CHAPTER 10

"Threatening Livelihoods": Nordic Enemy Images of Peddlers from the Russian Empire

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In the late nineteenth-century Nordics, many people were temporarily or constantly on the move. Diverse mobile groups, such as peddlers, rag collectors, and seasonal workers, traveled around in search of a livelihood. Some originated outside the Nordics, connecting local communities in the region to transregional and transnational flows of people and goods. Many peddlers were from the multiethnic Russian Empire, and they differed from the sedentary population in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion. The most numerous of these groups were the so-called "Rucksack Russians" from Russian Karelia. Other groups included Muslim Tatars, mainly from the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, Jews from the Pale of Settlement in the western part of the empire, and saw grinders from the Novgorod Governorate.

This chapter explores the ways in which the Nordic press portrayed "Rucksack Russians," Tatars, eastern European Jews, and Novgorodian saw grinders as a threat in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analysis engages the following questions: In which contexts and

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concrete situations were peddlers from Russia perceived as a threat? What characterized the rhetoric that authors utilized to describe the threat? The interests of which groups in the local society did the attitudes voiced in the press represent? As it is a given point of departure that the press depictions were pejorative, I analyze the topic through the concept of *enemy image*. Following Spillman and Spillman's notion, an enemy image can be defined as a stereotypical negative evaluation of the "other." It originates in a perception of the unfamiliar or strange and is utilized with an aim to evoke negative emotions toward outsiders.[1] The "other," be it a nation, a group, or an individual, is condemned or denounced for unfriendliness and for refusing to respect the essential moral values of the "threatened" group, and at times is also accused of malicious and hostile intentions.[2]

Several concurrent factors contributed to the pejorative rhetoric. First, sedentary societies have commonly perceived people with mobile lifestyles as a threat. In a societal order where everyone ideally occupied a given role and position, people without a fixed place have been viewed as a potentially dangerous anomaly. This has been particularly evident in times of conflict or distress when diverse interest groups in the sedentary society have portrayed mobile people as "strangers," utilizing their "otherness" to create and sustain mechanisms of caution, aversion, and fear.[3] Second, such descriptions reflect a general derogatory attitude toward ethnicized petty trade and the consumption of the lower classes.[4] And third, attitudes have been affected by preconceived negative notions of the peddlers' ethnicity and confession, as well as of "the East" as uncivilized and Russia as a military aggressor.[5]

The sources consist of articles and short paragraphs dealing with mobile groups from Russia in Swedish and Finnish periodicals, accessed through newspaper databases.[6] Mobile petty trade has left few and fragmentary traces in historical records, due to its informal character and existence as a gray zone between the legal and illegal.[7] However, the searchable databases containing digitalized newspapers that have emerged in the past decades have opened up new possibilities for researchers to localize these fragmentary mentions.[8] A given point of departure is that the sources predominantly represent the views of the authorities, who aimed to control mobile trade, and of sedentary merchants, who viewed peddlers as unjust competitors, while the voices of the traders and their customers remain silent. However, this does not contradict the main aim of the chapter, which is to disclose the mechanisms through which the Nordic press constructed an image of mobile groups from the Russian Empire as a threat.

Newspapers played a central role in shaping public opinion in the late nineteenth century, and thus functioned as an important channel for disseminating enemy images to the broader public.[9]

Of the four groups explored in this chapter, the "Rucksack Russians" have drawn the most interest in previous research.[10] The Jewish and Tatar peddlers, who were less numerous and only emerged in the region in the 1860s, have been studied in a number of publications beginning in the 1990s.[11] Finally, the Novgorodian saw grinders have been examined in an article by Pia Karlsson, and they are also mentioned in works on Swedish military strategy and Swedish–Russian relations.[12] Despite the fact that mobile trade as a livelihood was strikingly transnational in character, peddlers from the Russian Empire have mainly been studied as separate groups within a specific national setting. I argue that transcending the national framework will offer both more general and nuanced insight into the preconditions that the diverse groups of mobile traders originating in Russia faced when seeking a livelihood in the Nordics.

Peddlers from the Russian Empire

Göran Rosander has described the late nineteenth century as the culmination point of mobile trade in the Nordic region in terms of both scope and ethnic diversity.[13] It was an era of modernization and growing consumption in which both the supply of and demand for consumer goods grew because of incipient industrialization and rising living standards. The growth also encompassed the lower strata of society, a segment of which for the first time had resources that enabled consumption beyond the most basic needs.[14] Peddlers played an important role in the distribution of the growing bulk of commodities in the geographically vast but sparsely populated Nordic region.[15]

Of the four groups studied in this chapter, "Rucksack Russians," who peddled all over Finland and in northern Scandinavia, had the longest history in the region. Most of them originated in White Sea Karelia in the Arkhangelsk Governorate or in the northern parts of the Olonets Governorate.[16] Although Finland was a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire from 1809, the Russian Karelians' trade was formally illicit according to Finnish law, which included a citizenship right that legally differentiated its inhabitants from other imperial subjects. Despite this, both local customers and the Finnish authorities commonly looked at even evident illicit peddling through their fingers.[17]

Compared to the "Rucksack Russians," the Eastern European Jews and the Tatars were newcomers on the Nordic trading scene, emerging in the region only in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Jews originated in the Pale of Settlement in the western part of the Russian Empire and started to migrate to Sweden in the 1860s. They were part of a broad European migration movement from east to west, a result of many concurrent factors, such as a demographic crisis, harsh economic conjunctures, and pogroms.[18] Most Jews ultimately aimed to migrate to the United States, but some permanently settled in Western Europe, including Sweden. The Jewish population in Sweden grew from 1155 to 3912 persons between 1860 and 1900, with the growth mainly being ascribed to the immigration of Russian and Polish Jews.[19] In somewhat lesser numbers, Jews from the Russian Empire also migrated to Norway, where the majority initially earned their living by peddling. In a way that is typical for early transitional phases of migration, peddling offered a low-threshold livelihood to many newcomers, as it did not require investment.[20]

Jews from the Russian Empire also emerged in Finland, although for different reasons. Finnish legislation, building on eighteenth-century Swedish laws, prohibited Jews from migrating to the Grand Duchy. This changed in 1858, when an ordinance issued in Russia gave soldiers of the Russian military permission, after completing their service, to settle in the locations where they had served. As the ordinance was interpreted to include Jews, Jewish civil communities emerged in the garrison towns of Vyborg, Helsinki, and Turku from the 1860s. A Finnish ordinance issued in 1869 stipulated that the former soldiers and their families could earn their living exclusively by selling minor goods, such as bread, berries, fruit, cigars, matches, and second-hand clothes and shoes. The trade had to take place in spaces specifically intended for the purpose in the towns where Jews resided. Jews were formally forbidden to peddle in rural areas or visit fairs in other Finnish towns.[21]

The Tatars exclusively traded in Finland, migrating from the Russian Empire at the same time as the Jews. However, it was only from around 1880 that the Finnish press started to observe that a previously unknown group of "Orientals" was roaming the Grand Duchy, trading at urban fairs and peddling in rural regions.[22] The Tatars mostly originated in a few villages in the Sergach district southeast of Nizhny Novgorod, approximately 550 kilometers east of Moscow. Many had previously resided in Saint Petersburg, seasonally or permanently earning a living as petty traders.

Without citizenship rights in Finland, the Tatars were not formally allowed to peddle.[23]

The fourth group studied in this chapter, the saw grinders from the Novgorod Governorate, started to visit Sweden and Norway in the 1890s. Although their livelihood was based on offering a service, sharpening saws, and other utilities, rather than selling commodities, mobility was a prerequisite for their livelihood, like it was for the peddlers.[24]

Originating in the vast and multiethnic Russian Empire, all four groups to various degrees differed from the majority population of the Nordic societies regarding appearance, ethnicity, language, and religion. Although they were relatively few in absolute numbers, ranging from a few hundred to some thousands, the peddlers' mobile lifestyles, combined with their distinctive features, made the groups disproportionally conspicuous.[25] The "Rucksack Russians" were Orthodox Christians, a feature that separated them from their predominantly Lutheran customers. They also stood out with regard to some cultural attributes, such as clothing. However, they were also associated with Karelia, a transborder region that played a central role in nineteenth-century Finnish nation-building. In this respect, they were partly seen as related to the Finns, a trait that was strengthened by their knowledge of the Karelian language, at the time considered a dialect of Finnish.[26]

The Eastern European Jews and Tatars differed considerably more. The Tatars were the first Muslims that the inhabitants of the Nordic region had encountered in their everyday lives. In press portrayals, they were commonly described as "Orientals," with the use of stereotypes that represented Western European views of the "barbaric" traits of the "East."[27] Attitudes toward peddling Jews were in turn influenced by negatively charged anti-Semitic stereotypes that had been central in European thought for centuries.[28] Preexisting anti-Eastern and anti-Semite stereotypes, reflecting general contempt for people from Eastern Europe, were reinforced as a result of the vast migration movement to the West that was taking place. From a Western European viewpoint, the migrants were commonly described as strange people who spoke outlandish languages, wore bizarre clothes, and followed odd religious practices.[29]

The attitudes toward the mobile groups were further affected by preconceived derogatory notions of Russia as a repressive and expansionist power. Historical relations between the Nordics and Russia had given birth to an old tradition of animosity, reinforced by a Western European perception of Russia and the East as the "barbaric" antithesis of the

"civilized" West.[30] In Finland, anti-Russian sentiments strengthened in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as rising Russian nationalism resulted in attempts to weaken Finnish autonomy and tie the Grand Duchy closer to the empire's core.[31] Russia's tightened grip on Finland was also reflected in Sweden, where in their ambitions to strengthen the country's defenses patriotic circles utilized portrayals of Russia as a military aggressor.[32]

Despite the diversity of geographical origin, ethnicity, and confession, some background factors were common to the groups. The "Rucksack Russians," the Tatars, and the Novgorodian saw grinders were all initially part-time farmers, who came from barren regions that could not offer subsistence for the whole year. This had made mobile trade or craftsmanship an important source of additional seasonal income in their respective home regions. The tradition, in turn, gave peddlers access to existing knowledge and a transnational network that they could exploit as a springboard to expand their business. Due to the seasonal character of their mobility, the peddlers' families did not accompany them to the Nordics. Consequently, the traders that the newspapers describe are almost exclusively men. Even after some of them permanently settled in the region, bringing their families along, female sellers are rarely mentioned, except for Jewish women in Finland. As Jewish trade was largely restricted to the towns in which Jews resided, Jewish women were engaged in the actual selling and thus noted in the press.

Another essential factor that explains the growing presence of mobile traders from Russia in the Nordics in the late nineteenth century is the development of modern transport technologies. Regular steamship routes and the continually expanding railway network made migration, travel, and the transport of commodities faster and more efficient. An important turning point was the connection of the Finnish railway network to that of Russia in 1870.[33] Peddlers could now utilize trading networks stretching from St. Petersburg and Moscow all the way to Kazan, an important market town 800 kilometers east of Moscow.[34]

Economic Threat

One major threat that the press claimed that mobile traders from Russia posed to Nordic societies was economic. Peddlers were commonly accused of causing economic loss to both local societies and the national economy. Such discussions often centered around the question of legality.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Finnish law formally forbade persons without citizenship rights in the Grand Duchy to peddle. This prohibition caused tensions between the Finnish and the Russian administration, which culminated in 1900 when a Russian ordinance made peddling in the Grand Duchy legal for all Russian subjects.[35] In Sweden as well, peddling was prohibited for foreigners, except for a period of liberal legislation between 1864 and 1887.[36] Tensions usually arose from the gray zone between legal and illegal, which characterized mobile petty trade. In addition to the uncertainties caused by this gray zone, at times laws and regulations were contradictory and applied inconsequently, while the authorities often tolerated even apparently illicit trade.[37]

In most cases, it was merchants, the segment of local society whose interests peddling was most likely to harm, who articulated the alleged economic threat. Following a general pattern in this period, the discourse centered around the argument that foreign peddlers utilized their position in the gray zone of legality in ways that made them unfair competitors to established local merchants. Peddlers were accused of evading taxes and other trading fees that merchants had to pay, as well as selling illegal or contraband commodities not regulated by customs.[38] The allegations were typically conveyed to the authorities and the public through associations that represented the merchants at the local or national level. Since the liberalization of trade legislation abolished guilds in the mid-nineteenth century, trade associations became the channel through which merchants could bring pressure to bear on the authorities and legislative bodies.

The associations usually became proactive when merchants felt that petty traders were expanding their trade to such an extent that it threatened their business. In Finland, initiatives made by merchants opposed both peddlers originating in Russia in general and Jews in particular. The Finnish Diet repeatedly debated whether peddling in the Grand Duchy should be legalized for foreigners, including Russian subjects. In her analysis of how the topic was discussed at the Diet of 1877–1878, Hanna Lindberg illustrates the transnational aspect of the Finnish debate. For instance, those who opposed legalization referred to the harm that Jewish peddlers allegedly caused to economic life, even though the right of Jews to reside in Finland was restricted and they were not allowed to peddle. Although opinions were divided, peddling remained heavily restricted for Finnish citizens and, in the otherwise liberal Trade Act of 1879, completely prohibited for persons without citizenship rights.[39]

In the early 1880s, the focus of the Finnish debate shifted from the "Rucksack Russians" to Jewish petty trade. At a national meeting of Finnish merchants in Vyborg in 1883, the local association of Tampere presented a memorandum containing explicitly anti-Semitic rhetoric and examples of countries in which Jewish trade had harmed the economy.[40] Two years later, in a similar initiative, a group of merchants in Turku summoned the public to discuss the "Jewish question."[41] They protested that a number of Jews had been granted permission to open shops in accordance with the Trade Act of 1879. Town magistrates had initially rejected the applications, expressing doubt as to whether the law could be applied to Jews. The Jewish applicants, in turn, appealed to the governors, who repealed the magistrates' decisions, stating that they lacked the authority to reject the applications.[42] This enraged some merchants, who accused the governors of interpreting the laws in an overly liberal way. The merchants behind the initiative claimed that a considerable segment of the public in Turku had met the decision with "repulsion."[43] They appealed the governors' decision to the Finnish Senate, which on many occasions was harsher toward the Jews than the regional authorities.[44]

In Sweden as well, merchants played an active role in attempts to alter national trade legislation in a more protectionist direction. Since the liberal Trade Act of 1864 allowed foreigners to peddle, merchants' associations repeatedly criticized it. While not denying the benefits that freedom of trade contributed, they drew attention to the "obvious" injustices and nuisances that peddling foreigners had caused; the merchants argued that the "flood of complaints" voiced all over Sweden proved that the overly liberal legislation had turned peddling into a "distorted picture" of what it had once been.[45] In 1886, Pehr Emanuel Lithander, a wholesale dealer from Gothenburg who was also a parliamentarian and president of the national merchants' association, made a motion to revise the Trade Act of 1864 with regard to peddling. Utilizing anti-Semitic stereotypes and emphasizing that he represented the interests of all Swedish merchants, Lithander's ambition was partially successful. In 1887, a revision of the law prohibited foreigners from peddling.[46]

As many Russian Jews lacked Swedish citizenship, the revision resulted in some of them leaving the country. For instance, in 1888, the lost opportunity to pursue peddling as a livelihood was mentioned as the reason behind the emigration to the United States of a group of Jews residing in Lund.[47] However, the revision did not end peddling altogether, as many continued—albeit illegally.[48] In the following years, many observers

deemed the revision a failure. Instead of fulfilling its original aim to limit the nuisance caused by “wandering Jews and other loose people,” it had merely made it more complicated for honest, hardworking people to pursue their trade.[49]

The contradictory regulation and its inconsistent application repeatedly raised questions regarding the legal status of petty traders from the Russian Empire. Such uncertainties are reflected in short notices in the newspapers, which contain inquiries about whether specific traders are allowed to peddle in specific situations.[50] Occasionally, newspapers also contained short paragraphs on peddlers who had been arrested on suspicion of illegal trade. For instance, a group of Polish Jews from Stockholm, Lund, and Malmö, three of whom were Russian subjects, were arrested near Uppsala in 1901.[51] Likewise, Finnish newspapers regularly reported on detainments of Russian Karelian and Tatar peddlers.[52] If they were found guilty of illicit trade, the penalty was usually confiscation of their commodities and a fine.[53] Jewish traders in Finland, whose mobility was restricted the most, took a severe risk if they visited a fair outside their town of residence. If caught, they could in the worst case be banished from the Grand Duchy.[54]

At times, those who wrote opinion pieces for the newspapers urged the general public to denounce peddlers to the police if they suspected that their trade was illicit.[55] However, it was more common that they called for the authorities to take action. In 1885, merchants in Turku forced the local and regional authorities to apply the restrictions that the ordinances of 1858 and 1869 placed on Jewish petty trade.[56] Likewise, merchants in Gothenburg in 1900 notified the governor that Polish Jews were conducting large-scale illegal ambulatory trade in the Bohuslän archipelago.[57] The authorities were commonly criticized for their lax attitude toward even clearly illicit peddling and for shirking their responsibilities as guardians of law and order. In the Finnish coastal town of Kotka, local merchants in the 1880s and 1890s repeatedly complained about the “gross injustice” they witnessed, as the town authorities failed to banish Tatar traders from town like their colleagues in neighboring Hamina had done.[58] Similar complaints were expressed in other towns; for example, in an editorial letter to the local newspaper in 1892, merchants in Tammisaari provocatively asked how long the town administration intended to allow Tatars to wander from house to house, selling their “Russian rags and cloths.”[59]

Moral and Sanitary Threats

Another set of threats that peddlers from Russia were said to pose can be described as moral and sanitary. The alleged tendency of peddlers to undermine the morality of their customers and cause sanitary problems has been observed in previous research on mobile trade. Disadvantages commonly associated with peddling include violent and dishonest behavior, the sale of harmful substances such as drugs or poison, and the spread of venereal and other diseases.[60]

While the Nordic press voiced all these threats, two in particular rise to the fore. The first emanated from a stereotypical and pejorative perception of petty trade conducted by ethnic groups, combined with an equally derogatory attitude toward the consumption of the lower classes. This ideological construct portrayed peddlers as dishonest people who lured customers into unnecessary consumption that harmed both their economic situation and morals.[61] Depictions of the encounter between local customers and ethnic sellers follow a staid pattern. Usually, a "stranger"—the trader from the outside—approaches, using his "well-oiled" and "cunning" tongue to attract the attention of a potential customer.[62] While descriptions of the peddlers' enticing oral skills can contain a degree of admiration, their trading practices are generally portrayed as persuasive and deluding. They were commonly reprimanded for utilizing a "strange" and insolent tactic, an "importunacy that can only be described as audacious," to force their goods onto the customer.[63] Occasionally, Jews and Tatars were even accused of accosting customers physically, dragging them into their stalls, or giving them a box on the ear if they refused to buy.[64] Allegations of physical violations are largely absent regarding the "Rucksack Russians," however, indicating the existence of a difference in attitudes toward the various groups of peddlers.

Another practice commonly associated with petty trade, and ethnicized petty trade in particular, was haggling.[65] The Nordic press portrayed Russian, Jewish, and Tatar traders as the most aggressive hagglers, thus revealing a kind of ranking. In 1886, a journalist in the newspaper *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, a mouthpiece for Swedish merchants, claimed that the recently arrived Jews had far exceeded the infamous Swedish peddlers from Västergötland with regard to aggressive haggling.[66] In Finland, in turn, an author in the newspaper *Sanomia Turusta* in 1874 complained that common people seemed to have adopted the "deplorable custom of haggling" that the "Rucksack Russians" had introduced.[67]

However, with the arrival of the Jews and the Tatars, the Finnish press increasingly associated aggressive haggling with the newcomers.[68] The pejorative attitude toward the trading practices was further projected onto the Russian peddlers' commodities, which were claimed to be fake and consisting of "all sorts of worthless rubbish" of "foreign" origin.[69]

The alleged harmful consequence of the peddlers' persuasive and fraudulent trading practices was that customers paid excessive prices for certain items, up to ten times more than their worth.[70] The poor customers, especially in rural regions, were lured to part with their scarce money for low-quality commodities that they did not even need.[71] In 1909, an author in the Finnish newspaper *Wiborgs Nyheter* claimed that fairs had turned into nothing more than occasions for mobile Tatars, Jews, and other petty traders to "deceive honest people."[72] While newspaper writers accused peddlers of having contributed to this development, they did not get the blame alone.[73] Responsibility was equally laid on the customers, who were described with derogatory rhetoric dealing in stereotypes and reflecting both class and gender distinctions. In detailed portrayals, the customer is often a "naïve," "unexperienced," and "uneducated" poor male from the countryside, who gets swindled due to his inexperience with the petty traders' persuasive trading practices.[74] Depictions of female customers, in turn, reflected clichéd perceptions of women as vain consumers.[75] In both cases, the customers were deemed too inexperienced to act in their own best interest. Newspapers therefore commonly issued warnings of peddlers who were on the move in a specific region, offering detailed descriptions of their allegedly predatory methods.[76]

The sanitary threat that peddlers from Russia were associated with became increasingly topical toward the end of the nineteenth century. The development of transport technology, combined with increasing mobility, made the authorities aware of the risk that epidemics could be spread through peddlers and other mobile groups.[77] In 1902, for instance, a provincial doctor in the Kronoberg county of Sweden urged the authorities to investigate whether the recent outbreak of a smallpox epidemic in the region could be traced to Russian saw grinders.[78]

Most commonly, the perception of a sanitary threat occurred in conjunction with recurring cholera epidemics that spread westward from the Russian interior, provoking fears all around Western Europe. When news about cholera outbreaks in Russia reached Finland, the authorities took action to prevent potential carriers of the disease from crossing the border into the Grand Duchy.[79] One such action was to restrict or cancel fairs, as

peddlers with contacts to the affected areas were seen as possible vectors. In 1892, the Finnish Senate canceled several fairs in Finland, but turned down a petition made by the health board of Turku to cancel the town's autumn fair. Consequently, the board published announcements in the local newspapers, advising the public to refrain from buying anything from Tatars, Russians, and other traders from cholera-infested regions of Russia. Russian traders were expected to arrive in large numbers as usual, bringing with them leather goods, furs, and textiles that could contain contagious agents. Common people writing to the newspapers demanded that the items should not be allowed into town, or at least not until they had been thoroughly disinfected[80] (See Fig. 10.1).

Throughout the 1890s, health boards in several Finnish towns published similar announcements when cholera epidemics hit Russia, urging the public to avoid contact with "strangers, especially mobile traders"; the public was also warned of letting peddlers from Russia into their homes, and to inform the police if they tried to enter.[81] In this context, the threat that peddlers from Russia posed was further connected with allegations of poor hygiene. In an announcement published in the newspaper *Turun Lehti* in 1894, readers were warned of a group of Tatars, "dressed in untidy kaftans, carrying their filthy bags," who were roaming Turku.[82] Dirt—real or imagined—was typically associated with "the Other" in the late nineteenth century, and commonly used to justify exclusionary practices and ethnic class distinctions.[83]

The negative characterizations of the moral and sanitary harm that mobile Russians allegedly posed promoted the image of them as a threat that the Nordic societies had to fend off. In this context, the enemy image was primarily created by the authorities, who aimed to uphold law and order and hinder the spread of diseases. However, the image was at the same time highly compatible with the local merchants' ambitions to keep competing peddlers out by representing them in a negative light.

Political Threat

The third perceived threat reflected in the sources is political. In Finland, the political threat was closely related to the irreconcilable conflict between the Grand Duchy and the imperial central administration that characterized the last decades of the nineteenth century. While the Finns strove to preserve the Grand Duchy's autonomy, strengthening sentiments of imperial nationalism required that the Russian Empire's eastern borderlands be

Fig. 10.1 A crowded Helsinki marketplace during the annual autumn fish market. This area of the harbor was called "the Cholera Basin." In the 1890s, recurring cholera epidemics hit the Russian interior, evoking fears about contagious agents spreading the disease to Finland with itinerant traders and their goods. To prevent the spread of the epidemics, the authorities restricted or canceled fairs and markets, urging the public to avoid contact with peddlers from cholera-infested regions in Russia. (Photo by Carl Lundström, 10/11891. Helsinki City Museum)

tied closer to its core. This resulted in several Russification measures, aimed to streamline the Grand Duchy's administration and legislation with that of the empire.[84] In this process, Russian peddlers in Finland became "political tools," utilized by both Finnish and Russian ideologues to enforce their strategic goals. This occurred as early as the 1860s, when Russian nationalist circles accused Finnish officials of mistreating and persecuting Russian peddlers.[85] The conflict culminated in 1899, when Russia's February Manifesto formally revoked the Finnish autonomy that had gradually evolved since 1809. The manifesto evoked huge discontent in the Grand Duchy, giving rise to strong anti-Russian sentiments. Within weeks, the press reported that mobile Russians with malicious

intentions—peddlers, knife grinders, castrators, rag and bristle collectors, and ice cream sellers—had been observed around Finland.[86]

The Finnish press accused mobile Russians of two main offenses. First, they were said to spread unfounded and subversive rumors among the rural poor, claiming that land was to be confiscated from landowners and given to the landless. These ideas stemmed from the Russian *mir*- and *obshchina* institutions.[87] Rumors of land division had circulated around the Russian Empire already earlier, including Finland, where they emerged in conjunction with heated debates on crofters and land ownership.[88] Second, peddlers were accused of collecting signatures for some sort of address thought to be a countermeasure to the Great Petition collected in Finland in defense of autonomy.[89] The press claimed that this allegedly "false" counter-address was to be presented to high-ranking officials in the empire's machinery of power, with the aim of conveying an erroneous impression of the political sentiments in Finland.[90]

In the press campaign that followed the issuing of the February Manifesto, mobile Russians were portrayed as "suspect" figures engaging in a shady and hostile mission to divide and undermine the Finnish society.[91] Allegedly, they sought to agitate the lower classes to revolt against the elite through misleading information, distorting the sense of justice of the most "defenseless," namely, the uneducated and children.[92] The peddlers were said to be operating on behalf of a "subversive band" of "foreign nationality," led by K. P. Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod and ideologue of Russian autocracy, and supported by Governor-General N. I. Bobrikov and his anti-Finnish regime.[93] Supposedly acting on the orders of anti-Finnish forces, peddlers were accused of being agitators, instigators, and spies, while their activities were likened to "mole work," a metaphor commonly used to depict persons engaged in underground missions with hostile intentions.[94] With other negatively charged metaphors, they were portrayed as "wretched creatures," "pushy parasites," "harmful weeds" or, in conjunction with the cholera threat, a "filthy drain" of people aiming to "contaminate" the Finnish nation.[95]

While mobile Russians had already previously been associated with various threats, the growing political tensions around 1900 made the rhetoric more aggressive. As censorship hardened, from the summer of 1900 the agitation moved to the Finnish underground press, which, according to Duncan Huxley, reveals a "more or less fanatical concern" with Russian peddlers.[96] The underground press represented the Finnish constitutionalists' strategy of passive resistance, which propagated a

boycott of "all things Russian." The boycott encompassed peddlers, who were now portrayed as being increasingly politically motivated to destroy "all things sacred to the Finns": religion, language, and the ancestral social order.[97] Resistance writers claimed that the Russians sought to take over Finland altogether by undermining the Lutheran Church and the local school system on behalf of the Orthodox faith and the Russian language. A parallel was drawn to the Baltic provinces, where a similar tactic had already succeeded. Supported by Russian nationalists, peddlers there had allegedly managed to drive local merchants out of business, consequently settling down as shopkeepers to prepare ground for other Russians. The goal in Finland was said to be the same: after establishing roots, Russian shopkeepers would bring their families and employ more people from their home region. Eventually, the Russians would be so numerous as to require that Orthodox churches and Russian language schools be established.[98]

The political tensions in Finland were soon reflected in Sweden. The conflicts were reported in the Swedish press, as well as in a book by publicist Valfrid Spångberg, who followed the events in Finland in person in the spring of 1899.[99] Russia's tightening grip on Finland had raised concerns in Sweden, where patriotic circles viewed Russia as an aggressive power that sought to expand westward as if by a law of nature. From a military perspective, the expansion of the railway network on the Finnish side of the border was seen as a concrete manifestation of the expansionist ambitions. The question about the Swedish military's potential to withstand a possible Russian offensive became even more acute when the railway network, in 1886 already in Oulu (130 kilometers from Sweden), reached the border at Tornio in 1903.[100]

Speculations and rumors about mobile Russians soon began to spread in the Swedish press, however, taking on a slightly different form. In Sweden, it was the small group of saw grinders from the Novgorod Governorate that was suspected of conducting military espionage (see Fig. 10.2). Göran Rosander has estimated that they numbered only about 50 around 1900, increasing to a maximum of 300 in 1913.[101] From 1900, Swedish newspapers suddenly started to report observations of saw grinders from around the country, purportedly engaged in some sort of military activity, and allegedly carrying with them maps of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. They were also reported to be making maps and drawings of communications and defensive structures.[102] The local authorities were urged to rigorously supervise the saw grinders, and to detain them in case

Fig. 10.2 From 1899 to the First World War, the Swedish press occasionally portrayed Russian saw grinders from the Novgorod Governorate as military spies in disguise. Approximately 150 saw grinders were detained and interrogated by the police. Research has shown that the false allegations were part of a political campaign that aimed at strengthening the military defense of Sweden. (Photo taken at police interrogations in Stockholm, Sweden. Stockholm City Archives)

there was reason to believe that the motive for their presence in Sweden involved some sort of subversive activity. Pia Karlsson has found 178 protocols of such hearings in Swedish police archives.[103]

Suspecting peddlers or other mobile persons of being military spies or agents was by no means unique to the Nordics. Espionage was a highly topical matter in Europe in the decades preceding the First World War, to such an extent that one could speak of "spy fever."[104] Several works on espionage, such as V. N. Klembovsky's *L'espionnage militaire en temps de paix et en temps de guerre* (1895) and Hamil Grant's *Spies and Secret Service* (1915), featured peddlers. It was commonly thought that intelligence services sent out military officers disguised as mobile traders to spy in hostile countries. Citing Klembovsky's work, in 1902 a Swedish author noted that it included illustrations of an officer drawing by his table and a Russian peddler offering his goods for sale, obviously establishing a connection between the two. The significance of Klembovsky's work, the author claimed, hardly needed to be stressed in Sweden, which had the "questionable pleasure of being so much frequented by saw grinders and other Russian 'craftsmen.'"[105] While the Finnish press did not state as

explicitly as the Swedish press that peddlers might have been military spies, such references are found in other contexts.[106]

Modern research has found no evidence of Russian peddlers or saw grinders being involved in any organized political agitation or military intelligence. The press campaigns against them are explained rather by political tensions, which made mobile persons suitable "tools" in the hands of political factions with specific political aims. In the Finnish case, the proponents of passive resistance tried to create an image of the peddlers as enemies to strengthen their proposed boycott against "all things Russian." In a situation where armed resistance was not an option, a boycott was the best strategy they could conceive in defense of Finnish autonomy.[107] In the Swedish case, it was patriots arguing for a strengthening of the Swedish army against Russian expansionist ambitions that lay behind the campaign against Novgorodian saw grinders. Although their ambitions did not succeed, and despite the fact that the Swedish government denied early on that there was any truth to the allegations, warnings of saw grinders being military spies in disguise occasionally resurfaced in Swedish press until the First World War.[108] In both Finland and Sweden, the propaganda campaigns responded to a central mechanism in the creation of enemy images: in order to attain certain political goals, political ideologues constructed and utilized a caricature of a group with malicious intents.[109]

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored Nordic press portrayals of peddlers from the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I have examined in which contexts "Rucksack Russians," Eastern Jews, Tatars, and Novgorodian saw grinders were perceived as a threat, the rhetoric used in expressing those threats, and the motives behind such expressions. The aim has been to disclose an aspect of reality that mobile Russians seeking a livelihood in the Nordics faced, as well as to illustrate the mechanisms through which enemy images were created.

The analyzed groups differed from the Nordic societies in varying degrees regarding geographical origin, ethnicity, appearance, and confession. The "Rucksack Russians" who originated from Russian Karelia were Orthodox Christians but ethnically and linguistically perceived as related to the Finns. The Jews and Tatars were newcomers on the trading scene, appearing in the region only in the 1860s. Their geographic origin was more distant, and they differed more from the local communities than the

"Rucksack Russians." Finally, the Novgorodian saw grinders were ethnic Russians. All four groups faced preconceived negative notions that partly arose from a general negative attitude toward the "barbaric" East and the Russian state as a military aggressor. Furthermore, the peddlers encountered prejudices related to ethnicity and religion. The Jews were affected by stereotypical anti-Semitic attitudes, while the Tatars experienced negative attitudes toward "Orientals."

The analysis shows that peddlers from Russia were depicted as a threat in economic, moral, sanitary, and political respects. In the economic context, they were primarily perceived as unfair competitors to local merchants, who blamed them for evading taxes and trading fees that they themselves had to pay. Peddlers were also blamed for demoralizing their local customers by luring them into buying low-quality or fake commodities through fraudulent trading practices. The sanitary threat, in turn, emanated from fears that mobile people might spread infectious diseases such as cholera. In the political context, finally, the peddlers and saw grinders were used as tools in the political ideology of Finnish constitutionalists and Swedish patriots aiming to strengthen the country's defense against Russian military aggression. Viewing the portrayals through the lens of an enemy image, it becomes obvious that the peddlers are not depicted as individuals but rather as representatives of a collective accused of hostile intentions. The collective was burdened by negatively charged characteristics described in a stereotypical and derogatory rhetoric.

The threats and complaints that appear in the sources mainly represent voices beyond the traders and their customers. They primarily emanate from local merchants, who viewed the peddlers as unfair competitors, authorities who sought to maintain order and offer security, and political actors. Consequently, they reveal little or nothing about the actual encounters between the peddlers and the common people or about the meanings that customers may have ascribed to the commodities that the peddlers sold. However, the very fact that peddling persisted—despite the enemy image created around it—indicates that demand for the mobile Russians' goods and services did exist. Despite the fact that the images conveyed by the press were highly ideological and stereotypical, it is an indisputable fact that they comprised part of the reality that mobile people from the Russian Empire faced when seeking a livelihood in the Nordics. Considering the role that the press had in shaping public opinion, it is also reasonable to assume that the images created in the newspapers to some degree affected attitudes toward them.

Notes

1. Spillmann and Spillmann 1997, pp. 50–51.
2. Fiebig-von Hase 1997, pp. 2–3; Eckhart 1989, pp. 11–12.
3. Runefelt 2011, pp. 205–206; Häkkinen 2005, pp. 226–227.
4. Trentmann 2016, pp. 37–39; Ahlberger 1996, p. 59.
5. See, e.g., Hammarström 2016, pp. 38–42; Iver B. Neumann. 1999. *Uses of the Other: “The East” in European Identity Formation*.
6. Sweden: tidningar.kb.se; Finland: digi.kansallisarkisto.fi.
7. Wassholm and Sundelin 2018b, p. 202.
8. Wassholm and Sundelin 2020, pp. 119–120.
9. Stark 2011, pp. 40–42; Fiebig-von Hase 1997, p. 14.
10. Pekka Nevalainen. 2016. *Kulkukauppiaista kauppaneuvoksiin. Itäkarjalaisten liiketoimintaa Suomessa*; Mervi Naakka-Korhonen. 1988. *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta. Vienankarjalainen laukkukauppa*; Nils Storå, 1989. “Ostkarelische Wanderhändler als Kulturvermittler in Finnland”; Nils Storå, 1991. “‘Rucksack Russians’ in Finland: Peddling and Culture Contact”; Johanna Wassholm and Anna Sundelin, 2018a. “Emotions, trading practices and communication in transnational itinerant trade: Encounters between ‘Rucksack Russians’ and their customers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland.”
11. Jacqueline Stare. 1996. *Judiska gårdfarihandlare i Sverige*; Carl Henrik Carlsson. 2004. *Medborgarskap och diskriminering. Östjudar och andra invandrare i Sverige 1860–1920*; Per Hammarström. 2007. *Nationens styvbarn. Judisk samhällsintegration i några Norrlandsstäder 1870–1940*; Per Hammarström, 2015. “‘Judar öfwersvämma landet.’ Den judiska gårdfarihandeln i Kungl. Maj:ts befallningshavandes femårsberättelser 1865–1905”; Laura Katarina Ekholm, 2019. “Jews, Second-Hand Trade and Upward Economic Mobility: Introducing the Ready-to-Wear Business in Industrializing Helsinki, 1880–1930”; Johanna Wassholm, 2017. “Handel i marginalen. Den judiska småhandeln och lokalsamhället i Åbo i slutet av 1800-talet”; Johanna Wassholm, 2018. “Liikkuva kauppa ja kulttuurien kohtaaminen. Tataarien kulku- ja markkinakauppa Suomessa vuosina 1870–1920”; Johanna Wassholm, 2020. “Tatar Pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland in the Late Nineteenth Century”; Ainur Elmgrén, 2020. “Visual Stereotypes of Tatars in the Finnish Press from the 1890s to the 1910s.”
12. Pia Karlsson 1998. “En officer och gentleman? De ryska sågfilarna och spionanklagelserna”; Åselius 1994, p. 72; Rodell 2008, pp. 93–94; Nerman 1946, pp. 216–219; Nilsson 1990, pp. 141–144.
13. Rosander 1980, pp. 21–22.
14. Hjerppe 1989, pp. 41–42; Honningdal Grytten and Minde 1997, p. 61.

15. Lundqvist 2008, pp. 19–20.
16. Nevalainen 2016, pp. 28–30; Rosander 1980, p. 66.
17. Nevalainen 2016, p. 84–85; Wassholm 2020, p. 16.
18. Brinkmann 2013, pp. 3–5; Lüthi 2013, p. 29.
19. Bredefeldt 1997, pp. 34–35.
20. Gjernes 2012, p. 148.
21. Ekholm 2019, pp. 77–79; Wassholm 2017, pp. 593–596.
22. *Åbo Tidning* 9/23/1885, p. 3. See also *Tammerfors Aftonblad* 9/8/1882, p. 2; *Kaiku* 7/28/1883, p. 2; *Satakunta* 9/12/1883, p. 3.
23. Baibulat 2004, p. 14; Leitzinger 1999, p. 25; Wassholm 2020, p. 14.
24. Rodell 2008, pp. 93–94.
25. Gjernes 2012, p. 147; Wassholm 2020, p. 14.
26. Storå 1989, p. 34.
27. Elmgrén 2020, pp. 27–29.
28. Carlsson 2004, pp. 141–142; Andersson 2000, pp. 256–259.
29. Lüthi 2013, pp. 29–31.
30. Kari Tarkiainen. 2017. *Moskoviten. Sverige och Ryssland 1478–1721*; Iver B. Neumann. 1999. *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*.
31. Thaden 1981, pp. 76–88.
32. Åselius 1994, p. 72.
33. Brinkmann 2013, p. 6; Hjerppe 1989, pp. 81–82; Rodell 2008, pp. 93–94.
34. Wassholm 2020, pp. 13–14.
35. Jussila 2004, pp. 453–458; Polvinen 1995, p. 171; Tommila 1999, pp. 255–256.
36. Carlsson 2013, pp. 57–58.
37. Lindberg 2018, pp. 207–209; Wassholm and Sundelin 2018b, p. 199.
38. *Smålandsposten* 2/16/1886, p. 2; *Höganäs Tidning* 1/17/1899, p. 2; *Ny Tid* 12/14/1900, p. 3; *Östgöten* 1/11/1902, p. 4.
39. Lindberg 2018, pp. 215–218.
40. Jakobsson 1951, pp. 197–199.
41. *Aura* 1/17/1885, p. 1.
42. Jakobsson 1951, p. 202; Seela 2005, pp. 10–11.
43. *Aura* 1/20/1885, p. 2; 5/28/1885, p. 2.
44. The question was connected to national politics and reflected the anti-Semitic rhetoric expressed in the recurring parliamentary debates regarding Jewish citizenship rights. Jews could not acquire citizenship in Finland until 1918. Torvinen 1989, pp. 50–51; Jakobsson 1951, pp. 197–200.
45. *Smålandsposten* 2/16/1886, p. 2; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* 6/8/1886, p. 2.
46. Carlsson 2004, pp. 134–144.
47. *Korrespondenten* 5/3/1888, p. 2; *Trelleborgstidningen* 8/21/1897, p. 2.

48. Hammarström 2007, p. 111.
49. *Granskaren* 6/14/1890, p. 1.
50. Wassholm 2020, p. 16.
51. *Tidning för Skaraborgs Län* 1/18/1901, p. 3.
52. *Hämeen Sanomat* 12/7/1886, p. 2; *Päivälehti* 5/4/1898, p. 4; *Kotka* 4/14/1898, p. 3.
53. *Jämtlandsposten* 8/1/1902, p. 4; *Wasa Tidning* 4/7/1898, p. 2; *Wiipuri* 1/1/1911, p. 3.
54. Petterberg-Möntti 2001, p. 86.
55. *Fäderneslandet* 8/22/1860, p. 2; *Figaro* 6/2/1888, p. 2.
56. *Aura* 1/20/1885, p. 2; 5/28/1885, p. 2.
57. *Ny Tid* 12/14/1900, p. 3; *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten* 12/17/1900, p. 2.
58. *Kotka* 7/25/1885, p. 3; 4/24/1886, p. 3; 12/1/1892, p. 2; *Kotkan Sanomat* 11/29/1892, p. 2. For similar complaints in other towns, see *Åbo Underrättelser* 12/10/1898, p. 2; *Perä-Pohjolainen* 8/20/1898, p. 4.
59. *Vestra Nyland* 9/23/1892, p. 3.
60. Lindberg 2018, pp. 224–226; Runefelt 2011, pp. 207–209.
61. Trentmann 2016, pp. 27–39; Ahlberger 1996, p. 59.
62. *Wasa Tidning* 3/22/1885, p. 2; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* 6/8/1886, p. 2; *Figaro* 6/2/1888, p. 2; *Åbo Underrättelser* 10/3/1893, p. 2.
63. *Hufvudstadsbladet* 10/1/1886, p. 2. See also *Kotka* 7/25/1885, p. 3; *Åbo Underrättelser* 10/2/1892, p. 2; *Höganäs Tidning* 1/17/1899, p. 2.
64. *Borgåbladet* 1/26/1884, pp. 1–2; *Tampere* 9/6/1884, p. 3.
65. Geertz 1963, pp. 32–33; Ekholm 2013, p. 91.
66. *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* 4/30/1886.
67. *Sanomia Turusta* 9/11/1874, p. 1. See also *Turun Lehti* 9/22/1888, p. 2.
68. *Helsingfors* 6/16/1882, p. 2; *Turun Lehti* 9/22/1888, p. 2; *Björneborgs Tidning* 10/13/1888, p. 2.
69. *Fäderneslandet* 8/22/1860, p. 2; *Aura* 11/10/1885, p. 3. *Smålandsposten* 2/16/1886, p. 2; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* 6/8/1886, p. 2; *Figaro* 6/2/1888, p. 2; *Avesta Tidning* 10/17/1884, p. 3; *Granskaren* 6/14/1890, p. 1.
70. *Folkwännen* 7/2/1883, pp. 2–3; *Norra Posten* 10/31/1888, p. 3; *Turun Lehti* 9/22/1888, p. 2.
71. *Höganäs Tidning* 1/17/1899, p. 2.
72. *Wiborgs Nyheter* 3/6/1909, p. 2.
73. *Fäderneslandet* 8/22/1860, p. 2; *Avesta Tidning* 10/17/1884, p. 3; *Kotka* 7/25/1885, p. 3; 4/24/1886, p. 3; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* 6/8/1866, p. 2; *Figaro* 6/2/1888, p. 2.
74. *Tampere* 9/6/1884, p. 3.
75. Trentmann 2016, pp. 37–39.

76. *Fyris* 1/22/1883, p. 2; *Åbo Underrättelser* 12/10/1896, p. 1; *Vestra Nyland* 10/15/1897, p. 3.
77. Lüthi 2013, pp. 37–39.
78. *Hultfreds Tidning* 4/8/1902, p. 2.
79. Pesonen 1980, pp. 382–383; Nygård 2004, pp. 214–216; Wassholm 2018, pp. 225–227.
80. *Åbo Underrättelser* 9/14/1892, p. 2; *Turun Lehti* 8/25/1894, pp. 2–3.
81. *Hämäläinen* 9/23/1893, p. 1; 9/27/1893, p. 3; *Vestra Nyland* 10/3/1893, p. 2; *Ekenäs Tidning* 10/7/1893, p. 2; *Turun Lehti* 8/25/1894, pp. 2–3.
82. *Turun Lehti* 8/25/1894, pp. 2–3. For an association with dirt, see also *Östra Finland* 9/7/1892, p. 3.
83. Masquelier 2005, pp. 6–7; Häkkinen 2005, pp. 226–227.
84. Thaden 1981, pp. 76–88.
85. Jussila 2004, pp. 453–458.
86. Wassholm and Sundelin 2018a, p. 133; Tommila 1999, pp. 248–250; Naakka-Korhonen 1988, pp. 177–181.
87. *Laatokka* 4/5/1899, p. 2; Spångberg 1899, pp. 122–124.
88. Suodenjoki 2010, p. 97.
89. Tommila 1999, pp. 247–249.
90. *Västra Finland* 3/15/1899, p. 1; *Wasa Nyheter* 5/7/1899, p. 3; *Wasabladet* 4/11/1899, p. 2.
91. See f.ex. *Wasa Nyheter* 5/7/1899, p. 3; *Wasabladet* 4/11/1899, p. 2; *Vestra Nyland* 4/21/1899, p. 2; *Kristinestads Tidning* 9/29/1900, p. 2.
92. *Vestra Nyland* 4/21/1899, p. 2. See also *Tampereen Sanomat* 4/11/1899, p. 3; *Wiborgs Nyheter* 4/22/1899, p. 3.
93. See, e.g., *Åbo Tidning* 3/14/1899, p. 1; *Kotka Nyheter* 3/18/1899, p. 3; *Laatokka* 4/5/1899, p. 2; *Upprop till fosterlandets försvar*, p. 6; *Aftonbladet* 8/18/1900, p. 2.
94. *Västra Finland* 3/15/1899, p. 1; *Laatokka* 4/5/1899, p. 2; *Kristinestads Tidning* 9/29/1900, p. 2.
95. *Laatokka* 4/5/1899, p. 2; *Västra Finland* 3/15/1899, p. 1; *Kotkan Uutiset* 4/23/1899, p. 1.
96. Huxley 1990, p. 169.
97. *Upprop till fosterlandets försvar*, p. 2.
98. *Aftonbladet* 8/18/1900, p. 2; Homén 1906, pp. 11–12. On Russification measures in the Baltic provinces, see Thaden 1981, pp. 33–75.
99. Valfrid Spångberg. 1899. *Statskuppen i Finland 1899.*
100. Åselius 1994, pp. 70–71.
101. Rosander 1980, p. 66.

102. *Folkets Tidning* 1/13/1900, p. 3; *Fäderneslandet* 1/20/1900, p. 2; *Engelholms Tidning* 7/5/1900, p. 2; *Hudiksvalls Nyheter* 11/5/1900, p. 2.
103. Karlsson 1998, p. 145.
104. David French, 1978. "Spy Fever in Britain, 1900–1915."
105. *Göteborgs Aftonblad* 4/12/1902, p. 2. See also *Göteborgs Aftonblad* 3/3/1900, p. 1.
106. Gripenberg 1922, pp. 81–82; Parmanen 1936, p. 266.
107. Polvinen 1995, p. 170.
108. *Dalpilen* 4/22/1913, p. 2; *Provinstidningen Dalsland* 5/10/1913, p. 3; *Söderhamns Tidning* 8/27/1913, p. 4; *Östgötaposten* 3/13/1914, p. 2; *Trelleborgstidningen* 5/4/1914, p. 3.
109. Eckhart 1989, pp. 11–12; Fiebig-von Hase 1997, pp. 2–3.

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