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**Panel: Beyond Snowden: the Anthropology of Whistleblowing**

**Citizen Duty or Stasi Society? Informing on Unethical Behavior in Firms, Organizations and Communities and the Neoliberalization of Whistleblowing**

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INTRODUCTION

Whistleblowing is usually thought of as some kind of truth to power act. A brave individual, upset or disgusted with the behavior of their workplace or organization, tells the public or the authorities about an abuse in order to restore some kind of justice. The whistleblower may receive publicity, but they may also receive retaliation or even prison and exile. Much of it depends on the quality of their information, whether it indeed causes a public stir. In the world of conspiracy theory for example, an ex/CIA translator insists that she has knowledge of some kind of conspiracy about 9/11, but no one believes her. Not everyone is as famous as Snowden or Manning.

Now, most whistleblowing is a form of organizational dissidence. Someone presumed to be loyal, with access to organization secrets or practices, discloses information to the outside in an informal or unauthorized manner. The whistle blower is by definition an INSIDER, the information is considered ILLEGITIMATE or abusive and therefore in the PUBLIC INTEREST, and it is DISCLOSED to an AUTHORITY who can take ACTION. Since the insider, despite high MOTIVES, has violated a trust, he or she may be accused of treachery or be subject to RETALIATION, and may solicit or receive PROTECTION. Studies of whistleblowing show that between half and two thirds of whistleblowers lose their jobs and many can never work in their chosen field again. There are thus many ‘moments’ in the whistleblowing act

What would happen, however, if the dynamics of this whistleblowing equation were altered? What if, for example, if disclosing secrets could also give financial rewards, or emotional rewards not related to truth-to-power but more simple revenge or envy. What if whistleblowing was not just limited to one’s workplace but also once’s neighborhood or community? If whistleblowing is both telling truth to power and a breach of distrust, if it is both DISCLOSURE AND DISLOYALTY, then perhaps we can imagine whistleblowing anthropologically, as part of a DISCLOSURE REGIME OR TRANSPARENCY REGIME with many manifestaitons. It is this kind of broader approach I will present here (with the risk that the whistleblowing concept gets watered down). I I will do this by discussing two such examples today in which the whistleblowing equation is altered. The goal is to set up a more dynamic, anthropology of truth-telling, witnessing and power, a relationship between individuals and their workplace organization on one hand, and individuals in communities on the other.

More generally, we need to reconsider whistleblowing in a broader context of transparency, disclosure, individual empowerment, truth telling, witnessing, and the tense relation between workers and employers, citizens and the state, and people and each other in workplaces or communities. That is, the similarities and differences between personal confessions, revelations of abuse, informing, leaking and whistleblowing.

The two examples I will use are the government program of the office of the whistleblower, intended to expose corporate financial crime and corruption, a program where whistleblowers are paid cash rewards; and the Scandinavian welfare system’s program to expose welfare benefit fraud and tax evasion by citizens, programs run by tax authorities and social insurance agencies in several countries, including Denmark, Sweden and the UK. \

Now one might say that exposing neighbors as tax cheaters is not whistleblowing; it is snitching, or informing or a new form of surveillance. Maybe so. But to the extent that neighbors are part of a community, bound by certain customs and habits in terms of leaving people alone to their affairs, a kind of loyalty to community norms, we might also call this citizen informing a new form of whistleblowing, an instance of a transparency regime. In both these cases, the government whistleblowing with reward, and the community informing on welfare cheaters, we have a form of INCENTIVES TO DISLOYALTY to achieve money, justice, retaliation, or revenge)…..perhaps the two types of whistleblowing are not so dissimilar as we might suggest. We thus need to look at whistleblowing not just in terms of outputs but also incentives.

There are major whistleblowing scandals happening daily, and they reveal a wide range of illegalities, abuses, malpractice, environmental damage political and police corruption, corporate fraud, falsification of research findings, institutionalized violence and child sexual abuse. There are also small scale whistleblowing acts, and we need to include these as well, we might call it EVERYDAY WHISTLEBLOWING.

**WHISTLEBLOWING RESEARCH**

First a note on whistleblowing research generally. Three points can be made.

Whistleblowing is not simply going public with inside information. It has a history and a context revolving around personal empowerment against a potentially illegitimate organization, with a notion of public interest.

Whistleblowers can be heroes or leakers. One example is Malcom Gladwell’s comparison of Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the pentagon papers, and Edward Snowden. Gladwell says Ellsberg carefully curated the pentagon papers through meetings with selected journalists. Snowden, in contrast, just dumped out millions of documents. Ellsberg was a whistleblower and hero. Snowden, says Gladwell, was a simple hacker. Frequently seen not only as troublemakers but as mentally unstable. The whistleblower narrative is not so simple. This means that the whistleblowing act is still inflammatory. Together with confessional narratives and revelations by victims of abuse. Time magazine made 3 female whistleblowers their person of the year, saying that they were what American values are all about (Enron, WorldCom and FBI). Workplace vendetta, predator and play. Workplaces do not just have consensus and a feeling of team. The workplace environment (even a physically clean workplace) also be a toxic environment.

Whistleblowing is the powerless exposing the powerful. Informing is powerless exposing powerless to the powerful. There is an ambiguity here, however, since whistleblowing is dissidence and therefore entails a profound lack of loyalty and lack of collegiality. This leads also to question of why so many people do NOT blow the whistle. We thus need to recall the hold that organizations have on their members. Behind so many revelations of whistleblowing lies a question of WHY DIDN’T WE HEAR ABOUT THIS BEFORE? That this behavior was going on for years, even decades (which is certainly a lesson of the MeToo movement).

Second, Since whistleblowers work inside organizations, they are affected by their employment contracts, particularly company secrecy laws even when their revelations could be in the public interest. Whistleblowers can reveal abuses and still go to jail. The whistleblowing event thus has an impact after the moment of disclosure, and it is the post-disclosure moments that need to be understood for a full understanding of how whistleblowing works and what it does.

Third there is a major legal trend toward legal protection of whistleblowers from retaliation. Whistleblowers can retain some form of anonymity and can receive legal aid and financial compensation. However, the legal protection does not obviate the ambiguous image of the whistleblower: as hero and victim, and potentially a simple hacker or a kind of spy, as a truth teller or a hapless, mentally ill fool.

**THE US WHISTLEBLOWING REGIME: TRUTH, POWER AND MONEY**

Let me therefore use the rest of my time to describe two whistleblowing regimes, the US government whistleblower progam, followed by the Scandinavian informing systems.

In the US, there are several whistleblower programs run by the U.S. government, for example the Department of Justice as a whistleblower ombudsperson. But two of them are prominent because they give out financial rewards (which are called ‘award’) to whistleblowers. This is TRUTH TO POWER PLUS MONEY., the neoliberalizatio of truth to power. The two I will quickly describe her are the SEC program under the Dodd Frank Act and the IRS Office of the Whistleblower.

**The SEC whistleblower program** was established under the Dodd Frank Act, for wall street reform and consumer protection in 2010. The program allows whistleblowers to report financial irregularities or corruption to the SEC anonymously (while the IRS does not). About one-quarter of whistleblower report anonymously (represented by counsel).

Second, the program offers financial incentives, up to 30% of the take for cases over where there is over one million dollars in financial crime. The Largest awards were of 30, 22 and 17 million dollars. Both Americans and foreigners can receive the award. In 2017 50 million dollars was given to 12 individuals who provided new information that the SEC was unaware.

The SEC programs also operates to protect whistleblowers. It prohibits firms from imposing confidentiality clauses on employees if the employee believes law is being violated. And it provides protection from retaliation for whistleblowers, giving them compensation and paying for legal assistance.

In fy 2017 the SEC program received 4400 tips, 50% more than 2012. Tips from 114 countries, especially the UK, Canada, Australia, Russia, china. Mexico. Hong Kong

Types of allegations. Corporate disclosures and financials 19%, fraud 18%, manipulation 12%, other 28%

The awards are determined according to the value of the information and whether the employee went to the compliance officer first. The award was specifically made with monetary incentives in mind. And potential recipients of awards can look on a website to see if the SEC is opening a case. Most Information can be submitted online or hard copy or by phone…. In 2017 the office received 3200 phone calls.

Most of the awards are to company insiders.

The office posts notice of an action and the individual has 90 days to claim an award, which can be accepted or rejected and appealed. Higher awards if the individual is significant, high level of assistance, law enforcement interests at stakes, whether they used the firms internal reporting channels. Low award if person was themselves culpable or unreasonably delayed.

The awards wer of 160m dollars to 46 persons in 37 cases. 62% were employee insiders. 83% raised concerns internally! 54% were represented by counsel, of these 19% filed anonymously. 9 of the 46 were foreigners.

**The IRS Office of the Whistleblower**

The IRS has a simple mandate, to collect taxes. Whistleblowers can contact the IRS if they think some person or firm is evading taxes by hiding or misreporting income. The IRS also has a threshold of 2 million dollars. It does not as yet guarantee whistleblower protection. And since cases may take a long time to resolve, it informs whistleblowers that they can first expect their reward 5 to 7 years after reporting. Since 2007, the IRS has awarded 465 million dollars based on the collection of 3.4 billion dollars. The IRS has 61 persons on its whistleblower staff, and in FY 2017 paid out 61 million dollars to 418 persons, which is 322% more than the previous year. IRS Form 211 and form 5261 give instructions on reporting and claiming an award. 29000 submissions were sent and 12000 were rejected as irrelevant or not credible.

Whistleblowing may be complicated or risky. As a result a large number of whistleblower NGOs and especially whistleblower attorneys exist to help individuals file claims and take a share of the cut. Several of them advertise that their staff contains former SEC or DOJ anticorruption attorneys. Unlike Europe, where jurists normally pursue a career within either the public or private sector, lawyers in the US often commute between government and private employment. Of special importance here is the role of lawyers in negotiating deferred prosecution or nonprosecution agreements with the government, where the firm agrees to establish an ethics program and cooperate in order to reduce its fine or ensure that its CEO does not go to jail. Whistleblower protection laws have been strengthened, but we nevertheless have now is a kind of privatization of whistleblowing, truth to power, with a reward and a cut for attorney’s fees. So much for the government’s whistleblowing programs.

**COMMUNITY WHISTLEBLOWING IN SCANDINAVIA**

Now let me go to a new kind of whistleblowing, which I would call ‘informing’ but also ‘community whistle blowing’ It takes place in Scandinavia (and other countries).

Scandinavian countries have the world’s highest taxes. Tax paying is a social act with moral implications. Trust in Scandinavia, sammenhaengskraft, literally ‘the power of cohesion’ , is based on people’s perception of whether this contract is being upheld, or whether it has been irrevocably broken. A perception of injustice – that I am being forced to pay more than I get out it – or that neighbors are evading taxes or receiving illegal benefits -- will lead to indignation. Such indignation fuels new ideas and practices, from reform or illiberal social movments to tax cheating.

How do individuals reach this indignation stage between payers of taxes and recipients of benefits? How do they come to conclude that there is injustice? Is there some kind of ‘slippery slope’ here, where people get together and suddenly realize, ‘No, I’m going to cheat.’ How do we measure indignation? This feeling of betrayal is one where the community that used to deserve my trust doesn’t deserve it any more. So why give when you don’t get? This seems to set the stage for various forms of benefits fraud and tax cheating.

One way to measure this indignation is to watch the reaction to periodic tax cheating scandals in the welfare system. These scandals are brought up by the mass media, or occasionally in a political debate by a disgruntled politician. The scandal is invariably that some people are not receiving the benefits they deserve due to an insensitive bureaucracy or to budget cutbacks; or conversely, that others are receiving unjust advantages due to outright manipulation of the system’s monitoring routines. While there are many ways to deceive or manipulate the Scandinavian tax system, especially for the self employed, for businesses and organizations,

I will concentrate here on the two basic kinds of deception that ordinary people can carry out and which are the subject of media and political commentary. One is the falsification of claims to welfare benefits (e.g. welfare fraud, single mother benefits, including disability pension, unemployment benefits). The second deception is untaxed income or black work, typically working off the books in construction, catering and household services, or hiring such workers. In all the Scandinavian countries, these two kinds of deception are the constant topic of press commentary, political rhetoric, and bureaucratic control, as well as tax incentives to reduce them. More abstractly, these practices are also the object of SOCIAL THEORIZING ABOUT INCENTIVES, about what makes people stay honest, or what it is that they fear so they do not cheat. The tax authorities also operate with sophisticated theories of human behavior, trying to strike a balance between incentive and reward, between closing loopholes for evasion and simplifying payment (e.g. obligatory use of electronic payment for large sums). In this process, they try to reach out to the public by conducting ‘campaigns’, granting temporary amnesty for those with foreign accounts, or by ‘sending signals’ with spectacular surprise raids . The messages being sent are basically two: we are everywhere, and it doesn’t pay to cheat. As tax ministers invariably say, everyone should pay the taxes that they are supposed to, neither more nor less. Any other arrangement is, to use a frequently heard word in Scandinavia, ‘unfair’.

In a society of high welfare payments and high taxes, welfare fraud and tax fraud certainly occur. Incidents are publicized through public statistics, by scandals and arrests of spectacular cases (the Swedish personal assistant case), and then by TV documentaries with titles such as “With the Tax Authorities on a Raid” showing tax and municipal authorities at work, carrying out inspections and discovering fraud in shops, stopping people driving untaxed cars, or questioning stubborn welfare clients whose claim for payment is suspicious. In Sweden, the state social insurance bureau, forsakringskassan, carried out 20000 control inspections in 2013, of which 1100 led to arrests. 46% of these inspections derived from unsolicited public tips.

With a variety of ways to cheat, the public authorities have also developed their own special investigative units –sometimes called Street Teams—to investigate in the taxation ministry, while welfare fraud can be investigated by social ministries or municipal authorities who do the actual disbursement. The income brought in by these units is publicized to show their productivity. The investigation may include various data searches and correlations, by unannounced inspections in homes, shops and workplaces, or by inspecting suspicious applications for assistance where the facts do not add up. There have been various controversies over the legitimacy of entering client’s homes unannounced to see who lives there, called dynelofteri (‘lifting up the blanket’) counting toothbrushes, persuing facebook pages, or inspecting property to search for illegal construction workers, or waiting across the street to see if an ostensible single mother (who receives the single mother benefit) also has a man visiting her, or examining facebook pages to see if the family contains a new adult living there. New regulations now permit “tax control units to move out onto the residential streets and into Danes’ backyards” (Politiken 21.12.13). New laws requiring married an cohabiting couples to support each other, thus reducing welfare benefits, also make the inspections more ominous. Local welfare authorities have to assess whether two people living together are simply roommates, renter/rentee, or whether they are ‘in a relationship’, e.g. if they have a common bank account or carry out other functions together. A recent news story told of two young men sharing an apartment, one of whom was receiving welfare, where they had to provide proof that they were not in a homosexual relationship.

In Denmark one controversial raid concerned a single mother who may have a man living in their home and have not reported the change in her household economy. The controversy here is whether the bureaucracy is being too intrusive. On other occasions, the tax or welfare authorities, accompanied by a policeman, will enter a restaurant or shop and check the personnel’s ID cards, receipts and inventory of goods to search for irregularities. The attitude of these visits between controllers and clients, broadcast weekly on various TV documentaries, ranges from pedagogical to scolding, depending on whether they have been in the shop before. After these raids, the functionaries get to say a few words for the camera, invariably a statement that everyone should pay their taxes to the society and that it’s my job to ensure that no one escapes their obligations. The tax authorities and social welfare control are shown being vigilant, moralistic and proactive

**NEEDING HELP FROM THE PUBLIC**

Now, so far I have spoken of control conducted by public authorities on suspicious clients.

But what happens when the public authorities find themselves unable to carry out their control functions? What happens when the tax cheaters are too smart, the cases too many, or the political pressure too strong, when there is a pressure to catch the tax cheaters or welfare fraudsters? What happens when public opinion, having discovered a scandal of a welfare cheat, fanned by the media and encouraged by the indignant politician, push the authorities to ‘do something’?

In this case, the authorities can elect to establish special investigative units, which they have done. Or they can appeal to the citizens for more information. We are in fact experiencing a trend where citizens should participate in the policing of society (in sociology, called ‘plural policing’). Some observers – media commentators and politicians – have called this an epidemic of ‘informing’, the Danish and Swedish words are angiver/ange and also relate to the wartime collaboration where Nazi collaborators informed on the Danish resistance (stikker). In more pejorative terms, the Danish expression is ‘collaborator-society’, ‘informer society’, ‘surveillance society’ or frequently in Denmark, ‘Stasi society,’ hence the term Stasificiering./Stasification//////

How do citizens participate:

Citizens have always been able to report tax cheating or welfare abuse by their neighbors. Sometimes this was anonymous, by phone or letter. Most recently, however, the informing also comes with the assistance of publicly managed web portals, in which citizens can click their way to filing a report on suspected tax cheating, untaxed income, falsely claimed disability pensions, or welfare swindle. Here, too, citizens can provide their information anonymously, though with some risk of exposure, or by name, depending on the authority. And they can now upload ‘evidence’ in the form of photos or videos or other documentation. No rewards are given for this citizen participation.

The basic questions I would like to discuss here is who informs on whom about what. How does the process work? And what kind of public discourse emerges from this? What are the implications for our understanding of social cohesion, or the lack of same, in modern societies? Of the relationship between citizens and welfare authorities and citizens and each other? After all, the problem of social cohesion is not simply an issue for the highly taxed, highly controlled Scandinavian welfare states; we are beginning to see a tipping of the balance in southern Europe as well, as wealthy Greeks, Spaniards and Italians, or falsely pensioned persons or those with no incomes but giant swimming pools, are suddenly being forced to pay taxes, partly due to pressure by a sensationalized press, by more militant state authorities, but also by public outcry ‘from below’, aided by tips from the citizens who have themselves suffered from the financial crisis in Southern Europe. There is a clear social psychological element to this, a threshold which is being crossed in which people’s private affairs are now no longer to be kept private by those who know about them. Reporting on a cheating neighbor may be an act of civic duty. It is transparency with a vengeance. It is a society of disclosure.

In Scandinavia this threshold has been a contentious issue because of horrific child abuse cases that went out for years without authorities taking action. Here the issue was whether not just the authorities, but also neighbors should have intervened earlier. We are constantly being asked to get involved on the one hand, but to be careful about interfering in people’s private lives on the other.

**Informing as community whistleblowing.**

Let me describe the community whistleblowing/informing system in Denmark and Sweden, based largely on publicly available documents and press accounts.

**Denmark**

In Denmark, the informing activity has taken place often in the wake of television broadcasts showing social swindle. Hence, in the town of Odense, where a TV documentary followed the municipal authorities looking for welfare swindle, there was a sudden rise in informants to the tax authorities investigation illegal work, and the social authorities. According to the leader of the Odense municipality control group, the television series generated 250-300 reports, as much as we got all last year. “There has occurred a change in attitude…” he says. “More data scans will occur, and those people with suspiciously high scores will be examined” (TV2 nyheder 12.04.13).

Today, 32 of Denmarks 76 municipalities have web sites where people can report abuse. Most of them ask of the same information in a sequence, beginning with the identity of the informer, followed by a description of the informer’s suspicion, and a request as to whether the informer wants to remain anonymous not. The informant is instructed how to make an anonymous claim by not using their national ID, and warned that if they give their name the person accused may have the right to know who accused them and even confront them in court. Finally, the site requests any supporting evidence, such as photo, video or documents. The website for the agency that disburses child allowances, Udbetaling Danmark, has had a site since September 2012 and now offers room to upload as many as 10 file attachments, such as a photo of someone on a disability pension working in their garden.

The Danish national tax authorities, like the municipalities, have also set up a reporting site. Reports from citizens, firms and authorities numbered 6878 in 2011, 7929 in 2012 and 9750 in 2013 (to nov. 1st) (Politiken 11.12.13) In 2013 alone, the Danish tax authorities received 10.541 reports from citizens, compared to 5500 in 2010 and 7929 in 2012. (Some of the statistical data is unclear, since tips are sometimes meant as tips from individuals, while on other occasions it includes tips from firms and other authorities). Sixty percent of the reports to the tax authorities are anonymous. (Berlingske 2o.10.2013). Reports to the tax ministry state that 27% of the reports involve black work, 14% for unregistered firm, 11% for unreported sales income, 4% for foreign, untaxed cars, 4% for illegal workers, 3% for illegal import and 2% for use of improper car plates; 35% are ‘Other’.

On the basis of these reports, the Danish tax ministry has set up a department for inspection and control of 200 persons, of which 135 are in the field. (Politiekn 21.12.13). The Danish tax authorities are aware that the anonymous system can be abused. About one-third of the reports are useless because they are either frivolous or expression of harassment (ibid.). The tax ministry’s surveys say that citizens’ acceptance of black work is declining, which has led to an increase in the number of reports. “We are having a veritable informer culture out in the suburbs” (ibid.) As the minister Jonas Dahl from the left wing SF party said, “We should avoid that the Ministry of Taxation be used in a feud between family members or neighbors In mid February 2014, the new minister for taxation, a social democrat, decided to halt the anonymous reporting site, saying that he did not want Denmark to become ‘an informer society’. However, people can still report to the tax authorities using non-web based channels. In March, the Danish ombudsman criticized the Danish tax authorities of using anonymous informants, as this was a violation of the law on public administration. In the local authorities, however, the sites to report swindle are still operating.

**Sweden**

In Sweden, informers can send information to several sites: the tax ministry, the state social insurance payment agency, forsakringskassan, or to other bureaus such as the Immigrant and Migration agency. Punishment for cheating is carried out under the law on welfare crimes from 2007 which covers false claim and/or abuse of payments from several agencies, ranging from disability and sick leave, to student stipends, housing stipends and payment for caring for sick children (VAB days). The Swedish Tax ministry receives about 20,000 tips per year via letter, phone, email and persona visits. Since 2011 it also has also had a webpage for reporting tax evasion, inspired, they say, by experience from New Zealand, which had a 50% increase in tips (DN 11.11.2011) . The tips to the tax ministry were predominantly on black work, esp. in construction, hairdressing and café/restaurant.

The Swedish social insurance agency (FK), received 10.000 tips in 2013, up from 4000 in 2005 and 9653 in 2009 (6% led to police indictments) (Aftenbladet 02.03.2010), of which 45% are from individuals, on suspicious cheaters, typically those where someone is seen working despite collecting disability, or that a single mother receiving an extra allowance is living with a partner. 90% of the tips are made anonymously. But of all tips from the public, only about 10-14% lead to some measure, generally repayment of falsely claimed payments. This compares with 40% of reports from other authorities, the conclusion being that individual reports are less reliable. About 20% who are reported are contacted by the FK. As one of the officials explains, the anonymous reports ‘are often more about frustration than they are substantive, and in most of the cases the person has the right to receive payment’ (Sydsvenskan 30.6.13.). Another said, “there are often conflicts and family tragedies behind the tips”. The vast majority of control deals with false illness payments. “How can you cut the grass if you are sick….’ said one informer..

In 2006 FK received 300m SEK from the social democratic government to build up a control unit, which now has 150 persons; they are increasingly focusing on the most likely cases of swindle. (Faktum 24.11.10), and most informants focus on people receiving payments who are also working ‘black’.

In 2006, a Swedish municipality, Lerum, established a ‘security site’ in which citizens were actively encouraged to report on graffiti, child abuse, and ‘antidemocratic expressions’. In the debate Lerum was accused of establishing an informer site instead of a security site. A local official insists that they have never presented themselves as ‘a place where you can inform on your neighbor or to encourage people to spy on us’

**Some consequences of the ‘informer’ society.**

The public authorities are aware that encouraging informing may affect a postulated social cohesion. Hence, few of them are enthusiastic about citizen involvement in tax and welfare cheating. The director of the Swedish Social Payment office (FK), for example, emphasizes that we do not work ‘actively’ to get tips in from the public.. FK’s director Dan Eliasson (DN 10.11.2013) insists, ‘I do not encourage any kind of public informer line for us, but if a mistake is seen, it is good to let us know’. Eliason does not believe that the FK is based on an ‘informer cultur’ (angiverkultur). “We do not have great publicity campaigns that you should call us if you think there is swindle going on’. (DN 10.11.13. ). Again, another manager at FK, Linda Olofsson, insists that FK ‘does not active seek help from the public’ (Sveriges Radio and Metro, 10.12.13, an article entitled ‘tips om bidragsfusk populaert men problematisk’).

At the Swedish tax authority, a control official says that encouraging informing ‘is a bit sensitive. We don’t want to have an informer society where insecurity is created. It feels wrong without me being able to say why.’ (Faktum 24.11.10). The migration agency and other organs in Sweden also insist that they do not actively solicit tips or have carried out ‘informer campaigns’ (angiver kampanj) ‘We know that it can be about gossip, revenge, and there can be other interests which are benefited by information.’ (ibid.).

Public authorities also have their own ideas of how society has changed, with informing being simply a symptom of something else.

A Danish control team leader comments on the increase in both anonymous and non anonymous reporting: “I think that the public morality has changed… people do not want to take part in the neighbor’s cheating’ (Business.dk 28 May 2009).

A survey conducted in Sweden (by the newspaper DN) of 43000 persons found that 35% would report their neighbors for welfare cheating, 26% said no, but 33% said it depends on the neighbor.

In Denmark, a Tax ministry spokesman Jan P. Jensen, says the increase in reporting has two causes, the financial crisis which has reduced the amount of tax evasion they will tolerate, and the television programs such as Tax ministry on a Raid” and ‘Operation X’. People who see these programs think ‘I also know someone who cheats on their taxes, and they contact us’. (Berlingske 20.10.2013). The idea here is that people just need a little nudge and the reports will flow out.

The reporting websites have generated debates in chat rooms and among interest groups. Some vulnerable groups feel that all campaigns against swindle stigmatize everyone. The head of the Swedish association of disabled persons, for example, says the impression is created by the media and the authorities, that it is easy to swindle, and that people do not know how many tests that disabled people must go through to obtain their disability pensions.

The Danish tax minister says that “we will not encourage informing, but conversely, ….citizens will not accept the black economy. I think in fact that the crisis has made it so that we have obtained greater accountability in this area.”

A Danish woman commented on the influence in social relations when one of the TV programs focused on a single mother who had a boyfriend sleeping over. One of the municipal instructional videos states that your boyfriend must not pay your bills, you must not have a joint economy, go shopping or help with housework, and that he should sleep on the sofa, and that both your names must not be on any invitations.

A Danish commentator laments the reintroduction of the /informer/stikker concept, ‘where citizen A is encouraged to inform on citizen B if something seems suspicious. Where the authorities’ reasonable control of the citizens legal obedience becomes neighbors’ mutual surveillance… and to eternal sneaking suspicion’ (Tom Jensen, Stikker du, Berlingske kornik 7.8.2013)

Questions that can be raised about the Scandinavian informer systems are several. Recall that these are high trust societies. People have high trust in each other, and trust in the state. They believe that ‘the system’ will treat people fairly and equitably. Nevertheless, informing, or community whistleblowing, is increasing. This raises several obvious questions:

Does pervasive whistleblowing lead to a breakdown in social cohesion?

Is Denmark undergoing a ‘Stasification’ of the society?

Can we use this kind of tax cheating citizen reporting as a measure of ‘indignation’? Or are we measuring ‘civic duty’?

Do we have some kind of measure which is in effect the opposite of Happiness?….. Is this kind of community whistleblowing, of neighbors not leaving neighbors alone any more, is this the opposite of social trust and happiness, of a fragmenting society? Or is it the emergence of a civic duty?

**CONCLUSIONS**

Whistleblowing needs to be considered in a broader historical perspective. It exists on a continuum of personal confession, revelations of abusive behavior by authorities or employers (meToo, Catholic church), as a means of individual empowerment against organizations, as an expression of employees ethical conflict with their organizations, and as a vehicle for social conflict among envious neighbors and community members. These are all various forms of empowerment, in which individuals take, or take back, some kind of control over their life circumstances.

In this sense, whether it be U.S. government whistleblower schemes or community whistleblowing in Scandinavia, whistleblowing moments highlight the relationship between transparency and disclosure between individuals and the’ organizations in which they have ambiguous relations, and between indivdiuals and each other in their communities.

Let me end by systematizing whistleblowing as an act of disclosure by the powerless about the powerful, to some other authority to take action. It has originally been perceived as an act of courage, or of desperation. And condemned as an act of organizational treason or disloyalty. The US government’s monetary reward for such action, literally one authority offering money to stimulate disloyalty, changes the equation. We can thus see yet another neoliberal encroachment on what was once a personal decision about revealing abuse to trusted authorities to achieve redress or justice. Justice is now literally for sale!

Whistleblowing INSIDE the organization could take place when a powerless individual informs on colleagues or managers to their organizations ethics unit, through the hotline for example. The individual remains loyal to the organization, and the reward is a pat on the shoulder so to speak, or a possible penalty and vengeance (organizational vendetta).

This means that whistleblowing WITHIN the workplace is quite different than whistleblowing that moves UPWARDS OR OUTWARDS to another authority. It signals a breach between the individual and their organization. The government recognizes and apparently encourages this breach by paying higher awards to those who have gone through their organization first. So much for cohesive organizational cultures.

Let us leave the SEC reward system aside and recap what community whistleblowing is all about. With community whistleblowing, one tells the authorities about the behavior of neighbors who abuse collective resources, is a way in **which the powerless tell the powerful about other powerless.** In the former communist countries, such people were informers, and they were informing on behavior which we would regard as confined to the private sphere. The informers received some rewards from the regime, often in the form of privileges, or they avoided sanctions or punishment for other crimes (the black market dealing informing on foreign scholars, for example). Today’s informing, Stasi-comparisons aside, can be seen as something quite different. It is voluntary, there are no rewards or privileges offered by Danish municipalities or Swedish tax authorities; and it is invariably driven by some kind of envy or jealousy that a neighbor is misusing public goods (false benefits, unreported income). It is **vendetta egalitarianism.**

I will end by asking whether we might want to extend the meaning of whistleblowing to include broader regimes of transparency and disclosure, in which we could study who tells whom what about whom. How do they tell it and what happens to teller and victim after they tell? We could therefore outline the kinds of incentives, motivations, and structural constraints that stimulate such regimes of disclosure, or reinforce them. And we could study the kinds of public reactions of shock, dismay, or condemnation, or public horror that things have gone to far. Finally, let us remember that most people are NOT whistleblowers, that most people for various reasons, keep silent about abuses and that such silence may signal intimidiation, or be a weapon of the weak. The drama of whistleblowing tends to put the routine of keeping silent in the shadows. Whistlblowing remains exceptional. But clearly, there is a conflict between regimes of disclosure and transparency on the one hand, and the everyday life of organisations and communities, with their secrecy, shadows and business as usual.

More generally, we need to reconsider whistleblowing in a broader context of transparency, disclosure, individual empowerment, personal confessions, revelations of abuse, informing, leaking and public exposure. Whistleblowing exposes the tense relation between workers and employers, citizens and the state, and people and each other in workplaces or communities.