwegians from that generation seldom had the financial resources for schooling beyond grade school. Rather than psychopathology, the researchers found that family influence and a set of what were diffusely defined as social psychological mechanisms were the two factors most responsible for their decisions to fight for Germany. These particular findings were so controversial at that time that one condition of their publication in the English language psychiatric journal *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* was that they were not to be further disseminated in the Norwegian media (Gogstad 2001:200).

One interpretation of this post-war conflict among psychiatrists having relevance to the current debate about Breivik’s mental state is that to declare him to be insane shifts attention away from class and other factors impacting on his life to a much narrower focus on his delusions and other aspects of his individual psychopathology. This, of course, fits neatly in with the interests of such hate groups as the English Defense League who despite their documented contacts with Breivik declared him to be a “lone nutter” immediately after July 22nd. This view of a delusional killer dovetails as well with the interests of as well of proclamations of innocence by many of the main actors of the Islamophobic blogosphere. Even though he had both face-to-face and cyberspace contact with some of them and even though their writings fill hundreds of pages of his manifesto, nearly all of them publicly disassociated themselves from Breivik following the massacre.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, there are a number of indicators suggesting that few of these writers come from working class backgrounds. A brief examination of the backgrounds of those writers most often cited in the manifesto suggests that they share Breivik’s class background. For example, Peder Jensen, the writer cited most (111 times) in the manifesto is the son of a petty bourgeois shopowner/concert producer father and a local historian/journalist mother. Though holding a master’s degree, Jensen worked as a low paid assistant caring for mentally retarded adults while producing thousands of pages on the blogosphere aimed at displaying his expertise as scholar of Islam, feminism, the European Union and esoteric subjects like the brewing of beer. Among the other prolific Islamophobic writers much quoted in the manifesto are Robert Spencer, whose father worked in the Voice of America organization, and who holds a master’s degree in catholic history but claims expertise in all aspects of Islamic society, law and history. Bat Ye’or, another self-proclaimed expert on Islam, began but never finished a degree in archaeology at
the University of London. Likewise, Pamela Geller, a child of the Long Island suburbs, widow of a millionaire car dealer and dropout from Hofstra University, is a prolific blogger claiming inside knowledge about Islamic conspiracies to take over the world. In reading these and others who writings fill hundreds upon hundreds of pages of Breivik’s manifesto, one cannot escape the impression that they are present day versions of the French petit bourgeois autodidacts described nearly 30 years ago in pre-cyberspace times by Pierre Bourdieu. As he then emphasized, the insecurities generated by their shaky positioning between capital and labour makes them desperately concerned with presenting their immense stores of self-acquired knowledge as equivalent to or superior to the kinds of cultural capital acquired by those possessing legitimate educational credentials (1984:328-339). When Breivik who often boasted of having achieved more than the equivalent of post-graduate university education with his fifteen thousand hours of reading and research was asked to name one book which had impressed him, he could not recall a single book or single author, but did recommend Wikipedia as a great source of knowledge. Like him, the mainstays of the Islamophobic blogosphere tell of devoting great stores of time and energy to gathering the fruits of their self-study they put on display. In so doing, they constitute a special form of what Bourdieu first described as the “cult of autodidactic effort” characteristic of the petite bourgeoisie (1984: 351). Despire the tragic/comic aspects of their to present themselves as oracles and experts, these writers and the legions of anonymous admirers responding to them in cyberspace with words of praise have been responsible in the past decade for creating what Andreas Malm, the Swedish journalist and student of Islamophobia, has described as a breathable environment of fear and hatred. As he succinctly puts it: they all inhaled from this atmosphere, but Breivik was the one who exhaled (Dagbladet 2011).

The Past Weighing Like a Nightmare

Perhaps the exact mental processes triggering the events of last July will never be identified. Indeed, this may ultimately prove to be an impossible task even for the teams of psychiatrists appointed by the court to do so. But rather than narrowly focusing on issues involving the presence or absence of psychopathology in the mind of this mass murderer, our aim throughout this paper has been to employ a wider social structural framing of him as specific actor in spatially and historically defined sectors of the Norwegian class pyramid. In concluding this exploration here, we begin with a brief review of the trajectory of his life along different points of this class ladder prior to July 22nd. Born in west Oslo with a diplomat father, educated at its best schools and filled with standard petit
bourgeois aspirations, the young Breivik seemed destined to climb upwards along a pathway well-worn by earlier generations of west Oslo’s young men. Yet, rather than the success he hoped to become and lied about becoming in the manifesto, his sense of his own acumen in business and investing led to his undoing and a series of failures. Even what appeared to be his only moneymaking venture, peddling counterfeit university diplomas and transcripts on the internet, ended in ruin.

With customers paying 105 dollars for false doctorates and 295 dollars for the special BA, MA and PhD package, he managed in three years to accumulate 600,000 dollars deposited in 14 overseas banks (VG 2012:4). But he soon emptied these accounts in unsuccessful stock market speculations and lost his BMW as well as a luxury flat in west Oslo. In the manifesto, he laments without mentioning a loan equivalent to 50,000 dollars from his mother that he was forced to finance the purchases of weapons and explosives for his attacks with 9 credit cards and by selling off his cherished Breitling watch, Montblanc pen and Versace table service. At that time in 2011, he already had been living nearly 5 years in his mother’s tiny apartment still in west Oslo but now with a leader of an immigrant worker association as one of his nearest neighbors. For a young man announcing years earlier to his classmates that he was going to become a millionaire, this situation represented the realization of nearly all petit bourgeois status anxieties and fears of falling.

In her richly detailed study of downward mobility in the US class structure she poetically described as “falling from grace,” the American cultural anthropologist, Katherine Newman, found her informants commonly experiencing

*Feelings of anger or dismay, a sense of injustice – these are the responses to downward mobility shared by most of its victims (1999:229)*

These kinds of emotions saturate the fifteen hundred pages of 2083: A European Declaration of Independence, but nowhere does Breivik’s relate them to his own particular fall from grace. In fact, it is difficult to find any direct or even indirect references to Norway’s class structure in the manifesto. As earlier mentioned, Breivik’s anger is directed at Muslims, the Labor party and a catchall grouping of “cultural Marxists” comprised of radical feminists, multiculturalists and others on the political left. Yet with his many forebodings about a rapidly approaching future when the alleged high birthrates of Muslims would set the stage for their enslavement of the peoples of Norway and the rest of Europe, a devil’s advocate might inquire why Breivik did not choose to attack worshippers congregated for prayers at the handful of mosques in east Oslo as well as those schools in east Oslo having many youngsters with Muslim backgrounds.

Why we must ask did the Labor party and its youth became the targets of his rage? Even though his written and spoken statements are presented as being necessary to defend Norwegian
culture and society from a future “deconstruction,” we would suggest that at one level, perhaps the subconscious, his attacks had much to do with the blame he attributed to the party of organized labor in Norway for his own rapid slide down in the class system. In short, we argue that the tropes of invasion, betrayal and defense central to the manifesto together with his nightmare vision of a destabilized social order may have more to do with past happenings in his life in west Oslo than about future threats of a multicultural Norway ruined and ruled by Muslim invaders.

When presenting himself at his trial with the delusional titles of military commander and Knight Templar complete with a clenched fist salute, Breivik declared that he wanted to destroy the present and future Labor party leadership so as to prevent future damage being inflicted on Norwegian society and its culture. The subtext of this declaration we suggest could be understood as describing not a future but a past when this party had made it possible for a handful of working class families to move westwards thus disturbing ever so slightly the social arrangements long enjoyed by west Oslo’s privileged men, women and children. Understood in this way, his texts and testimony about invading Muslim Others threatening the future stability of Norwegian society could be reinterpreted as descriptions of the damage he felt had already been done to his own life and aspirations by the invasion of his west Oslo neighborhood by working class Others. The manifesto provides some support for this understanding in the form of Breivik’s vision of a future genetically “purified” Norwegian society cleansed of Muslims, but where there would still be a need for imported labor to carry out housework, gardening, harvesting and similar menial tasks. To deal with these chores, he proposes bringing in non-Muslim laborers from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan to work on 6 to 12 month contracts before being shipped back to their homelands. He emphasizes on page 1197 of the manifesto that this imported servant class, when not working 12-hour days, would “live in segregated communities in pre-defined areas of each major city”.

As evidenced by the history of fascism and proto-fascism in Norway, hatred as well as fear and loathing of the working class had deep roots in the ideological climate on this side of the city. But once the east-west class divide first had been penetrated ever so slightly in Breivik’s childhood, this meant that schools long the stronghold of pupils from bourgeois and petite bourgeois families began to be infiltrated by a relatively few youngsters from working class families. Not all of these working class invaders were ethnically Norwegian: some had origins in Pakistan, India, and the Middle East. Their physical presence too represented a disturbing element in that part Oslo still referred to in some quarters as Vanilla Town owing to the color of its inhabitants. As we have shown, one response to these developments at Breivik’s middle school was the resurrection of the west Oslo fascism of the 1930s and 1940s in the form of a neo-Nazi group. More significantly, this new situation meant
that while Breivik at an earlier time might have been viewed by his affluent classmates as a just poor bourgeois relation, he had become instead a tiny minority of kids from “Negerbyen” or the “dump” as it was also called to be teased and bullied by their wealthier schoolmates. It is perhaps not coincidental that Ris classmates recall Breivik at that time beginning a bodybuilding regime while desperately trying to act and dress like his wealthier schoolmates. It is important to note as mentioned earlier that the working class invasion of west Oslo was made possible by OBOS, the building cooperative with longstanding and intimate ties to the Labor party. Indeed one of the earlier residents of Skøyen Vest was Sissel Rønbeck, a former government minister, who represented at that time the Labor party in parliament and who later went on to be a board member of the national building cooperative including OBOS as its key member. Given the relatively small size of Skøyen Vest, it is possible that her visibility in Breivik’s living space represented a local reminder of the damage he imagined her party and the class it represents had done to his petit bourgeois life and aspirations.

As Noam Chomsky cogently observes, the five letter unmentionable word in the United States is class. In today’s Norwegian society, there are signs that the six letter word Klasse may be destined to share a similar fate and become what one sociologist describes as an absent presence circulating socially while remaining unnamed (Lawler 2008:126). Nonetheless, working class consciousness is still being kept alive by the members of the political party Breivik wished to exterminate. It still hosts first of May ceremonies where members of the organized working class of Norway join together to celebrate themselves, their victories and their roots. Internasjonalen is still sung with gusto at party gatherings and of course by the party’s younger members at their gatherings each summer on Utøya. The predictability of this annual meeting is we suspect what made it such an attractive target for Breivik. During his trial, he has told of first planning to trigger a massive fertilizer bomb in the midst of the thousands of women, men and children gathered to celebrate Mayday in the square in Oslo’s center bounded on the one side by the headquarters of the Labor party and on the other by the headquarters of Norway’s AFL/CIO. Failing to carry out that massacre, Breivik chose to bomb the complex housing the Labor government and then to travel to the island to murder every single person one he found there. At the trial he told of hoping that most of Utøya’s girls and boys would die in a kind of mass drowning try to escape his bullets. Their deaths, he told the court in his characteristic pedantic style, were necessary because they had made themselves “legitimate targets” by supporting the idea of a future Norwegian society “deconstructed” by bearers of alien cultures.

Throughout this paper, we have tried to make the case that those murdered and maimed on that gray July afternoon represented the political party Breivik blamed for his downfall by allowing
working class Others to invade, disturb and defile the pristine bourgeois world of “his” side of the city. As we have earlier indicated, this kind of scapegoating done by petit bourgeois actors fearful of or actually sliding down the class pyramid is unfortunately a familiar pattern in modern European history. Perhaps the best known example of this pattern is represented by the explosive growth of rabid anti-Semitism among the bourgeois sectors of Viennese society in the late 19th century. This has been sometimes been understood as originating in the linkage of two totally unrelated developments. On the one hand, many actors in the city’s petit bourgeois fraction had lost or were in the process of losing their positions and privileges in the wake of a series of major financial crises. At the same time, liberalization of some restrictions by the Austro-Hungarian empire opened the way for some Yiddish speaking and oddly garbed Jewish immigrants to enter the city’s slums. Though these two developments had nothing to do with each other, not a few of those fearful or actually losing their footholds between capital and labor found these highly visible strangers, rather than the workings of the capitalist system, to be the cause of their difficulties. Like Breivik over a century later, they channeled their fears, loathing and hatred into aggression against powerless and vulnerable victims who had nothing to do with their real or dreaded fall down the class ladder.

In concluding this attempt to examine the class dimensions of this massacre, several developments at the ongoing court proceedings in Oslo should be mentioned. Ever since Breivik was put on trial, veteran Scandinavian journalists have left the courtroom often in tears and sometimes in clenched fist anger. They then produce report after report describing him as a monster and a butcher. Yet, at other times, many tell in their reportage of their puzzlement about these hideous acts and their perpetrator in the form of this well-mannered and soft spoken young man from west Oslo sitting quietly listening to the testimony of his victims. This we argue should not be surprising since class is the powerful absent presence occupying much space in the courtroom and in Breivik’s life: it is the proverbial elephant in the room permeating his written texts, spoken testimonies, and indeed his whole being in the world. Day after day, survivors at the trial show their wounds and tell of hearing Breivik’s shouts of joy as he shot them and murdered their comrades. All the while, he sits a few meters away from them stiffly and without expression clad always in his immaculate black suit and dark Windsor-knotted tie. There he fiddles with a pen and occasionally takes notes on small yellow slips. When he does speak, he does so formally in what Pierre Bourdieu has described as the tense, pinched mouth, tight-lipped and low volume speaking style of the petite bourgeoisie (1999: 86-87). Breivik’s way of being in the world is only part of what Bourdieu described three decades ago as the archetypal habitus of the petit bourgeois when emphasizing
It is no accident that the adjective petit (small) or one of its synonyms can be applied to everything the petit bourgeois says, thinks, does, has or is, even to his morality. It is strict and rigorous, its formalism and scruples always make it somewhat tense, susceptible and rigid. With his petty cares and petty needs, the petit bourgeois is indeed a bourgeoisie ‘writ small.’ Even his bodily hexis, which express his whole objective relation to the social world, is that of a man who has to make himself small to pass through the strait gate which leads to the bourgeoisie: strict and sober, discreet and severe, in his dress, his speech, his gestures and his whole bearing, he always lacks something in stature, breath, substance, largesse. (1984:339).

Day after day at the trial, the class-defined contrast between Breivik’s bodily hexis and those of his victims is underscored as these youngsters, or in some cases, children, who survived his attack tell of what they witnessed on the island. Like the scores murdered on Utøya, these survivors come from nearly every one of the nineteen parishes ranged along the one thousand mile length of Norway. And this is demonstrated in the great diversity of their regional dialects. Unlike Breivik so acutely and stiffly concerned with properly speaking the dialect of his west Oslo, these youngsters are refreshingly unconcerned with making any adjustments whatsoever to their spoken presentations of self often showing their regional and working class backgrounds. Despite having to sit uncomfortably close to the monster who murdered their comrades and riddled their bodies with bullets, these young witnesses produce their words with broad and relaxed mouths displaying a variety of words heavy with diphthongs and stressed first syllables contrasted markedly with the tense and self-censored speaking style of Breivik – a way of talking at once artificial, sterile and hollow. And finally, it must be noted that even though a fair number of those murdered, maimed and scarred on Utøya came from schools arranged around the east, north and south sides of Oslo, as far as it can be determined from a search of the records, none were from Breivik’s privileged alma maters of Smestad and Ris schools. This demonstrates that even in 2011 when it comes to questions of life and death for girls and boys as young as 14, class still matters in Norwegian society.

References


Knudsen, H. (1967) *I was Quisling’s Secretary.* London: Britens.


York: Doubleday.


forlag.


Moen, E. (2012) “Har vi ham nå”, VG online, 23 April
http://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/artikkel.php?artid=10073272

Myklebust, J. and Hagtvet, B. (1980) “Regional Contrasts in the Membership Base of the
Nasjonal Samling,” in Larson, S., Hagtvet, B., and Myklebust, J. (Eds.) *Who Were the

Press.

University of California Press.

Quisling, V. (1940/1941) “Retningslinjer for Nordiske Folkereisning” in *Quisling Har Sagt*,
Oslo: Stenersens Forlag.


frontkjemperne under den andre verdenskrig,” Hovedfagsoppgave, Historisk institutt,
Universitetet i Bergen.

Breivik, Right Terror, Racism and Europe* . (Eds.) Humphrys, E., Rundle, G. and

Lægeforening*, nr. 11: 115:1379-84.


