

**SOCIAL CONTROL AND LAW IN THE FINNISH GYPSY COMMUNITY:  
BLOOD FEUDING AS A SYSTEM OF JUSTICE**

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**Introduction**

The author of this article conducted research concerning Finnish gypsy society as a participant observer during one and a half years in 1976 and 1977.[1] Although the main aspect of enquiry was the examination of the relationship of the gypsies with the Finnish police, attention was also focussed on their indigenous system of justice, blood feuding. In order to put the reader in touch with the operation of blood feuding as the chief means of social control among Finnish gypsies, it is necessary first to describe some of the more important characteristics of the Finnish gypsy community.

Finnish gypsies today number around 6000-8000, which is more than the rest of the Scandinavian gypsies put together. They have been in Finland for over 400 years. Their isolation in this remote region of Europe from the rest of the world's gypsies has meant that although the basis of their culture resembles that of other gypsy groups, the culture of Finnish gypsies has developed in an independent direction. Numerically they form the largest physically distinct ethnic group in Finland. Their dark complexion and extremely colourful and elaborate clothing make them also the most visible ethnic group in the country.

Throughout their existence in Finland they have formed the prime group on whom the Finns have been able to vent their racial prejudices, and their situation is still very poor in spite of some efforts to alleviate it. For example, the police in Finland hold numerous prejudices against gypsies, and apply discriminatory measures in their dealings with them (Grönfors, 1979, 1980). The gypsies for their part distrust the intentions of Finnish society and avoid contact with it in every sphere except the economic.

Finnish gypsies, previously a rural travelling people, have become semi-sedentary and primarily urban in the last two decades. They lived earlier in a symbiotic relationship with the country folk, who provided gypsies with a livelihood and with temporary shelter. They traded with the settled population,

dealing mainly in horses and other livestock. During the last two centuries the state has attempted the assimilation of gypsies through legislative means, but has, until recently, been singularly unsuccessful. Now, when the settled population no longer needs the kinds of goods and services which the gypsies used to provide, the basis of the gypsy economy has disappeared. This, coupled with improved social services, has brought the gypsies from the rural areas into the cities, and the earlier symbiotic relationship has turned into one of dependency. Social welfare and subsidised housing are succeeding relatively quickly where legislation failed, and the assimilation of gypsies is an ever-increasing phenomenon.

Unlike gypsies in many other countries, the Finnish gypsies form basically an apolitical society. There is no organ, and no individual, in a position of authority over the whole group, or even over most of it. There is no organisation nor group nor individual who can represent the Finnish gypsies to the outside world, let alone negotiate or arbitrate in their internal matters. Finnish gypsy society is fragmented into roughly equal and competing units of families and kin groups. Earlier, the families or kin groups had their own "territories"; the country was informally divided between them into non-overlapping utilisation areas, in which they carried out their economic activities. They took no part in the workings of Finnish society, nor utilised its political structure and institutions in their internal matters. Within the family and the kin group authority was held by males, the older males having autocratic authority over the rest. In the main this state of affairs still stands today.

Kinship is reckoned bilineally. Individuals who can trace a common ancestor through either the male or the female line are considered to be related, no matter how distant the relationship. Bilineality is shown frequently in the way in which people are identified in their everyday life. For example, an individual may be known to others as Sara's Robert's Helena. Here the subject is known as her grandmother's son's daughter, although all her maternal and paternal relatives are considered kin. The more notable ancestors, from either the paternal or maternal side, become part of the person's own identification. One's mother's and father's sisters are called "aunts", as are all grandparents' sisters. Parents' and grandparents' brothers are all "uncles". First-cousins on both mother's and father's side are usually called "cousins", but often they are referred to also as "brothers" and "sisters" as their status is not unlike that of natural brothers and sisters (a strict incest prohibition applies between first cousins). A curious anomaly occurs, however, in that all children sired by one man through different women are

considered as full-siblings, whereas children born to a women by different men are only half-siblings. Bilineality creates some problems in blood feuding, because the kin-groups which are embraced by blood feuding can become very large indeed.

Finnish gypsies form a rare society in which marriage as an institution is at least ritually ignored. They have no accepted way in which two individuals can legitimately form a marriage-type relationship. The only ways in which people can form a couple are by elopement or abduction, and by keeping out of reach until at least the first child is born. All references to the nature of the relationship between the couple must be avoided. They must not be seen to sit side by side, nor give any indication that they are sleeping together. They may not touch or show any affection towards each other when other people are present. Any verbal references which would reveal the nature of their relationship have to be avoided. They cannot refer to each other by terms such as wife and husband, nor are their children allowed to call them by the terms mother and father, or by any variants of those terms. Spouses simply refer to each other by first names or by nicknames, and the children do likewise when they refer to their parents.

While children do become a part of their parents' kin-groups, any overt reference to a biological link between them and their parents is ritually ignored or underplayed. This means in effect that within the Finnish gypsy society there is no legitimation of sex. Even to ask a child's age is not appropriate, as children are not born but "happen", and enquiring about the age of the child would necessarily refer to an event that is "not possible" in that society. If a gypsy mother is asked by an ignorant non-gypsy, in the presence of other gypsies, whether she has children, or how many children she has, or "Is that child yours?", she is likely to answer in the negative. The younger the child is, the closer the actual "shameful" event of birth, the more potent source of acute shame is the mother-child relationship, and it is quite usual that other females in the household make a greater fuss of the child and cater for its needs more than its natural mother does, as she is expected to take a low-key approach to her role as a mother. The child's grandparents and other members of the older generation generally ignore the child while the parents are present, as an object which is not really supposed to be there.

All through their life together, the first responsibility and the point of identification for a man and woman living in an intimate relationship remain with their own respective kin groups. This identification is most clearly illustrated in the blood feuding

relationships. One's intimate partner can without fear associate with the enemies of his/her companion-in-life. As the partners are not acknowledged to be related to each other, they do not become involved in each other's feuds either. However, their common children, as they have a membership in both parents' kin groups, can become involved in any blood feuding relationship in which their parents' kin groups are involved. Similarly, should the children from such liaisons get involved in a blood feuding relationship, all kin groups of both parents would be drawn into the ensuing hostilities. This system of reckoning can lead to situations in which some people are relatives of both sides of a feud. If the relationship is of equal distance to either party, the problem can be solved by acknowledging the impossibility of the situation, and such people are considered to be outside the feuding. When the relationship to the feuding groups is unequal, then the loyalty is reckoned to the group to which the person is more closely related. In these types of situations there is also some room for individual choice. A person related to both sides of the blood feuding relationship can choose which side he or she wants to support and which to oppose.

Ideally, men and women on the opposite sides of a blood feuding relationship should not form intimate liaisons. Should the respective partners' families or kin get into a blood feuding relationship after the liaison is formed, there is usually no alternative to immediate separation. The closer the relationship between the killed and the couple, the more pressing is the norm.

The denial within the gypsy society of legitimate sexuality and marriage, and of everything that can be traced to sexuality, could mistakenly be taken as a pointer towards matrilineality. This, however, is quite clearly not the case. In a society lacking any overall internal authority, only kin ties are considered strong enough to withstand outside threats. Any other groupings, including intimate couple ties, are not only considered not strong enough to unite the members of a group against outsiders, but actually as a potential threat to kin-based solidarity, on which alone the security of individuals rests. The loss of one member, even through "marriage", weakens the kin group, and the arrival of a stranger through "marriage" into the group has the potential of dividing the kin-based loyalties of the group. Ignoring liaisons other than those which stem from a common ancestry is a way of minimising the effect of conflicting loyalties which couple liaisons might create. In practice, naturally people do "get together", live together and have children together, but at no point are these given any official status, and their significance is underplayed constantly in gypsy everyday life. Even when gypsies marry officially either in the church

or at the registry office, the situation remains the same. Such official marriages are formed for instrumental reasons, usually to obtain some practical benefits from the wider Finnish society, and are solemnised with a minimum of fuss. Apart from being slightly embarrassing, such marriages have no place or meaning within the gypsy community. The attitude towards the children of official unions is the same as those towards the unofficial ones.

At the practical level, Finnish gypsies are endogamous to the extent that the only acceptable partner-in-life is another Finnish gypsy. An absolute incest prohibition includes first-cousins, who are considered as a part of the immediate family. This is somewhat contradictory with the idea of kin-based solidarity demands, since it might be considered logical that intimate liaisons with kin members would be favored, as they are for example among American gypsies (Sutherland, 1975:206). In attempting to trace the origin of many Finnish gypsy norms, attention is often drawn to aspects of social control and the demands on security and loyalties. The prohibition of in/group intimate liaisons may have its origin in those. In a situation where in-group potential for conflict has to be kept to the minimum, the kin-groups may not be able to afford to have built-in sources of conflict, such as could arise if the members of the kin-group could compete with each other for sexual partners within the group. With the constant danger of conflict with non-kin gypsies, the chances of conflict within the kin-group have to be kept to a minimum.

Sexuality is the domain only of gypsy males, for whom it is a sign of masculinity and a great source of honour. As the gypsy women's feminine role does not allow for any expression of sexuality, gypsy men can only legitimately express their manliness by conquest of non-gypsy females. Such relationships, so long as they are kept at the sexual level, are not considered threatening, but are important in enhancing the honor of the gypsy male. The gypsy women are considered as asexual beings, and in their behavior they have to outwardly comply with those expectations. For these reasons, to slight a man's virility is an insult of the most serious kind, while to charge a woman with being a sexual person also becomes an insult. The men are the guardians of the virtue of their family's women, and any suspicion that the women are not what they should be tarnishes the reputations of the men. As the strict incest prohibition prevents their becoming sexual partners, it is a girl's brothers and male first cousins who have the primary role in attempting to protect her from the amorous advances of non-kin males. They are constantly on guard in order to make sure that no stain on their reputation befalls them on account of the behavior of the significant females in their

family, and they accompany a girl in situations where there are chances of meeting potential suitors from other kin-groups.

The valued characteristics of a gypsy woman center around her role in the domestic sphere, her childcare, standards of house-keeping, her earning capacity, and her respectful attitude and subordinate role in relation to her family's men. Femininity is a valued characteristic of a gypsy woman, but it must be expressed in non-sexual ways, through the roles of mother, sister or daughter - never as wife. In addition, the women have an important function in upholding and passing on traditional values. Many of the traditional taboos and observances concern women rather than men, and therefore it is logical that women pass on the right attitudes and the correct cultural forms to subsequent generations.

The valued characteristics of a gypsy man center around his generally "honorable" conduct, his ability in economic pursuits, his behavior in conflict situations, and his sexual prowess, as evidenced for example by the number of children begotten by him with European women.

There is considerable cooperation in economic and other activities between the various households of the same kin, but between different kin groups this changes into an observance of the rules of hospitality, which may be viewed more as an ongoing gesture of peace than as effective cooperation. The characteristic feature of gypsy occupations is that of independence, in that a gypsy should never be in a subordinate position to another gypsy. Neither should their occupational pursuits ever supersede in importance their other, more important, obligations, those towards family and kin. Reflecting these considerations, a body of "gypsy occupations" has evolved which permit the required independence. The traditional occupations of Finnish gypsies may be broadly divided into the following categories:

1. occupations which were considered so lowly by other Finns, that nobody else would engage in them (e.g. castration of domestic animals);
2. occupations which the particular lifestyle of gypsies made profitable (e.g. trading over an extensive area);
3. occupations in which the gypsies were thought to possess special skills not shared by other people (e.g. fortune-telling).

These days a large proportion of gypsy households (75%) receive at least part of their income in various social welfare benefits.

Gypsy social intercourse is above all regulated through a complex system of pollution taboos and cleanliness rituals. Gypsies have to be permanently on their guard to ensure that clean and dirty, appropriate and inappropriate, decent and indecent, do not get mixed up. The concept of cleanliness is very different from the Western concept, and includes, in addition to physical cleanliness, the idea of ritual, symbolic cleanliness. They do not in fact make a sharp distinction between the two. The evidence from my fieldwork among the Finnish gypsies suggests that cleanliness taboos, apart from having had a practical function in earlier days in the avoidance of contagious diseases, are also utilised ritually to mark out internal relationships, based on the ideas of "respect" and "shame". These two concepts serve to demarcate the individual's position in the group. Young people respect their elders, and this respect is manifested in a variety of ways in their everyday life; women respect men. The younger members are "ashamed" in front of older generations, as are women in front of men. The gypsy meaning of the Finnish word *hävetä* (to be ashamed) differs markedly from its non-gypsy meaning. For gypsies, *hävetä* is to recognize the inappropriate and to make public one's realisation of its inappropriateness. To "respect" generally refers to deferential acts and forms of address, while to be "ashamed" means refraining from particular actions or topics of discussion or forms of address when the social position of the actor is lesser than that of the others who are present. The leap from pragmatic pollution rules, connected with the avoidance of contagious diseases, into taboos regulating interpersonal relationships is not a great one.

#### Justice through Feuding: Blood Feuding of Finnish Gypsies

Even today the basis of internal control among Finnish gypsies is an elaborate system of blood feuding. As they do not recognize any common internal political structure or leader, the main political unit is the kinship unit. The kin are all direct descendents in the male or female line who can trace their descent from a common ancestor. As a bilineal society, the Finnish gypsy society forms a rare exception among societies practising blood founding, as they usually trace their kinship through either the male or the female line (cf. Otterbein & Otterbein, 1965:1473-1475).

The "jurisdiction" within which blood feuding operates is the Finnish gypsy community. Under no circumstances can feuding involve non-gypsy Finns, not even the non-gypsy spouses of gypsies in the rare cases of mixed liaisons, although their common children would fall under its "jurisdiction". The activities of

the Finnish state authorities are irrelevant to the operation of blood feuding. There is no way in which the state can mediate or arbitrate and intervention by the official Finnish justice system in no way affects liability in the system of blood feuding. Everything possible is attempted by the gypsies in an effort to get any such court case dismissed. This involves refusals to testify, deliberate misleading of the authorities, and general non-cooperation with the Finnish judicial agents. Getting processed by the police, courts and other legal agencies, as well as any sentences that might be imposed carry no stigma in the gypsy community, as the legitimacy of the official Finnish justice system in internal gypsy matters is denied.

Apart from blood feuding, resort to institutional gossiping and rumour-mongering form other means through which conformity to the gypsy society's norms can be attempted. Those can be an effective curtailment of behavioral excesses, as they are aimed at the reputation of the person as a member of gypsy society. Since Finnish gypsies have little or no chance of moving into alternative social milieu, their standing in the eyes of the gypsy community is important.

Less serious offences, usually those against honor by one gypsy against another, were in former times also dealt with by duelling. This is still practiced in less formalised and ritualistic ways. The regulations that concerned private fighting between gypsies were designed to prevent "private matters" from becoming "public issues". Duelling therefore cannot be thought of as a juridical form of dispute handling. It was entirely a private matter between the direct disputants themselves. They usually chose a lonely spot, far away from other gypsies, and settled their matters at a prearranged time. The choice of arms used in those duels (wooden and metal bars, whips, knives, and the like) was designed to be such that no deadly injury could easily be effected. Even in knife fights, the way in which the knife was to be wielded (slashes rather than stabs) was regulated to prevent fatal wounds. In case of injury, the responsibility for care of the wounded rested upon the winner of the fight, who had to do anything in his power in order to prevent the loser from dying from his wounds:

Let's say, for example, that the men have gone some place and fought about something - duelling in a fair way - and if one suggests that they stop the fight, that he has been hit enough, at least at that stage the other one comes to his senses and agrees, and they offer the hand to each other. And then the winner takes or carries the other one into the winner's home



and demands of his wife that the other be taken care of and cured so that he has really recovered before he is allowed to go home ... It is appreciated that the other one has been able to say that he is weaker and not as good.

As this quotation indicates, the role of women is extremely important in preventing conflicts from developing to the stage where somebody might lose his or her life. Men are considered to be more emotional and less rational in general than women. The role of women is largely a rational one - a role that takes into consideration the possible long-term consequences of action. Men, on the other hand, are thought to be ruled by their hearts rather than their heads, and not to take into consideration the consequences of their actions. Therefore it is primarily the task of gypsy women to see that the men of their families do not put themselves into situations where physical confrontation is inevitable. The style of fighting in private duels, the choice of arms and the aftercare accorded to the loser, which were all to prevent fatalities and blood feuding which would have followed any deaths, are efforts to keep disputes as "private matters". For similar reasons the Nuer fought only with clubs - not with the more dangerous spears - when they fought with a member of the same clan, where blood revenge action would be put into effect for a killing (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:151).

Fighting as a form of settling private matters between direct disputants has not entirely lost its importance even today. The younger gypsy generation still seeks redress in private matters by way of confrontation, but the old customs of controlled fighting are said to have deteriorated, especially among urbanised gypsies:

These days, if matters develop to that stage, they do not give the other any leeway. They play it safe that the other is left with no chance. Earlier, if gypsy men started fighting they stated that "now it starts", but these days they don't. They only go into some passageway, or somewhere further away, and the other one is shot in cold blood. Earlier, if one asked not to be hit because he did not have a knife himself, the other one may have given his knife, if he had two, or told him to go and get one, and then fight. These days they are so Gajo-like (like Europeans). Real gypsies are disappearing at such a rate that soon we'll have only a memory of gypsies. The gypsies of today have no experience of what it feels like to be a gypsy.

The old form of duelling tended to prevent private quarrels from escalating to a stage where blood feuding would have to be resorted to. The deterioration of the traditional rules governing duelling could mean that blood feuding is increasingly prevalent. It is impossible to check on the accurate number of feud-related incidents, but the gypsies themselves feel that there is more feuding today than earlier.

Blood feuding is used specifically as an answer in the most serious conflicts, which are created by intentional or unintentional killings or by serious woundings, usually with intent to kill. The Finnish gypsies define murder rather widely as any untimely death "caused by the hand of another Finnish gypsy". This could mean, under certain circumstances, even clear cases of accident, as illustrated by the following quotation from a Finnish gypsy:

The job is the same even if it occurs accidentally, with only one difference, that the pressure to revenge is not so great.

The only circumstances in which peace is possible between the families of the killer and the killed are when they are reasonably close blood relations:

My father's father was N and Z was his brother, and they lived side by side in the borough of ----- . My father's father was lying on a bed and Z shot him there. Then my aunt interfered and Z knifed her. He knifed his brother's daughter! My father was at the fair in the town of ----- and did not know anything about the whole thing. Z went then to meet my father when father came home with his horse. Z said to my father "You won't get rid of me, my beloved brother's son, without killing me". And then father struck him with his rifle on the head and Z died from that. The brothers had had some quarrels because their houses were side by side. Z's woman was G, and my aunt was P. They had fought together, these two women, and that is where it all started. G's child had died in that fight. After my father had killed Z we moved to the other side of Finland where we lived for over twenty years. After that time we decided to move back to our home district and take whatever consequences might follow. My father said when we left that if Z's relatives kill, they kill, but he is returning anyway to the borough of -----. Z had seven sons and they were all strong and notorious men. We arrived at -----, at a large Gajo

[non-gypsy] house. They still remembered my father, those Gajos. Then Z's sons came there with seven horses, and when they saw that there were only helpless girls there - father was already in a weak state - they said that there is peace on earth now, that there is nothing between us any longer and blood is thicker than water. They came to see in what sort of condition we were. The oldest of the sons said "Never again shall blood be drawn in our families". Until then they had not seen each other at all, and the talk had been that when they met they would kill. Now the hatred has died down, and their children visit us, and it is never remembered.

Feuding in general has been defined as a state of "relations of mutual animosity among intimate groups in which a resort to violence is anticipated on both sides" (Lasswell, 1931:220). The idea of blood feuding, on the other hand, indicates that the relevant groups are composed of kin - blood-relatives - in which ever way the kin is defined in the particular society. Many anthropologists consider that feuding means a state of prolonged violence (e.g. Bohannan, 1963:220; Evans-Pritchard, 1940:293; Pospisil, 1971:5). It is sometimes implied and sometimes specifically stated that "single fight or a single killing cannot be defined as a feud" (Pospisil, 1971:3), and that there has to be at least an initial killing, revenge and counter-revenge involved before we can talk of feuding (Pospisil, 1971:5). I maintain that feud is a condition - an atmosphere of mutual hostility and that action may or may not follow from that hostility. The initial killing alone is sufficient to create such an atmosphere. The state of feud that follows never has to result in another killing, but the state of feud is nevertheless evident in the relations between the participants, and, more specifically, this state of affairs could lead to violence and other killings. The feuding itself is governed by conventions accepted by other parties, as well as by the fact that the act (the original killing or serious wounding) is considered an act against the whole group and not only against the individual (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952:215; Grönfors, 1977:98). Consequently I shall define blood feuding as a

state of customarily-regulated animosity between the kin groups of a killer and the killed after homicide (or occasionally after a serious wounding), a relationship in which both parties anticipate mutual violence. Blood feuding can occur only between kin groups who have some mutual rights and obligations binding them together in some way in times of peace.

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There is a wide divergence of views about the place of blood feuding in traditional legal settings. For Hoebel, the resort of feuding marks "the absence of law" (Hoebel, 1954:330). Gluckman, on the other hand, comes to the conclusion that in feuding there is peace, and sees feuding or the possibility of a feud as one of the chief legal processes in societies which practice it (Gluckman, 1970:1-20). That view is echoed by Colson when she says that in feuding societies the fear of feuding, rather than the feuding itself, is an effective mechanism of social order (Colson, 1974:30-43). Evans-Pritchard, too, says that "Fear of incurring a blood-feud is, in fact, the most important legal sanction within a tribe" that has a system of feuding (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:150). Barth emphasizes that only successful revenge can be called a principle of justice, a true adjudicatory means of dealing with wrongs, while any form of settlement in lieu of revenge in a society practising blood feuding is not a principle of justice, but a negotiative process through which justice proper is prevented from being carried out (Barth, 1959:81-85). Like Hoebel, Bohannan and Radcliffe-Brown do not regard blood feuding as a legal institution. The former calls feuding "a faulty jural mechanism" as it does not lead to peace (Bohannan, 1963:290), while the latter considers it a non-legal form of dispute settlement, because it lacks a recognized authority (Radcliffe-Brown, 1970:xx).

The mere fact that blood feuding has been a very common way of handling serious conflicts all over the world indicates the importance of understanding how it works (see e.g. Westermarck, 1912:477 ff.). It seems clear that in all societies which have the institution of blood feuding proper, it is only practised between people who are in a reciprocal relationship to each other, and thus fall under the same "jurisdiction" (cf. Black and Mileski, 1973:9). Evans-Pritchard, speaking of the Nuer, states explicitly that blood feuding is a "tribal institution", while vengeance for inter-tribe homicide calls for war. The distinguishing characteristic in that society is that in intratribal blood feuding there is a chance of settling the dispute by arbitration in lieu of vengeance, while in inter-tribal war there is no such possibility (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:151-152). Similarly, as honour - an issue very often involved in blood feuding - can only be realized among people who have mutual dependencies, feud is limited to the significant community (Grönfors, 1977:149 ff.; Barth, 1959:83 ff.). In the North Indian Chamar society, feuding relationships only occur between lineages of the same caste, as each caste is considered to have its own independent jurisdiction (Cohn, 1959:79-93). Gluckman argues that it is necessary to resort to drastic measures in cases of serious breaches between

people who are mutually dependent on each other (Gluckman, 1970:14-19). Such sanctions are not necessary against people with whom the group does not maintain intimate relationships and on whom it does not depend for its survival. As Gluckman observed, "people who are friends on one basis are enemies on another" (Gluckman, 1970:3).

In Finnish gypsy blood feuding, the responsibility for revenge for the killed or wounded relative rests upon the bilineal kin. Nobody outside the kin group can participate in the feud, except in a diversionary way when attempts can be made by other than kin members to keep disputing kin groups away from each other. Thus no grossly unequal alliances can form.

The joint responsibility of the kin group for the behavior of individual members is illustrated by the fact that all the kin of the killer are called murderers. The revenge action in theory can be directed at anyone among the kin of the killer. In practice, however, the risk of becoming the target of revenge is reduced the more distant relation the kin member is from the actual killer. Women and children rarely become involved in actual revenge action. The most serious threat is faced by the killer himself (if he is not in police custody or in prison), his brothers and male first cousins. Equally high risk is faced by the father (unless he is very old and fragile) or the son of the killer, and by grandsons (if they are beyond puberty). In theory, the revenge action can be launched by anyone from the kin group of the killer, although in practice similar qualifications apply as do to the targets of revenge.

No rules such as govern private fights apply in feuding. In revenge, anything goes. There is no principle of equivalency, neither in the numbers involved nor in the kind of action launched. Only recently, one such action resulted in the gruesome deaths of four people. Successful revenge does not end the hostilities between the two kin groups. The roles of revenger and revenged merely change. Ideally, groups which have a blood feuding relationship can never resume peaceful relationships and establish ordinary communication with each other. No form of arbitration or negotiation is possible, and attempts to initiate negotiative processes bring contempt from the entire gypsy community. A few years ago, one such attempt ended with the negotiator being killed. An educated member of a kin group considered blood feuding relationships outdated in modern circumstances and attempted reconciliation with a kin group with whom his family had had a longstanding feud; he himself became the victim of his efforts.

In blood revenge authority is vested in the kin group which mobilises around homicide. Among Finnish gypsies authority within the family or kin group in disputes follows the social hierarchy, at the top of which stand the oldest male, provided he is not entirely incapacitated by senility. This may be the only form of authority, as is the case with the gypsies, or it may be coupled with authority of some other kind, such as that of a chief, whose authority may or may not exceed that of the kin group. If a chief has at his disposal human resources or supernatural power which exceeds the power of the kin group, the chances of a successful intervention are greater (cf. Gulliver, 1969:17-18). If the real power of the chief is negligible, as in the case of the Nuer leopard-skin chief (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:152-153, 172-175) or the Saints of the Swat Pathan (Barth, 1959:96-97), his success in stopping revenge is dependent on his negotiative and arbitratory skills rather than on the authority vested in his office. If he lacks sufficient power to carry out his wishes, his office hardly qualifies as judicial. "Wise old men" utilized occasionally by the Finnish gypsies and by the Kapauku (Pospisil, 1967, 1971) in arbitration of disputes cannot therefore be seen to form a judicial office, as their advice may be followed or may be disregarded.

The fact that "anything goes" in revenge fights, could be taken as an indication that feuding is an extra-legal measure, indicative of social disorder rather than order. To view feuding this way, however, would be a mistake. As will be indicated later on, revenge killings are only the last resort, when efforts to keep the peace through other means have failed. In a society which has no overall authority only the relative physical strength of disputing groups ultimately decides the outcome in serious disputes (cf. Barth, 1959:85). The lack of formal controls has to be compensated by some extreme means, available to the group for the demonstration of its internal strength. When everybody knows that in the end no action is out of bounds in revenge action, the mere knowledge of this can act as an effective deterrent in gypsy social intercourse. The deterrent effect of feuding is especially strong because everyone knows that his or her actions can have consequences not only upon oneself, but upon the whole kin group. This knowledge makes gypsies think before they act, consider the likely effects of their actions, as not to put their own lives and those of their kin members in unnecessary jeopardy. One quite frequently hears gypsies say, for example, that "I would dearly love to give him a good hiding, but I must remember that I have an old father, and I shall not make myself responsible for any harm that might come to him". Such comment implies that in the gypsy community one has to forgo one's own feeling for the good

of the kin members, and for the fear of initiating feuding and all its possible consequences.

The fact that revenge is taken by the kin of the deceased against the kin of the killer is indicative of group solidarity, based on kinship. The kin group forms the basis for the immediate security of its individual members. Successfully committed revenge killing has not so much to do with seeking retaliatory compensation for the loss as it has with the demonstration of power by those against whom the offence was committed.

Feuding in other societies as among Finnish gypsies, is usually not governed by the principle of equality, neither in the kind of actor nor in the number of participants involved (see e.g. Pitt-Rivers, 1965:29). If a successful revenge killing closed the matter it could then be considered as an act of retaliatory compensation, but this is not usually the case. With each successful revenge killing the roles of killer and avenger only reverse. By taking action in revenge, it is hoped to deter similar assaults on the group in the future. Through the act of revenge, others are made to realise that the group which has suffered the loss of a member is prepared to meet challenges (cf. Barth, 1959:83-84). It is this aspect which makes blood feuding an instrument of order rather than disorder.

It is essential to have means of dealing with those acts which are considered so serious that the existence of the society is threatened by them. Homicide within society, especially the homicide of an individual who is not a member of the killer's immediate kin group, is one such act. If the society practises blood revenge for murder, everybody, including the killer, knows the consequences of a killing.

When a killing takes place the matter becomes a public issue. It has to be reacted to in the way expected of the public issues in that particular society. Even in societies where killings in practice do not always, or even often lead to counter-killings, because of the availability of settlement in some form, the victim's family must appear - at least until the settlement is completed - as if they were going to carry out revenge. The period between the initial killing and the settlement is characterized by threats and abuse, one purpose of which is to show a determination to carry out revenge, even though everybody knows that a settlement of some description will probably intervene. Similarly, it is characteristic in societies like Finnish gypsy society, where counter-killings are averted by voluntary agreement on both sides to avoid each other physically, that the group which has suffered the loss make clear to others what is in store

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for the offending group. Threats, malicious rumours and great commotion usually accompany physical avoidance of hostile groups and the act of refraining from revenge. This feature of feuding emphasizes its role in social control.

In blood feuding the use of force is societally sanctioned. However, if feuding were to be allowed to continue without intervention of some kind, then a physically superior group would eventually wipe out the weaker group, or the weaker group would flee from reach or submit itself to the power and control of the stronger group. Efforts on the part of members of uninvolved groups, aimed at stopping or limiting the revenge, are not made because the violence itself is disapproved of, but because of the consequences of continued violence. In a feuding society everyone accepts that violence used in revenge is justified. In societies where a peaceful settlement is possible, it is also accepted that if the parties to the settlement do not observe its conditions, the use of force - violence - is still an accepted way of dealing with the matter. Since the honor of the deceased's family usually demands that revenge be carried out, it is likely that a group which did not at least display an intention of using force would suffer dishonour for not showing willingness to use the force that is deemed appropriate for dealing with that particular kind of dispute. The continued use of authorized force in certain disputes is functional for the entire society, in that it separates the most serious offences and the most important norms from those of lesser importance. The threat of institutional or institutionally approved violence adds to the predictability of events and thereby promotes order rather than disorder.

In Finnish gypsy society, blood feuding is not seen in a glorified way: its continued use is both accepted and condemned. In the absence of any other acceptable and institutional way of dealing with homicide or wounding with intent to kill, feuding is a necessary evil. Not to observe the customary way of reacting would brand a kin-group as cowards or as nearing extinction. Finnish gypsies themselves are conscious of two somewhat contradictory sides to feuding.

Nothing good is achieved by it - only bad. However, if something bad [murder] has happened people know that others [kin members] will come to his aid. They support one another in coming to help and therefore one does not feel alone.

These days they [the victims relatives] eat from the same bowl with the murderer, and the young ones, men and women go into their lot. They go as wives to the



killers of our fathers, go to their sons. Earlier it was really shameful ....

In the last quotation an old gypsy man is critical of the younger generation gypsies who, in his opinion, do not observe the appropriate attitude towards their enemies.

#### Halting Revenge in Blood Feuding

It is characteristic of blood feuding that there are usually ways in which active hostilities can be stopped, often after the initial offending act, homicide, or after a successful revenge. Evans-Pritchard emphasizes that among people who live in close proximity to one another, co-operating in a number of ways, feuding cannot be tolerated for long periods of time (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:156-158). People who do not associate with one another to such an extent, are not dependent on one another, and who do not share the same territory, can tolerate hostile relations for much longer periods of time. d

Attempts to put a stop to active hostilities limit the violence within the significant community to a tolerable minimum. Unchecked violence would plunge the whole community into disorder and lead to its inevitable breakdown. Blood revenge is resorted to in the name of a group to show that the group is strong enough to meet any challenges, while arrangements designed to halt it are an acknowledgement that unchecked revenge could also lead to the destruction of the society. Thus both blood revenge itself and any institutional arrangements to avoid or limit revenge action are concerned with the survival of the group as a group rather than with protecting individual members from violence, although in effect the individual lives are also protected.

The most common way of halting revenge in blood feuding is by the payment of blood money or blood wealth (i.e. goods) to the victim's relatives. There may be a very exact and elaborate system of payments, such as that of the ancient Welsh (Hartland, 1924:56-57), the Yurok Indians of North California, and some East African tribes (Redfield, 1967:9-12). The Nuer graded the payments in accordance with the social worth of the individual killed (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:218). Blood money is paid in feuding societies in the Mediterranean area as well as in the Middle East (see e.g. Hardy, 1963:76-77; Black-Michaud, 1975; Hasluck, 1954). Similarly, it has been common in many African societies (see e.g. Contini, 1971; Colson, 1953), in the Philippines (Kiefer, 1972:104) and in Papua (Hallpike, 1977:150 ff.). It is

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characteristic that both parties are expected to take a little and give a little in the settlement process.

The purpose of offering and making blood payments is important to the understanding of blood feuding as a system of justice. There are two principal ways of looking at that purpose: payments can be seen as compensation for the loss suffered, or as a way out of an impossible situation created by homicide, a kind of face-saving device, a safety valve which allows the community to continue in some semblance of peace after peace has been shaken by internal homicide. When the function of so-called blood-money is examined in societies where such payment occurs in cases of homicide, however, it becomes apparent that such payment cannot really be thought of as compensation for the lost life (for an opposing view see Redfield, 1967:9-13). Its primary function is to bring overt hostilities to an end. Blood-money can be seen as an acknowledgement that disputing groups have to continue to live in the same society, which cannot afford to have the threat of feuding hanging over it continuously (see e.g. Nader, 1969:90). Even in societies which saw blood payments as compensation, such as the Nuer, it was not compensation for the loss of a life as such, but it was used to purchase another female to bear a child in the dead man's name. Among the Somali, part of the blood payment included "a nubile girl fitted out for marriage" (Contini, 1971:79). This can be seen as a sort of rebirth of the dead (see Evans-Pritchard, 1940:154).

Pursuing revenge is generally regarded as more honorable than accepting blood payments. Face-saving demands are therefore included in the process leading to acceptance of a blood payment. In many Mediterranean societies and in the Middle East, for instance, it is customary to appear unwilling to accept blood payment for as long as is feasible and then to accept it "reluctantly" in the interest of community peace (cf. Barkun, 1968:110). A similar settlement process has been reported for the Tausug society of the Philippines (Kiefer, 1972:102-104). It is also evidenced in the Swat Pathan system, where people with political ambitions, such as the chiefs, cannot accept blood payments, while people who have no chance of political office can do so (Barth, 1959:85). In Albania, blood money could be paid only in cases where the social value of the victim was not very great, for example if a woman was killed (Hasluck, 1954:238-239).

In some societies, blood payment cannot be paid directly to the victim's kin, but is made to the chief or another functionary, who arranges a feast for the entire community with the proceeds of the payment. In other societies the payment, although paid to

the victim's kin, must be used for a public feast at which the unity of the community is re-established. Sometimes the murderer or his kin, in addition to making blood payment, is required to pay for or provide the meat for a feast, the purpose of which is a ceremonial unification of the community after homicide and settlement (Hardy, 1963:77; Hasluck, 1954:241).

In the African Lango society there is an unusual option available to the kin of the killer, in that they may refuse to come to his aid with blood money if they think him not worth saving from revenge. For the same reason, the kin group may decide to hand over the culprit to the victim's group (Moore, 1969:397-399). Such a situation is possible if there are conflicting loyalties between kin-composed groups and groups formed on another basis, such as cooperating work groups (cf. Colson, 1953, 1962). A reversal of this may occur when a member of the killer's group is living with or near the victim's group, and away from his own blood feuding group. Such a person may appeal to his own group to make a blood payment settlement quickly, so that his safety in a vulnerable situation is secured (Gluckman, 1970:11-12).

It is usual that during the negotiations for blood payments the offender either has to seek refuge in a publicly-acknowledged sanctuary or has to leave the community. In Nuer society the "man of the earth" (also referred to as the "leopard-skin chief") shelters the killer until the negotiations are completed. While the offender is living with the chief he is safe from revenge.[2]

The collective paying of blood payments by the kin of the killer is yet another indication of the shared responsibility of the group for the behavior of its individual members. If blood feuding communities were only concerned to seek an eye for an eye, the elimination of the culprit would be the way to do it. However, this very seldom happens. In fact any number of the killer's relatives can be substituted for the killer in revenge. Both the principle of inequality of revenge action and the shared responsibility for meeting blood payments make kin groups responsible for the actions of their individual members. This must act as an effective force of social control (cf. Hasluck, 1954:239). It means that the group in fact tends to repress and prevent the kinds of situations and individual acts which might make the whole group vulnerable to being drawn into hostilities, and liable to economic loss. It is here that the peace in blood feuding is located, rather than in the active feuding itself.

Finnish gypsies are an example of a society in which it is not possible to bring the violence inherent in blood feuding to an end by any form of blood payment or by other negotiative proces-

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ses. Among the Caribou Eskima, to cite another example, revenge was a sacred duty, and no blood payment could be made in its stead (Birket-Smith, 1929, quoted in Wyer, 1962:222). In the absence of any means through which the kin groups who have a blood feuding relationship can bring about peace between them, there has to be some other way of limiting feuding. Finnish gypsies do so by resorting to the practice of institutionalised avoidance. The parties to a feuding relationship mutually and intentionally avoid any physical and social contact with each other. This means that after the initial killing, no further violence takes place if the rules of avoidance are observed by both sides. Such avoidance may be forever, as it is with the Finnish gypsies, or temporary under certain circumstances, as it was in Albania. In the latter society, after a homicide, the relatives of the killed destroyed the property of the killer. If there were mitigating circumstances in the killing, for instance that the victim had contributed to his own death through improper behavior, the kin group of the victim could destroy the killer's house but leave the cornerstones in place as an indication that the killer could return sometime to the village. If the cornerstones were scattered too, the killer knew that he could never return (Hasluck, 1954:246). The personal violence characteristic of feuding can thus be symbolic in character and can be suspended as long as culturally demanded avoidance is carried out.

In Finnish gypsies society, avoidance behavior, in the absence of any other form of reconciliation, forms the major way in which the violence potential in blood feuding is kept to a minimum. The offender's kin and the victim's kin should never come face to face again if they want to avoid further violence. When a killing occurs, the killer should seek the company of his kin immediately and the entire kin group will at once move as far as possible away from the kin group of the killed. Occasionally the kin of the victim also notify the killer's kin-group about the event and their own intentions of revenge in advance, thus giving the killer's kin sufficient time to organize themselves for the escape. Members of uninvolved kin groups can also aid in this, both by helping the killer's kin group to escape and by delaying the victim's kin in revenge action.

Although the responsibility for continued avoidance lies with both groups, the offender's and the victim's, the main responsibility is always with the killer's kin group. They, more than the other party, must ensure that the two feuding sides do not come into contact. They stay away from occasions and places where it would be possible to encounter representatives of the hostile kin group.

By voluntarily moving away and thereafter avoiding contact in every possible way, the killer's kin pleads guilty to the killing. This is demanded of them by custom, and few families, regardless of the relative power relations of the kin groups of the killer and the killed, would want to face the general condemnation from the rest of the gypsy population that refusal to move would bring upon them. Should it occur that the killer's group does not voluntarily move as far as possible away from the victim's group then the victim's kin group usually takes the initiative in avoidance action by moving away. Such a situation usually only occurs when the physical strength of the killer's kin group is markedly greater than that of the victim's.

Avoidance is the usual course of events in Finnish gypsy society, regardless of the circumstances of the killing. It is the case even in accidental killings or in situations in which the victim, by his behavior, has contributed to his own death. However, if there is some doubt as to the "real culprit" in a killing, there is a possibility of using a mediator, a member of an uninvolved group, in negotiating which group will move out of the area.

#### Conclusions

Blood-feuding, with its associated means for stopping the chain of revenge, can be considered a "legal" sanction in the societies which practise it for the following reasons. First, it is a regulated and acceptable way of dealing with the most serious wrongs affecting the perceived chances of survival of the group. It is resorted to in the name of order rather than disorder. Second, feuding is a demonstration of power by those who have been a target of challenge to their power. It is an authorised use of power. Third, measures to halt the chain of revenge are customarily regulated and are an inherent part of the feuding process. These measures cannot be viewed as compensation for the wrong, nor as weakness on the part of the revenging group, but as an acknowledgement of the fact that unleashed violence would be dysfunctional for the survival of the group as a whole. Any measure to halt blood-revenge is more accurately to be seen as a postponement of violent revenge so long as the parties abide by the customary rules.

As far as the evidence from the Finnish gypsy society seems to indicate, blood feuding continues to be the chief means of dealing with intentional or unintentional killings, or woundings with intent to kill, in so far as the gypsies feel themselves to be a distinctly separate group from the mainstream Finnish society. There is a danger, though, that with increasing assimilation

and the accompanying deterioration of the indigenous gypsy culture, the violence inherent in blood feuding could become unregulated violence. Hence a practice which originally aided the survival of the group might actually hasten its disintegration and existence as a distinct, separate culture. The problems in their relationship to the majority Finnish culture have until now mostly had to do with cultural differences between the gypsies and others. These could now become conventional social problems, involving an escalation of violence and further marginalisation of the gypsies.

#### Notes

1. Some of the research for this article was made possible by a generous grant from the Nordic Council for Criminological Research.
2. Additionally, the killer and his kin are ritually impure, and may not eat or drink with other people until the chief has ritually let the blood out of the victim (Evans-Pritchard, 1940:152; Gluckman, 1970:15-16). The fact that ritual impurity must be treated by certain ritual observances in order to prevent calamity befalling the whole group, may well act to prevent any concealment by a murderer of his deed, since fear of an unknown calamity may be greater than fear of the known consequences of confessing a killing.

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