

ORDER OF DISORDER:  
BURNOUT AND THE NEW FINNISH ECONOMY

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## ORDER OF DISORDER: BURNOUT AND THE NEW FINNISH ECONOMY

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During the late 1990s and early 2000s, when criticism of the welfare state peaked in Finland even amongst the political Left, the Finnish Ministry of Health identified workplace burnout [*työuupumus*] as an emergent health risk stemming from the changes made to productive practices in the name of national competitiveness. By depicting burnout as something emergent and “new,” Finnish health officials provoked an orientation to the present as a distinct moment and the experience of those individuals diagnosed with burnout (and their particular qualities) as exemplifying this rupture from the past. Such a framework has contributed to self-examinations on the part of those diagnosed as to their personal qualities that make them ill-suited to the present. On a national level, the often moral depiction of those who fall under the category of burnout by the general public has come to signify for and to confirm that a moral subject of the non-competitive, welfarist era truly existed. In this sense, those diagnosed become for the nation the physical archive of what is believed to be lost.

Based on two years of ethnographic field research in rehabilitation centers, self-help groups and public health forums for burnout, I explore how economic ideals (neoliberal or otherwise) intersect processes of self-constitution in that ideas about economics affect the production of the frame in which subjectivity, time, morality, ethics and notions of justice gain meaning. Often, scholarship inspired by Foucault’s notion of biopolitics focus on the moral and ethical ramifications of disciplinary measures on the body. I build upon ideas of discipline, but reframe the issue psychoanalytically as one of language and being. I explore the struggles behind how subjects come to step into and identify with the categories and narratives of “burn out”

and temporal belonging designated for them. In short, I ask: what does the discourse of burnout enable expression, and what does it obfuscate.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daena Aki Funahashi received her B.A. in philosophy (despite a brief dalliance with botany) from Cornell University, after which she completed her M.A. in medical anthropology, from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in sunny Oahu. She returned to the ice and snow of Ithaca to join the Asian Studies department, but later transferred to anthropology for her Ph.D. Much of the writing of this dissertation was completed whilst living out of a suitcase across North America, Europe, East and Southeast Asia.

For Drew

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The production of burnout as a new workplace risk**

In 1995, crates of food aid began to arrive in Finland, something unheard of since the end of World War II. For a country that had, for the latter half of the twentieth century, defined itself against the image of “impoverished” Soviet Estonia and Karelia, accepting the influx of not just capital but food from the European Union represented something shocking. Inka Salvoora-Moring (2004) describes the subsequent mood of the country as one of “collective shame” (2004: 142), as the national media transformed the economic and political failure of policies to accommodate for external economic shocks into a matter of national and individual loss. National newspapers depicted the reception of food aid at this moment in history as a sign that “the self-reliance of the nation had failed and the poorness of the country was an official fact within the European Union” (Salvoora-Moring 2004: 143).

While Nordic markets remained relatively closed until the late 1980s (Swank 2000), the recession and what it represented to Finland (as “shame”) accelerated the palatability of making capital more efficient. Political historian Pauli Kettunen claims that the economic recession legitimated the sentiment amongst policy makers that the Finnish mechanism of welfare was “outdated” and that “‘we’ have to reject them and adopt new modes in order to meet the new challenges” (1998: 33). Under the rhetoric of “lean production,” Finnish firms laid off workers just as the government also cut back on public expenditure (Hämäläinen and Heiskala 2007; Uusitalo 1996). This climate of economic reductionism increased unemployment to 18.4% in the year 1994 from just 3.5% in 1990 (Okko 2001: 1). And with an increase in service-oriented jobs and atypical (fixed-term) workers, the introduction of performance-based pay systems and intensive workplace productivity assessments, labor lost the protection it once had

from the commodifying effects of the market. Policies which in the past had fixed working hours and had placed rigid controls on the labor market were now overturned in favor of re-regulation in favor of more flexible working hours. The rhetoric of economic efficiency and the need to raise the nation's global competitiveness transformed past regulations to protect the labor market from market pressures as remnants of the distant past. Moreover, the recession and what it came to signify as a national lack increased the visibility of the present as an exceptional moment in which assumptions about one's moral, ethical and legal obligations to the common good fostered during the development of the mechanisms of social democratic welfare fell under examination.

The Finnish economy picked up towards the end of the 1990s, but in contrast to the growing health of the economy, researchers at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health saw an increase in complaints of stress and an inability to sleep from those who kept their jobs. The public health community soon pointed to these symptoms as threats to the future of the Finnish workforce and included in the national Quality of Work Life Surveys<sup>1</sup> for the first time in 1997 (Lehto 2007) burnout<sup>2</sup> [*työuupumus*, literally “work-exhaustion”] as a “new” risk.

With Finnish baby-boomers projected in the next twenty years to drop out of productive activity, and with strong evidence pointing to the links between burnout and premature retirement, the prevention of burnout represented an economic as well as a public health issue to policy makers (Hätinen 2008). In 1999, the Finnish government launched a public health campaign to increase the workers' “ability to

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<sup>1</sup> The quality of work life surveys by Statistics Finland, the national statistical institution, is a longitudinal study that examines the changes within the working environment over a period of twenty five years. They are conducted on a face-to-face basis, and involve 3,000 to 6,000 individuals from the entire national workforce. So far, five of these surveys were given (1977, 1984, 1990, 1997 and 2003) (Lehto 2007).

<sup>2</sup> In the latest 2003 quality of work life survey, 55% of female and 44% of male respondents reported positively to fear of getting burnout.

cope” with the new pressures in the work environment. The campaign rode on a discourse of “survival” as put forth by the Finnish Ministry of Labor (Hietanen 1999), which saw burnout as a disorder of maladjustment to the exigencies of the times. Here, I see this proclamation of burnout as an *emergent* hazard as supplementing and reinforcing the perspective of the present as a moment full of new challenges that calls for new ways of being. Burnout, in this perspective, is not an effect of the neoliberal regime but an enabling factor. It articulates the hegemonic norm by making visible those who challenge it as allochronous individuals who fail to abide by the moral, ethical and legal laws that are synchronous with a society in the era of competition. Thus, burnout represents an ailment inseparable from its visibility as a risk to national competitiveness. In a circular logic, burnout *is* because of the field of vision opened by the language of neoliberal thinking.

Michel Foucault suggests in his seminal discussion on neoliberalism and the rise of biopolitics that at the heart of any economic thinking (neoliberal or otherwise) is the production of subjects, and therefore of society, in its image. He argues that at the heart of neoliberal economics is the production of the subject as “an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (2008: 226). What Foucault calls biopolitics – the encroachment of economics into areas previously separated from economic thinking – is the normatization of this perspective that one produces and manages one’s “self” as an object of one’s own competitive advantage. Neoliberal thinking produces *Homo oeconomicus* as not the partner of exchange as in classical economics, but as a self-interested and calculating entrepreneur of his own human capital. Categories of madness are applied not based on the essential qualities of those to be disciplined, but on the temporally contingent social mechanism of recognition

that designates as deviant individuals who become visible as risks to the internal logic of the neoliberal regime.

Foucault's perspectives on the power of institutional categories to objectify life have inspired anthropological research which looks at subjects as "bodies," objects of control (cf. Biehl 2005; Fassin 2005; Mol 2002; Lock and Farquhar 2007). Such a field of inquiry focuses upon how biopolitics and institutional categories bring aspects of life open to disciplinary measures. Accordingly, research has focused on the moral and ethical ramifications of the institutional gaze while leaving what remains beyond that field of vision in the shadows.

While burnout can be analyzed as another instance in which techniques of power produce the individual with burnout, instead, I provide a psychoanalytically-informed interrogation of how individuals *become* subjects with burnout. And, as psychoanalytic thinking has never been too far from deconstructive analyses (Derrida 1995) I also interrogate how this process of *becoming* and identification is not altogether creative but at the same time destructive. Notions of self, moral conduct and truth about the "moment" fall apart just as they appear. I see biopolitics as not the management of the body as a speechless, animalistic object, but as the master discourse which informs the relationship between language and being. Specifically, what concerns me here is what burnout enables expression for those who come to be designated by it. The dominant reading of burnout tells them that they are somehow dislodged from time, and that something about the way they see themselves, their ideas about society, about social exchange must be recalibrated. I argue that their identification with burnout is compelled by radical doubt with which they come to see their relationship to themselves as they have known it, as something about "it" must be explained.



Here, drawing upon the data collected from two years of fieldwork in 2006 and 2007 at rehabilitation centers, public health forums and self-help groups for burnout, I show how individuals diagnosed with burnout expose not the horror of being subjected to institutional discipline, but rather the realization that society itself – neoliberal or welfarist – is a space which disciplines.

This horror is made manifest in the idioms of hopelessness and self-ineffectuality offered at group counseling sessions and in private conversations on burnout. Although the rehabilitation program provided an understanding of burnout as affecting the more “conscientious” and “responsible” individuals who do not operate based on the logic of competition, I show how these teleological constructions nonetheless only provide comfort in the moment of their enunciation. The fact that such explanations about the self repeated in group counseling sessions supports this observation. According to these narratives, conscientious and diligent individuals are more vulnerable to buckling under stress in an era of increased competitiveness. Yet, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue, pointing to social transformation and character misses a full explanation:

“explain[s] the *conditions* which made antagonisms possible, but not the antagonisms as such. (The description proceeds through expressions such as ‘this *provoked* a reaction’ or ‘in that situation X or Z *found itself* forced to react.’ In other words, there is a sudden jump from explanation to an appeal for our common sense or experience to complete the meaning of the text: that is to say, the explanation is interrupted)” (2001: 124).

The retroactive constructions of the “conscientious subject” that suffer from the temporal shift fail to explain why malcontent about the work environment finds no

public discourse for those who find solace in the diagnosis of burnout. Further, it masks over the basic antagonism here I describe as “radical doubt.”

In addition to classifications of the self, group counseling sessions often invited participants to talk about such moments of doubt. Idioms of doubt expressed in tropes of hopelessness and speechlessness were common in response to questions which demanded why participants could not express their sense of malcontent to their peers. For example, at one such session, in answer to this question posed by the psychologist, Terhi, a woman in her mid-forties who ran a resort hotel answered as follows: “I wanted to confront my partner, but I felt speechless. I went up to his desk, but when I got there I found that I was filled with words that somehow didn’t make it out.” At another time, Terhi expanded on what she meant by being “filled with words that somehow didn’t make it out” as a condition ruled by “hopelessness.” “I faced him [her partner] and I felt hopeless,” she said. While she identified herself as sharing the same “conscientious” qualities, this identification contrasts with her confessions of being “filled with words.” In other words, being conscientious in itself does not provide satisfaction. What she desired yet failed to demand from her partner was recognition for the sacrifices she had made for his sake. In a private conversation, she described how she felt that if she did not work as hard as she did, she would not live up to her partner’s expectations – a co-owner of the resort who had put in more capital investment into the place than she had. This moral stake she felt she had in her productivity at work contrasts with her retrospective analysis of her motivations to work as “conscientiousness.” Moreover, her statement that she “was filled with words” reveals that despite her claims to have worked because of her “conscientious” character, she had indeed desired recognition for her observance of what she thought was a moral demand made upon her – someone who had put in less capital investment – from her partner. The futility of communicating her frustrations, then, speaks not to

an ontological truth of herself or of morality as such, but to an awareness of sudden meaninglessness of the sacrifices she felt was demanded of her. What Terhi's case reveals is that it is not specific techniques of power that violate but the condition of being social that produces aggression. Specifically, I build on Lacan to argue that moral, ethical and juridical expectations and self-aspirations that represent to the subject what he is to himself contribute to the production of such aggression.

While the discourse of “conscientiousness” and moral uprightness appears to open a space for those diagnosed with burnout to critique the social, those most vocal are not individuals diagnosed with burnout. Through talking to friends and family of those with burnout, I found that often those who witness the suffering of those relegated to rehabilitation centers see them as individuals driven by idealism unrealistic by today's standards. Yet, simultaneously, I found that the moral superiority associated with a particular reading of burnout made the expression of a *fear* of burnout – but not a diagnosis itself – a point of pride for many otherwise “healthy” individuals.

In the tabloid pages of *Iltalehti*, *Oho!* and *Kauppalehti*, celebrities appeared with their stories of “burning-out.” “I burned till the end” [*Olin palaa loppuun*] (2006 *Oho!*) said Viivi, once a host for entertainment news, in the tabloid *Oho!*. The front page of the same issue featured a quote by Pepe Willberg, a singer: “Depression took my ability to work” [*Masennus vei työkykyni*]. One key feature of these accounts in the popular media as well as during informal conversations at the rehabilitation center was that no one used the official term for burnout in Finnish – *työuupumus* – which literally means “work-exhaustion,” and instead used the metaphoric term, “burning-to-the-end” [*loppuun palaminen*] or “I feel burned-up” [*tunnen olevani loppuunpalanut*].

Indeed, the clinical condition [*työuupumus*] and the metaphor [*loppuun palaminen*] often collided into each other, obfuscating the line between pathology and

the norm. However, I took notice of the fact that both those officially diagnosed with burnout and those who self-diagnosed showed a tendency to use the colloquial term rather than the official term. Jari Hakanen, a leading researcher of burnout from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health explained to me that the term “burning-to-the-end” [*loppuun palaminen*] used to be the official term for burnout in the 1980s before the official translation of the WHO’s ICD-10 into Finnish in 1996 and before the idea of the syndrome as a timely issue. The debate concerning whether to change the term to *työuupumus* engendered conflicting opinions within the Finnish public health community. According to Hakanen, the issue was presented to Finnish language specialists at the University of Helsinki. For opponents of the term “burning-to-the-end” [*loppuun palaminen*], the term implied something too terminal – a condition that implied death. *Työuupumus* won as the official term, as it focused on fatigue – something that could be dealt with – and a term distant from the irretrievable.

However, it seems that the allusion to death made in the term “burning-to-the-end” [*loppuun palaminen*] carries cache in everyday speech. The media often portrayed celebrities as doing a public favor by spreading the awareness of an ailment that carried the potential social stigma of a mental illness. However, in contrast to the illness narratives of participants at the rehabilitation center, the stories highlight the accomplishments and mastery of the celebrity over the potential risk of “burning-to-the-end.” Celebrities “come out” as one who works much but remain undefeated – they have some of the conscientiousness of the past yet somehow manage to succeed in the current economic era. By claiming to suffer from burnout, the celebrities appear more powerful than ever. They suggest that they have converted the negativity of burnout into a new positive force – for example, social prestige. They, and others who succeed in the new economy, transform the force of the global economy into something manageable, something one can and should master.

The moral understandings of burnout and the character reifications of those who come to be designated by it, then reveal the desire of those not relegated to the sites of medical rehabilitation for those within it to signify for and to confirm that a “conscientious” subject of the non-competitive, welfarist era truly existed. Those diagnosed become for the nation the physical archive of what is believed to be lost.

The conceptual frame of burnout thus enables the expression of both social power and individual inadequacy. Patricia Gherovici (2003) saw what US army physicians called the “Puerto Rican syndrome” as speaking to much more than about the individual psyche but to the experience of being subjected to a “neo”colonial (and colonizing) force. For Gherovici, the syndrome exposes the contradictory and alienating demands made upon individuals who occupy a politically marginalized and racialized milieu. Similarly, those who fall under the category of the burnout syndrome expose much more than the risks of not “surviving” in the new economy as per the understanding of the Finnish public health community. It is through examining the subject’s relationship to the new image of the ideal worker that we may come to understand how identification with an ideal and the moral consequences of falling short can lead to suicidal ideation. I argue that the shifting relationship with ideals of production affects the moral, ethical and juridical stakes one has in economic exchange, and that the diversity of the understanding of such ailments as neurasthenia, workplace fatigue, and stress syndromes such as burnout and chronic fatigue syndrome continues to fascinate. Finland emerges as an ideal place to examine the social and medical fallout from the shift in ideals of production. The tensions within a welfare-oriented society caught within the global market create a unique point of impact, where a history of political and religious expectations of humility, honesty, propriety, and assumptions about social and financial equality clash with neoliberal ideals for calculation, competition, and display.

## **The diagnoses of fatigue**

Supporting the notion that the radical doubt associated with burnout is not in fact something arising from the specific structures of neoliberalism, but rather is something more fundamental to the creation of social norms and orders is the fact that similar conditions recur. Physicians Abbey and Garfinkel (1991) look back to the “discovery” of neurasthenia in the mid-1800s and find parallels in the rising concern over “stress” and “burnout” in the present, especially amongst the so-called “post-industrial” societies. Indeed, the category of burnout is not singular in its production of the present as a specific, rather than indistinct, moment in time. According to these researchers, the concept of neurasthenia first appeared in 1869, a time when the broad application of Darwin’s theory of evolution was fashionable. George Beard, who popularized the concept of neurasthenia, described it as “American nervousness,” implying that the condition only mattered to highly-developed capitalistic market societies – by which he meant the United States, and more precisely to its upper-middle-class population. Despite the presumed superiority of “American Civilization,” life there suffered from “the strains of modern technology and evolved production systems” (Abbey and Garfinkel 1991: 1642). For Beard, neurasthenia expressed both the superiority of the “American Civilization” as well as to the affective condition of “hopelessness.” According to Abbey and Garfinkel (1991), Beard “attributed the hopelessness to ‘an instinctive consciousness of inadequacy for the task before us. We are hopeless because our nerve force is so reduced that the mere holding on to life seems to be burden too heavy for us’” (ibid 1640). Thus, while those who suffer from the symptoms of “nerves” – manifested in the inability to sleep, depression and constant fatigue – show signs of failure, a failure to live up to the demands of production, neurasthenia itself articulates the very ideals of the “now” and the

everyday. For although those who suffer from neurasthenia may manifest signs of failure, they nonetheless fetishize the Victorian ideal of a person of high social standing with sensitive nerves and high intellect. By archiving symptoms as a failure to deal with the present, the diagnostic frame constructs its Other.

Later in the nineteenth century, neurasthenia gained legitimacy as a clinical category outside of the US when similar capitalist forces affected other populations, but overall waned in popularity in American, European, and Japanese contexts by the turn of the twentieth century. Ironically, the reason for neurasthenia's decline was its popularity: medical skepticism increased as the condition became a catch-all "garbage bin" of ailments amongst the lay population. Ultimately, neurasthenia fell out completely with the medical establishment as the supposition of neurasthenia's physical origins came under attack (Wessely 1990: 47). Freud removed neurasthenia from physical medicine altogether by categorizing the symptoms formerly under neurasthenia around the psychiatric symptoms of "anxiety neurosis" and "hysteria." Such a categorical transformation (from physical to psychiatric) came with social consequences. Owing to the stigma attached to psychiatric disease at that time, neurasthenia went through a shift in lay discourse and lost the veneer of sophistication and upper-class sensitivity it once had.

If neurasthenia was a defining mental condition for industrialized nations in the late nineteenth century, by the mid-twentieth century "stress" took over as the malaise of the century. Russell Viner (1999) explains that "Stress," written with a capital "S" by its discoverer Hans Selye in 1935, failed to gain popular and medical attention until another era of intensified industrialization in the 1950s. At this point, American factory owners and the state bureaucracies became easy recruits for supporting Selye's theories. Indeed, Viner (1999) argues that Selye's idea of "eustress" helped justify the

terms and conditions of production that supported the premise of constantly increasing the margins of profit.

“Eustress,” coined in contrast to negative stress, or “distress,” stemmed from Selye’s sociobiological reading of man as “*Homo faber*” (working man) (Selye 1975 quoted in Viner 1999), an entity with a biological necessity for “positive stress” and for work – a point quickly adopted by industry as the mantra for enforcing workplace efficiency. In this fantasy, the experience of stress manifests a perfectly normal condition while falling sick through stress pointed to the mismanagement of one’s daily processes. One simply needs to work on reducing stress by building a tolerance to stress – a circuitous argument at best. Again, the ideal condition as seen through the discourse of stress points to a worker who experiences stress but not *distress*: the archiving of the symptoms of distress supplements the workplace ideal of positive stress.

Allan Young (1980) details the production of knowledge *about* stress and *of* stress and argues that the etiology of stress “displac[ed] the subject from his place in society to a desocialized and amorphous environment” (1980: 133). This displacement speaks to a process in which the idea of distress as an experience arising from structural violence switches over to the idea of distress as stemming from individual coping issues. Stress, then, is made out to be about the individual and what is made available to the individual: for example, “psychosocial supports” and other such resources. The examination of the social impact on the individual or of the notion of affective experience as always stemming from one’s subjective relationality with the social remains largely ignored.

More recently, in the era of the economic bubble of the 1980s, the notion of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) gained much media attention in the US as “yuppie flu” (Cathébras 1991). Pascal Cathébras (1991) describes chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)



and burnout as “modern avatars of fatigue.” Burnout, CFS and stress are the “same” condition which recurs under a new name depending on the prevailing scientific fashion of the time. For instance, if in the Victorian era “nerves” became the trope through which people talked about the psychological, physiological and social response to industrialization, stress became the prominent trope in the modern era. Cathébras (1994) argues that the non-specificity of these conditions drive doctors to categorize them under specific disciplinary and theoretical guidelines. However, it can also be said that, as these diagnostic categories are re-discovered at moments of social crisis and change, the search for “emergent” pathologies speaks to much more than a need for diagnostic and professional medical coherence. The emergent and the new (in the case of Finland, the post-1990s economy and the emergence of burnout as a matter of public health concern) contribute to the demarcation of what normalcy means in the new era and therefore what the everyday should hold. These avatars that recur (e.g. neurasthenia, CFS and burnout) confirm that, while risks (health risks and otherwise) appear emergent and exceptional in moments of perceived social transition in which the present appears to harbor increasing threats to one’s well being as well as to the social fabric, no linear historical narrative exists in which distress increases incrementally. Moreover, Lehto and Sutela’s (1999) longitudinal research on changes in the Finnish work environment shows no increase in the amount of complaints at the workplace, rather, that the physical complaints of before has taken the character of that of mental health. Yet, as researchers point to, for example, back pain and burnout as both originating in workplace stress it seems that similar symptoms of distress repeat under different names in different epochs. I argue that the repetition of symptoms of fatigue, sleeplessness, depression, etc., speaks to the fact that each diagnostic category serves as the prosthesis that covers up the absence of the everyday or the norm as a concrete idea.

Burnout not only frames the field of meaning which supplements the necessities, ideals and obligations of the present, but also recalibrates the past. People diagnosed with burnout that I came to know through my fieldwork do not talk about the past as divorced from the framework of burnout. They talk about what Jacques Derrida (1998) describes as that which “can be counted as memories.” These “memories” appear as not pure events, but as memory through the *pharmakon* of burnout, that is through the external reminding structure of the public discourse of burnout.

### **Burnout**

The first usage of the term “burnout” in a clinical connotation is often attributed to Herbert Freudenberger, a psychiatrist who also volunteered his time at New York City’s St. Mark’s Free Clinic. Freudenberger begins his query into burnout after observing many of the staff at the Free Clinic “fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on [their] energy, strength, or resources” – a condition very similar to the dictionary definition for the verb to “burn out” (Freudenberger 1974: 160).

Based on his own experiences with burnout as well as through witnessing the suffering of his colleagues, Freudenberger (1974) distinguished two signs of burnout: physical and behavioral. For the physical signs, he listed the following symptoms: “a feeling of exhaustion and fatigue, being unable to shake a lingering cold, suffering from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, sleeplessness and shortness of breath” (ibid 160). For the behavioral counterpart, he noted the suffering individual’s inability to “hold in feelings” (ibid). He recorded one “staff member’s quickness to anger and his instantaneous irritation and frustration responses” (ibid) as symptomatic of a curious mixture of paranoia and omnipotence which characterizes

burnout. He suggested that the show of anger, tears and frustration points to an individual who believes that “just about everyone is out to screw him” or that he “has been through it all” (ibid).

Freudenberger links these two forms of response to the specific ideals of those who volunteer at the Free Clinic. Most at the Free Clinic, an alternative medical service center, work for the ideal of providing healthcare to those who fall out of the mainstream health system. Freudenberger claims that the “dedicated and the committed” (ibid 1974: 161) of the volunteers are most vulnerable to burnout. Accordingly, he argues that those who burn out “feel a pressure from within to work and help and ...feel a pressure from the outside to give” (ibid). He claims there is a sense of “guilt” that comes from recognizing the needs of others and not being able to provide what is necessary. When Clinic administrators demand more from the staff in addition to the already-present sense of guilt, Freudenberger argues that this could bring staff members to “burn out.” Further, he argues that this “pressure to give” may also be driven not only by the recognition of the needs of others but also by the recognition of one’s own need – specifically, one’s own need to be “accepted and liked” (ibid 162). According to Freudenberger, when staff members feel disillusioned or let down by ideals they once thought charismatic, for instance, the ideal of the Free Clinic or when they take on a cynical attitude towards others whom they suspect of taking advantage of them, this is when they are most likely burn out (here still used metaphorically, following Freudenberger).

If Freudenberger (1974) provided a profile of those who burn out within the specific social and political context of the Free Clinic, American social psychologist, Christine Maslach and her colleague, Susan Jackson reified burnout as a measurable and unique syndrome in the 1980s. Through self-report questionnaires and surveys,

Maslach systematized the approach to burnout to develop the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

They define burnout as comprised of three components: exhaustion, cynicism and sense of ineffectiveness at work. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) has become one of the most common diagnostic tools for burnout in the world, and is the most influential in the diagnosis of burnout in Finland. The MBI measures the level of all three components and determines whether a worker scores above the normative levels of exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness at work.

The researchers describe this tripartite character of burnout as the reason why burnout cannot be made redundant by other diagnostic categories such as job-stress, work-related neurasthenia and depression. They claim that:

Although exhaustion reflects the stress dimension of burnout, it fails to capture the critical aspects of the relationship people have with their work. Exhaustion is not something that is simply experience – rather, it prompts actions to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from one’s work, presumably as a way to cope with the work overload (Maslach et. al. 2001: 403).

Cynicism, the second dimension of burnout, follows from this movement of the self to distance oneself and is considered by the researchers as “an immediate reaction to exhaustion” (ibid) and is often considered as a condition of depersonalization and indifference to the work itself and to others at work. The third aspect, professional inefficacy, according to the researchers is a “function... of either exhaustion or cynicism, or a combination of the two” (ibid). The feeling of inefficacy, then, is the result of the existence of the first two pre-conditions. The researchers claim that “a

work situation with chronic, overwhelming demands that contribute to exhaustion or cynicism is likely to erode one's sense of effectiveness" (ibid).

Following Freudenberger, while burnout was initially considered a syndrome of "emotional exhaustion" (Maslach and Jackson 1984) that mostly affected workers in human service professions (e.g. teachers, physicians, nurses, policemen – situations not unlike that of the Free Clinic), it was not long until the idea of exhaustion broadened to include general forms of "job stress." In the 1990s, the growth of interest in burnout as an occupational phenomenon led to the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Survey (MBI-GS). Maslach et al. (2001) account for the new inventory as the need to address the relevance of burnout in within an "industrial-organizational" setting. Thus, instead of merely seeing burnout as developing out of "compassion fatigue" and disillusionment of workplace ideals as suggested by Freudenberger and others, Maslach and her colleagues argue that burnout must include within it an aspect of "job stress, with links to such concepts as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover" (Maslach et al. 2001: 401).

While fatigue from work emerges in many different times and places, the particular categorization often varies from place to place. For instance, while as Torbjörn Friberg (2009) shows, burnout became a national health concern in Sweden during the late 1990s as it did in Finland, he argues that physicians in the Netherlands use the term "work-related neurasthenia" and that in France, burnout does not exist as a reported illness category. Thus, while anyone can be diagnosed with burnout, burnout does not exist as part of social reality for all.

Instead, the emergence of burnout within the Finnish public health system marked a particular moment of crisis, one which not only reflected the growing neoliberalism of the Finnish state, but went much further than this. Burnout and the suggestion of allochrony that it held for public health officials and business

consultants, became a sign that Finland's economy had truly modernized – i.e. one can only have vestiges of a past way of being if one has moved on. But for those with burnout, it marked a crisis of social exchange, where the demands made by new regimes of productivity conflicted with how workers conceived of the creation of social (and self-) value. Burnout, then, provides a critique not only to ideas of cultural specificity or “culture-bound syndromes”, but also to studies of resistance, as it shows how regimes of work speak to the creation of value both within and without of the subject. My argument is, in short, that the divergent understandings of burnout between those involved in rehabilitation courses, public health officials, and the lay media all need to be seen as a part of an overall rise in public concern over how the production of self-value is made possible since the shift in the ideals of productivity since the 1990s. I see the depiction of burnout by public health officials as enabling a discourse of value which separates those who are incapable of “surviving” the risks of the new economy from those who do not. The conceptual frame of burnout thus not only sets the parameters for success and failure, but also the moral consequences involved.

### **Overview of the Text**

To explore why burnout came to matter in public health discourse and in the lay media exactly during the era of economic recovery in Finland, I explore the specificities of the shifts which took place during the economic crisis of the 1990s in chapter one. As Finland's economy fell to an all time low ever since World War II, those critical of the rigid and non-competitive elements of the welfare state gained increasing political legitimacy. When cuts were made to social services, it ushered in what Finnish political scientists call an “era of transition” (Lehtonen et al. 2001). While this trend towards increased demand for efficiency, adaptability and

competitiveness characterizes most post-industrial workplaces and no way makes Finland particularly vulnerable to burnout, Finland and other Nordic welfare states represent distinct cases. Chapter one provides a background as to why burnout rose in prominence in the era of Finland's economic recovery and the kinds of challenges people face in the face of political and economic transformation.

In chapter two, I turn to my fieldwork conducted at rehabilitation centers set outside of metropolitan areas around Finland. Specifically, I focus on my in-depth engagement with one such center, Pääskynpesä, where I participated in the rehabilitative exercises for people with burnout. The rehabilitation center houses participants for the duration of the course where they sleep, eat, and socialize as a group. Here, I examine how the space created by participating in the center activities and from spending time away from everyday contexts contribute to the development of themselves as subjects of burnout.

In chapter three, I explore how rehabilitation treatments shore up notions of the new market ideals by reworking national myths and instantiating a "primordial" notion of "Finnishness." I provide as a case study one rehabilitation treatment that relies upon a taken-for-granted "homeliness" of the forest. If, as I described, Heidi and many others I introduce in this dissertation claim of "unhomeliness" in the everyday due to the shifts in taken-for-granted notions of moral exchange, the space of the forest is taken to represent something *a priori* and "Finnish." Why should treatments rely upon national myths? I ask specifically why national ideals of self play into bolstering the fragmented egos of those who suffer in the present. Here, I question the following: What is the genealogy of the "forest" as a national symbol in Finland? What does demarcating "the forest" as a specific space as distinct from that of the social say about the social?

In chapter four, I turn to discussions at self-help groups for people with burnout to explore why “graduates” of rehabilitation courses still prefer the company of others who similarly suffer from burnout. By paying close attention to the discussions and close friendships I made with specific individuals in these groups, I examine why the notion of burnout as a failure to cope with stress as pushed by the Finnish public health community does not resonate with the concern of those with burnout.



CHAPTER ONE:  
SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL CAPITAL

Viivi lived on credit: sometimes, she borrowed money from her brother to pay her rent. As a master's student with no teaching position, she worked at a government-subsidized student job during the day, but with no hopes of getting paid. Signing onto this job after losing her temporary work contract at her old workplace, Viivi said that the Employment Office of Helsinki told her that she failed to qualify for wages. Her new employer, it turned out, did not have an employment office code that would allow the Employment Office to pay Viivi. Working at a place that does not exist in the book of codes therefore disqualified Viivi for a welfare check. Even worse for Viivi, her new employer gave her this position as a receptionist on the condition that the government subsidize her paycheck and thus, when the Employment Office failed to do so, also refused to pay her *or* let her renegotiate a contract that she had already signed.

Therefore, when I met her, she worked with no pay. I go into the reasons why she did so below, but here I simply wish to use her as an example through which to chart the borders of the welfare state. As Viivi said, "I am proof that we now have big holes in this security net of ours." Needless to say, she showed immense interest in the aspect of my project concerning sociopolitical changes in the welfare state.

One spring day in 2007, she came to our meeting place at our usual café on Mannerheimintie with a triumphant look and took out a political cartoon. She often liked to contrast how she got treated at work with her mother's experiences. This time, she pointed to this bit of satire and said with great conviction, "I tell you, it wasn't like this during my mother's time," she said.

It was the Finnish election season then, and the media was rife with political commentary. The political cartoon Viivi pulled out had eleven frames. In one of the frames stood a caricature of Jyrki Katainen, the head of the conservative National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen Kokoomus* - NCP), pointing to a soccer field where two teams jostled to kick the ball into the same goal. Referring to the increasing power of the National Coalition Party (NCP) and the Center Party (formerly the Agrarian Party), the caricature of Katainen explains that “Finland has two teams but as they both play into the same goal, we are all winners!” [*Joukkueita on kaksi, mutta kumpikin pelaa samaan maaliin. Kaikki ovat voittajia!*] (Kuukausiliitte 2007: 103). In another frame, Finnish lyrics to the anthem to the Soviet Union pours out of a gray compound obviously meant to represent the headquarters of the Central Organization of Finnish trade unions (SAK). However, instead of the official title of the building, it carries an ominous title of “Armagedontec OY” (Armageddon Limited/Incorporated).

Following these sequences of frames, a caricature of Oiva Lohtander<sup>3</sup>, the actor made infamous for his role as the “greedy” capitalist in an advertisement made by the Central Organization of Finnish trade unions (SAK), a political group with strong connections with the Social Democratic Party (*Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue* - SDP), is shown hauled away by two policemen. Katainen’s head complains to the reporter of left-wing propaganda in the next frame.

Viivi interpreted these frames as saying that the Left – especially the SDP - has become so unpopular today that the bourgeois parties [*porvarihallitus*] used the phrase “No Opposition Anymore” as their slogan. I questioned Viivi on her own perception

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<sup>3</sup> This advert by SAK to encourage voters to vote met with heavy criticism from the more conservative parties and was pulled off the air quite rapidly. In it, the actor, Lohtander plays the role of a greedy capitalist eating from a table laden with roast meat, fruit and other choice delicacies. It was intended to show what happens if one voted for the right or did not vote at all. People complained that the SAK went too far by offending the Kokoomus (NCP), and some say that the Kokoomus actually won more votes through gaining sympathy through such an “unfair” depiction on national TV and printed media.

of the decline in support for the SDP, a party, I thought more likely to gain the support of those in dire straits like Viivi.

“Well,” she said as she stirred her coffee without looking at her cup, “but even when we had a center-left government, the SDP did nothing to stop the trend towards – I’m sorry – ‘American-style’ politics. Workers have actually lost faith in the SDP and this is what we have left” she said.

In this chapter, I explore the qualitative shifts in the meaning of social democracy and what it represents since the economic recession of the 1990s and Finland’s membership to the European Union (1995) and the European Monetary Union (1999).

### **Election in 2007**

Public buses carrying blown-up portraits of candidates for the National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen Kokoomus* - NCP) with their meticulously-coiffed hair passed us numerous times as we sat by the window. Sitting in a tram as I went home, I found yet another glossy campaign portrait and yet another slogan pasted under the windowsill, but this time by a candidate from the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Under the candidate’s brightly lipsticked smile were the words, “*Ihmisyys on itseisarvo, ei ole kauppavara*” (Humanity is invaluable, it is not a commodity).

As voting day approached, these posters and slogans became more and more visible. Portraits, be they the high-end headshots of the NCP or SDP, or the Swedish People’s Party’s candidates in their “casual” poses, or the less-well produced posters of the Christian Democrat Party with their rows and rows of sullen-looking mugshots, graced public transport, market squares, dog parks, and – though they were often the victims of vandalism (politically-motivated or simply drunken) – they also provided reason for passers-by to stop and reflect on the pending change in Finnish politics.

Weekends before the election represented prime time for campaigners to amass at the market squares (*tori*) of each city district with their badges, brochures, candies, and often even free hot coffee to entice people to stop and talk. The drizzle and the cold of one particular Saturday as I made my way to the market square in Hakaniemi made one campaigner's coffee exceedingly welcome. It was a booth set up by the Leftist Alliance (*Vasemmistoliitto*), a small collection of post-communist and socialist political parties generally gleaning a dwindling near – ten per cent of the vote in national elections. The candidate handed me a cup of coffee and a brochure emblazoned with her image. I asked her what made her party different from the SDP, and she replied in an impassioned (and seemingly often-practiced) tone that “We are the only Left voice in Parliament. The SDP doesn't know what it stands for anymore – I mean, before they might have, but now they have so many characters in that party with their own political agendas that people no longer know what that party stands for as a whole. Really, we are the only real Left Wing party with one Left Wing voice.”

Her doubts about the SDP mirrored news reports on polls leading up to the voting day which showed a significant nation-wide decline in supporters of the SDP. According to David Arter (2006), “since the Second World War, only in Finland in 1962, 1991 and 2003, and in Denmark in 2001 and 2005 have the social democrats not been the largest party” (Arter 2006:73). Thus, given this strong history of the SDP in Finland, the “fall” of this once mainstream party became a much talked-about issue amongst political pundits on nightly telecasts.

Although traditional SDP hotspots still continued to support the SDP, as was shown in early maps and surveys before the actual election, the election results that came out in March of 2007 confirmed the SDP's fear as voiced in the media. Pundits blamed the fall of the SDP on a lack of understanding by the Party leaders of the needs of the white-collar workers of the so-called “new economy” and (as the Leftist

Alliance candidate suggested) on their lack of political coherence. A consensus formed in the media that, while the loss of the SDP was indeed significant, also important was the rise of the conservative NCP, a party that was formerly sidelined in Finnish politics that entered into a ruling coalition with the Center party with the SDP in opposition in the late 1980s. The NCP had undergone a makeover, from the party of World War II-era nationalists that had been in an oppositional position in Finnish politics for a time during the Cold War (facing much pressure from Moscow), into the party of young, wealthy urban entrepreneurs. The party also is associated with the Federation of Finnish Enterprises (*Suomen Yrittäjät - SY*), a group supporting the free-market policies, the EU and NATO.

It may be too soon to project the current success of the NCP into the future, but their increased support and the fall of the SDP into an oppositional position in the election of 2007 manifest the reaching of a certain threshold. The mounting incongruence of policies that cut back on social expenditure in the name of counteracting the negative effects of the economic crisis of the 1990s<sup>4</sup>, while still standing for the ideals of redistribution of wealth and full employment attributed to social democracy, gave way to and also paved the way for the force of a more coherent move towards an open endorsement of the free market<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Economic Crisis of the 1990s and its Aftermath**

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<sup>4</sup> The coalition government (the Rainbow Cabinet) of 1995-2003 passed the pension reform in 1996 which took away the provision of universal pension and in the same year they reformed the sickness insurance system to tighten the criteria for those who may receive sickness insurance (Uusitalo 1996).

<sup>5</sup> David Arter cites the work of Finland's former Green leader, Osmo Soininvaara, who criticized the "irresponsible nature" party opposition taken by the SDP during Aho's non-socialist coalition between the years 1991-95. According to Soininvaara, the SDP criticized the government for cutbacks made on welfare benefits to deal with the economic depression, yet, when public support turned towards the SDP and they came into power, the SDP turned on their word to follow a similar fiscal policy as the one taken by the non-socialist coalition.

Pekka Kosonen (1993) claims that the national economic crisis brought criticism against the expensive welfare state to the fore, incriminating its over-expansion as one factor for the economic crisis. I turn now to the specific conditions in which the Finnish economy fell in the 1990s.

Although researchers disagree on the degree of Finnish economic exceptionalism in the greater global context of the economic crash following worldwide financial deregulation of the 1980s, most agree that the economic crisis in the Nordic states affected Finland the most in the European region (See Klaus Petersen & Klas Åmark 2006:178). Honkapohja and Koskela (1999), both from the department of economics at the University of Helsinki, refer to an oft quoted phrase: “bad luck and bad policies” in an attempt to sum up the reasons as to why Finland was so affected in comparison to its neighbors.

The notion of bad luck stems from two external shocks that affected Finnish exports. First, a lucrative bilateral trade with the Soviet Union, which represented 15% of Finnish foreign exports, diminished by 70% with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Honkapohja and Koskela 1999: 405). The latter event is significant in matters of comparison with other European countries. Throughout the Cold War, Finland had a special economic relationship with the USSR. While most European countries suffered high unemployment rates and economic shock during the oil crisis of the 1970s, Finland’s trade agreement with the Soviet Union and its special relationship with its eastern neighbor cushioned the Finnish economy: from the 1950s into the 1990s 50-70% of Finland’s crude oil came from the Soviet Union (Ojala and Karonen 2006: 111). After the Soviet Union’s demise, the collapse of this alternate source of oil imports, which coincided with an international recession, affected Finland’s export outlets, both exacerbating and contributing to the crash of the Finnish economy. While Finland shares many features with other Nordic states in its strong emphasis on

exporting raw materials, Kosonen (1993) argues that Finland's export advantage played a more central role in bolstering the Finnish economy vis-à-vis its Nordic neighbors— and thus the blow when this competitiveness was challenged was felt more keenly.

This notion of “bad luck” dovetails what Aslama et al. (2001) call the “politics of powerlessness” as voiced by key decision-makers in government during the decade in question (Aslama et al. 2001: 167). They found that these decision-makers often interpreted the financial crisis as an “inevitable” end and that they were “powerless” to stop the pressures of global capital to affect their policy-making decisions. For instance, in an interview, one policy maker stated “We *had* to follow what happened in the world outside... Many times they were a way ahead of us...” (ibid 171 emphasis added).

While this sense of acquiescence might merely reflect Finland's historical position as located within the “peripheral zone” (Mead 1989) of the European world, a point I will discuss more in depth later, Aslama et al. (2001) argue that this attitude of resignation and blame allowed certain interest groups to push forth their political and economic agenda under the mask of inevitability. The double-movement of this “politics of powerlessness” allowed policy-makers to advance the perspective that “the national as well as public economy are perceived often as inefficient, while the internationally competing parts of economy are seen as efficient and business proper” (Aslama et al. 2001: 173). Aslama et al argue that this division and re-categorization of work as either efficient and competitive or inefficient and uncompetitive, denounced “the earlier ‘solely’ Finnish economy...now characterized mainly by negative or disdainful terms such as being a ‘sandbox’ for the children” (ibid) in favor of an image of the “new” global-scape where private businesses compete together in an international market directed by financial experts rather than by national

governments. Aslama et al. (2001) claim that the economic crash only provided the boost necessary to steer the state in the “right” direction, a direction already suggested by bourgeois parties since the 1980s.

While the Finnish welfare and redistributive mechanisms still function in ways they never have in the United States or even in the United Kingdom, where, despite the current debate over following “Third Way” politics, state policies in no way come close to the full-fledged welfare operations of Nordic states, considerable retrenchments were made to the welfare state during the 1990s. The coalition government of 1995 under Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (also the chairman of the SDP) slashed sick pay and unemployment benefits, as a way to create incentives for the unemployed to go find work (Uusitalo 1996).

Even with these retrenchments, the universal healthcare and education coverage, as well as the rights to maternity/paternity leaves made available to most Nordic welfare states still contribute to the relevance of marking Finland and the rest of Norden as emblemizing a unique political sphere. However, in the aftermath of the economic recession and in the face of an increasingly noticeable income gap that underlies the intransigent unemployment problem, the future of the Nordic model relies upon the government’s ability to legitimize the social and political obligation of citizens to “be honest” (i.e. not demand more than one needs from the commons) and to be productive in a political climate where work is no longer a universal right. As with the amendment made to the Finnish Constitution which made the provision of employment a “pursuit” rather than the obligation of the state to its citizens<sup>6</sup>, work, in

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<sup>6</sup> Although the Finnish employment law saw “full employment as the goal of the state” (Lehtonen et al. 2001:117), this goal was soon set aside in 1993 as unemployment rates soared. Lehtonen et al. (2001) state that “In 1995, the paragraph in the Constitution obliging the state to arrange an opportunity to work for the citizens was somewhat mitigated; it is no more ‘the task’ but a ‘pursuit’ of the public authorities to ‘secure everyone the right to work’” (2001: 114). To clarify: a “task” is something which must be *completed*, whereas a “pursuit” simply must be *attempted*.



the “new” economy characterized by the likes of Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen (2002) as the “network society,” one which these scholars believe is exemplified by the Finnish example, no longer refers to a fundamental right. Work has become an opportunity for which one must compete.

For example, despite the fact that the economy started to grow with the blossoming of the IT industry, only highly specialized professionals with cosmopolitan connections gained footage at the wage-negotiating table, while the older and the less educated were pushed to the sidelines (Lehtonen et al. 2001). Uusitalo (1996) argues that the appearance of long-term unemployment, inherited poverty and policies that fail to alleviate income gaps marks the economic recession of the 1990s as something different from that of the 1970s.

In addition to the qualitative changes to the idea of universalism of the pre-recession welfare ideal, the orientation of politics to affecting work negotiations also shifted. Julkunen and Nätti (1999) argue that the 1990s “was a crossroads of old and new traits within patterns of working times” (Julkunen and Nätti 1999: 35) as the old working time law of 1946 was superseded by the new in 1996 (Julkunen and Nätti 1999: 44). In lieu of keeping the issue of working hours under the framework of social welfare and a factor necessary for the achievement of the Nordic political vision of the “good society,” working hours chimed in time to a “new logic” of the economy (ibid). Standards for working hours fell out of the realm of politics to be considered part of what made businesses competitive.

One direct example of shifts in negotiation patterns comes from the amendment made to the Employment Contracts Act of 1970. This Act of 1970 built on the political ideology of Nordic welfare ideals to protect all workers from workplace agreements disadvantageous to its citizen-workers. In contrast, the amendment made to this Act in 2001 made allowances for individual employers to determine the terms

and contracts of their employees in their own terms. Replacing the universal and statutory character of the Employment Contract Act of 1970 which provided a safety net for even those workers employed in organizations not covered by Finland's system of collective bargaining and centralized wage negotiations, the amendments made in 2001 emphasized the need for contractual differentiation and deregulation based on the needs of the employer.

The amendment comes from the background study by a "committee on the development of the labor market system" appointed by the Council of State (Hietanen 1997) which highlighted the failure of current labor laws of Finland which they considered too rigid to provide new jobs for the 16% of the population still without gainful employment. Further, that deregulation of the labor market and opting for flexible contracts and responsibility towards the worker will be "essential to improve competitiveness."

Following Aslama and others' (2001) observation that the notion of "inevitability" made the shift towards market economics a rational endpoint, state attitudes towards working hours and the plight of workers also took on a hyper-rational veneer and a "post-ideological" outlook despite its political underpinnings. This supposed "post-ideological" outlook of the "new" economy allegedly freed from the "ideological" fantasies of the "older" social democratic era drew strength from the success of Nokia, Finland's economic powerhouse. The story of Nokia became a new idiom with which Finnish media figures engaged in self-caricature. As *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's premier newspaper, wrote: Nokia's "rise from the ashes to the top of the world is the most fascinating economic legend of all time in Finland. In Finnish history, it can probably only be compared with the miracle of the Winter War" (*Helsingin Sanomat*, January 2001), referring to the 1939 conflict in which Finnish forces fought the vastly larger Soviet forces to a standstill.

Indeed, Nokia's global success in marketing and technological innovation has come to emblemize the shape of things to come for Finland for many. The Finnish Ministry of Trade and Industry pointed to the importance of moving away from making physical investments (i.e. in factories) to putting the national emphasis on Research and Design (R & D) and personnel training. Risto Heiskala (2007) argues that in tandem with this technological imperative, this "third industrial revolution," as he calls it, comes with "social innovations" (2007: 52). According to Heiskala, in comparison to the post-war characterization of the Finnish economy as a centrally "planned economy," one based on a "trust in the effectiveness of hierarchical planning as the key coordination mechanism in all sectors of the society" (ibid 84), the new paradigm which manifested in the late 1980s and into the 1990s developed in the context in which the nationally bound policies of Nordic welfare states appeared inefficient and structurally problematic.

The new paradigm developed "based on the belief in the efficiency of free, open and competitive markets as a coordination mechanism of advanced economies and societies" (ibid 85). Instead of a centrally planned economy, notions of "luck," inevitability, and the *need* for competitive edge take over.

George Ritzer (1993) characterizes this emphasis on technological innovation, specialization and flexibilization (or the adaptability of workers to the needs of the market) as the evidence of the post-Fordist condition. While post-industrial socialists would argue that nothing about post-Fordism is "post," rather, the changes in the market Ritzer discusses would be merely a further advancement of capitalism (Little 1998), both camps agree that a perceived need for innovation, competitiveness and luck contributes to capital accumulation in a supposedly ideologically de-odorized condition. The state is no longer held responsible for workers who fall into the peripheries of society. They must adapt, learn new skills and make themselves more

competitive as value-added workers. Birgit Müller (2004) argues that in this advanced capitalist system, workers as political subjects no longer exist. In the profit making system, “political convictions” are secondary (Müller 2004: 151). I discuss this issue in more detail in chapter two, when I address workplace burnout, but here I wish to continue to discuss the changes in Finnish social democracy.

Finnish social scientists Kalela et al. (2001) describe the 90s “as the era when the social practice and the social rhetoric departed” (Kalela et al. 2001: 9) and as one tainted by “dishonesty” (ibid). The de-prioritization of political convictions occurred at the price of only one side of the political spectrum. The politics of market liberalism flourished under the mask of de-politicized rational choice and inevitable increases in competition in the face of global market pressure while politicizing the ideals of social democracy as mere ideological propaganda of the left. However, this critique of current “dishonesty” by Kalela et al. (2001) ironically, pulls Kalela and others themselves into making a similar fallacy. Kalela et al. (2001) argue that “Finland ha[d] gained [a] reputation as a country” where “all ‘constructive forces’ are collected under one umbrella heading toward a better future” (Kalela et al. 2001: 9) and that “A person had gained his/her value as a citizen and human being through work in the Finnish society for hundreds of years” (Kalela et al. 2001: 9). That is, of course, until the shift that occurred in the 1990s when Finland openly embraced the trade laws of the European Union whereupon, according to Kalela et al., “honesty” disappeared. Their critique of the present turns into nostalgia, as they suggest uncritically that prior to the 1990s, social rhetoric indeed translated into social practice.

What researchers called “dishonest” was the way in which policy makers de-regulated labor laws while still making claims to notions of morality and to the ethics of work despite the ways in which notions of efficiency, competition and flexibility

overshadowed and allochronized “older” notions of work as a highly politicized sphere of life that characterized the Nordic social democratic social safety net.

A close reading of the edited volume, *Down from the Heavens, up from the Ashes: The Finnish Economic Crisis of the 1990s in the Light of Economic and Social Research* (2001) in which contributors make similar arguments begs the question: what is the significance of the use of the term “honesty” (2001)? To answer this, I turn now to a detailed analysis of the kinds of moral injunctions necessitated by the welfare state on its citizens, not only to avoid the ire of Esping-Andersen (1990), who criticized “social scientists” for being “too quick to accept nations’ self-proclaimed welfare-state status” (1990:20), but also to understand the context in which the tropes of dishonesty and honesty play into the terrain of the political in Finland.

### **Laws of the Welfare State**

Sociologist Erik Allardt reminds his readers that “the word ‘welfare’ (in Swedish *välfärd*, in Danish *velfaerd*, in Norwegian *velferd*, and in Finnish *hyvinvointi*) also stands for well-being, and that it relates to both level of living and quality of life” (1993: 88). He further describes the tenets of Nordic welfare/well-being as the satisfaction of universal basic needs: the satisfaction of which he argues is met via the individual sacrifice of “excess” needs by all for the benefit of all. This idea of individual sacrifice, and the individual’s management and embeddedness in an imagined social exchange where each sacrifices for the good of the collective, thus contributes to the basis of policies which flattens economic discrepancies within society.

Esping-Andersen (1990) argues that such rights to basic needs are granted as the net product of the state’s role within the market and the labor force. The

diminishing of market power over labor or “de-commodification of labor” is a key element in Esping-Andersen’s examination of welfare provision by the Nordic states.

In contrast to the Nordic model, the “Anglo-Saxon-style” or “liberal” regime of welfare is one where social reform is “circumscribed by traditional, liberal work-ethic norms... [and] the state encourages the market, either passively – by guaranteeing only a minimum – or actively – by subsidizing private welfare schemes” (Esping-Andersen 1990:27). Esping-Andersen argues that such a regime model minimally de-commodifies labor and creates a market-dependent provision of social rights and social security. In contrast to the liberal model, which promotes social stratification via the equation of state dependency and poverty levels, in the “social democratic” regime-type the laws of universalism and de-commodification operate together to ensure that all citizens benefit from similar standards of social security.

The differences between the liberal strategy and the strongly welfarist one of social democratic regimes are exemplified in Juha Häyhä’s (1993) comparison of contract law between the two. Häyhä (1993) argues that the biggest difference lies in the role of the state in protecting either negative or positive rights. According to Häyhä, the idea of negative rights, most closely associated with liberal ideology, enforces a legal framework necessary to put in place the moral imperative for others to *refrain* from impinging on other’s rights. This protects individuals from the will of others and from the illusion of freedom as choosing one’s own strategies in life. The role of the state in this case is to “guarantee that private contracts [a]re respected” (Häyhä 1993:28). This ideal role of the state as per liberal ideology, builds upon and promotes the premise that a citizen acts upon his own self-interests and that the state must provide protection to its citizens from “others’ and [from] the state’s interventions” (ibid).

In contrast, Häyhä argues that “the welfare state is considered to have the positive task of ensuring the material preconditions of the social and cultural autonomy of the members of the society” (1993:26). And thus unlike the liberal theory of society prevalent in the “Anglo-Saxon states” where “positive” tasks given to the state are seen as meddlesome and antagonistic to individual autonomy, state “interference” is seen as a duty in most Nordic welfare systems. The welfarist model of the state operates on the assumption that the state must provide positive rights for its most disenfranchised citizens, thereby taking up an interventionist role. Here, the assumption is that the “open” or “free” market is never a level playing field and that contract law must “limit the scope of freedom of contract in favor of the weaker party” (Häyhä 1993:37). According to Häyhä, the duty of the welfare state is to “cure the problems caused by the open market,” while keeping “the basic structure of the open market mainly ...untouched” (1993: 34).

This difference in the fundamentals of what constitutes the responsibility of the state (either to act as the protector of positive or negative rights) stems from how the needs of the addressee within the social is imagined. It further reflects the difference in the nature of social antagonisms germane to the particular political structure of both liberalist and welfarist societies. According to Häyhä (1993), the vision of law developed by liberalist states stems from a history of the oppression of general society under the perceived despotism of absolute monarchs. He argues that it is from such a perception of tyranny and the “unpredictability” (1993) as resulting from living under an all-powerful monarch that law developed as a measure to provide predictability and protection from not only powerful others but also from “others” in general. Or, to rephrase his formulation, the idea of the subject as desiring liberty from the imposition of others developed as a complement to and only because of the perception of the big Other (the state, society, etc.) as enjoying this freedom in our stead. Law then, in this

case constructs subjects as already interested parties, free to enter into contract with others but owing nothing beyond what is deliberated by law. In contrast, in Nordic societies, especially in the case of Finland, Pauli Kettunen (1998) argues that a history of a free peasant society without a monarchy and without religious conflicts with the state placed the initial need for law on a different trajectory. The law is not put in place to protect individuals from a tyrant or the collective in the Nordic welfarist system, as the law is made commensurate with collective interests. Unlike the push for liberation from an intervening state, welfare law presumes that without the state, the logic of the market will take advantage of the weaker, less informed party of a contract. Häyhä (1993) summarizes these differences by two slogans: “Legitimate expectations based on contract” for liberalist contract law and “Contracts based on legitimate expectations” (ibid 43) for the welfarist model.

However, despite the weakly liberalist vision of social democratic welfare states, Häyhä and Esping-Andersen both reveal that an interventionist state still keeps the market intact. While the highly universalistic provision of social services “constructs an essentially universal solidarity in favor of the welfare state” (Esping-Andersen 1990:28), this is not set up in opposition to the basic liberal principle of market success. Esping-Andersen (1990) claims that the most “salient characteristic of the social democratic regime is its fusion of welfare and work. For universalistic and de-commodifying principles to work, full employment and the minimization of people living off of the system without labor are both required in that “all benefit; all are dependent; and all will presumably feel obliged to pay” (Esping-Andersen 1990:28). In short, we have two moral injunctions: first, the citizenry contribute to (and sacrifice to) the greater good. Second, the state is given the responsibility to guarantee that citizens will not abuse the fruits of collective labor. These injunctions are necessary for the ideological force of the welfare model to take hold. The welfarist model of



“contracts based on legitimate expectations” (Häyhä 1993: 43), then, depend on moral, religious, juridical and social systems which all contribute to the notion of what makes expectations “legitimate.”

Citizenship in a social democratic welfare state therefore comes ideologically enmeshed with the responsibility to uphold a politically articulated moral reciprocal network: all receive benefits and all contribute to the chain of reciprocity through work without a specific value being placed upon either the contribution or the benefit (i.e. one’s benefits from the state do not have to be proportionate to one’s contribution). The arms of the state are endowed with the moral responsibility to guarantee the reproduction of wealth, for which they have to act as redistributive forces. For example, education, which in Finland includes an obligatory class on religion or ethics, welfare, etc., must maintain and regulate the social moral framework that feeds into public opinion.

What make notions of work and honesty so different from that of liberal states comes from the premise of welfarist states that “we all receive” and that this universalism depends upon the productive activities and honesty of all citizens. Subjects of liberal states in this formulation make “bad” welfarist citizens, as the state already represent a tyrannical and interfering “center.” In this scenario, it appears in the best interest of citizens to get the most out of the commons and of the state.

In contrast, Henrik Stenius (1997) argues that in Nordic states, both the Lutheran tradition of equating self-sacrifice and humility with the path to salvation and the agrarian spirit of communal hard work strengthened the social fantasy of individual responsibility towards receiving welfare benefits. The social democratic society represented by the re-distributive state is not tyrannical. The success of and the legitimacy of redistribution of wealth, universal coverage of social services and

benefits rest on the presumption of a citizenship well-attuned to the principles of self-sacrifice, “humility” and “honesty.”

Nordic social democratic ideals of equality, universalism and protection of the individual from market pressure come from welding the Protestant work ethic into these notions of redistribution and social protectionism. Like Esping-Andersen (1990), Stenius (1997) sees work as “the main principle of Nordic societal organization and the force that holds the association together” (1997:164). Citizens enjoy free education, universal healthcare, sickness and unemployment insurance at greater rates than do citizens of liberal democratic states, all under the belief in the honesty of one’s neighbors to only demand “basic needs” and to pull one’s weight through work. In this sense, work represents more than individual endeavors to make a living, and includes notions of social responsibility, ethics and morality. In comparison to citizens of liberal states, in Nordic societies, the citizen believes he *owes* the state and that he contributes to society through work and his ability to pay taxes.

Birgit Müller (2004) shows that in the case of planned economies (and here, I include social democratic states before the espousal of liberal market policies), the moral political economy is founded on the idea of productivity. “According to the political ideology of socialism,” she claims, “the worker was to find his individual fulfillment in the collective organization of work and in the contribution he made toward the satisfaction of social needs” (2004: 151). Thus, in contrast to the capitalist and liberal visions of work and workers respectively as the place for profit-making and as the labor which made profit-making possible, socialist orientation to work envisioned the workplace as productive of “political or social persons.”

Müller claims that the transition from this planned economic system to that of the capitalist system placed workers in a “system of domination that exposed them to an uncertain future” (2004: 150). This does not mean that the socialist system actually

provided the protection from exploitation. Müller (ibid: 150) argues that, in both cases, the workers suffer from exploitation, but they do so in different forms. Whereas in the capitalist mode, the worker faces uncertainty and the demand for “maximum performance,” in the socialist model, the worker suffers “protective domination” and the threat of being labeled an “enemy of the people” should he fail to contribute.

Echoing this sentiment, conversations with Finnish-American families in New York, after the period of my fieldwork, often revealed such conflicts with over-intrusive neighbors and church members, who passed judgment on attitudes to work or on farm and household management abilities often provided an impetus for emigration. Such statements mirror Stenius’s critique of welfarist models as showing “intolerance” for letting others be. According to Stenius (1997):

What abounds ... is common sense itself, a straightforward modern sense that feels competent to decide what is natural and normal. ‘Society,’ that which is shared, the *Gemeinschaft* that never completely vanished, knows no bounds. All the doors are open – to the living room, the kitchen, the larder, the nursery, not to mention the bedroom – and they are not just open: society marches in and intervenes, sometimes brusquely (1997: 171).

*Gemeinschaft*, here read in the sense of Tönnies (2001), operates with the least external regulating force (e.g. legal standards for receiving aid) to reproduce the conditions necessary for the mechanisms of re-distribution to reproduce itself. If Stenius argues that social democratic and Lutheran ideals of hard work set the framework through which neighbors “watched” each other in Nordic states, I found that each of these notions took on its own particular flavor in the case of Finland.

In an interview, Seppo Tamminen, a Finnish writer and a head of a professional consulting company, described the challenges faced by what he called “typical Finns” to me as “proving themselves to other workers and to the boss that they are hardworking and reliable as workers.” He embedded the notion of the need for “reliability” in Finland’s agricultural history in a harsh and forbidding climate, where teamwork was valued and neighbors needed to know that they could rely on each other. He found continuity of this idea within the modern-day context in that “we (Finns) need to know that we can trust a worker to do his part of the job since if he fails, the others must do more. Reliability means that he is independent and that he can do his part.” To further illustrate his point, Seppo pointed me to one of Finland’s most popular classics: the trilogy by Väinö Linna titled “Under the North Star” (1959, 2001) (*Täällä Pohjantähden Alla*). The book begins with the now canonical phrase: “In the beginning there were the swamp, the hoe – and Jussi.” It depicts Finland’s history through the now mythologized life story of a crofter, Jussi, and his descendants as they struggle through Finland’s class (and language) conflict, civil war, poverty, hunger and the harsh hazards of nature. Jussi brings to life the word *sisu* (guts, perseverance, and grit) a word often light-heartedly taught to foreigners but kept still closer to the founding myths of what makes Finns “Finnish,” something inaccessible to non-Finns. With just a hoe and his bare hands, Jussi transforms a swamp into arable land despite the snickers of his neighbors. The book shows through Jussi’s profound determination the ridiculous yet beautiful grit of Finland’s landless class who fight on regardless of the odds set against them and as such becomes a central point for the formation of nationalist self-stereotype, about which I go into more detail below.

Such self-stereotype emerges unsurprisingly during nationalist holidays, especially those connected with Finland’s wartime history. War veterans mix with mythical literary heroes (such as Jussi) as those who make tangible what it means to

have *sisu* for the general public on Finland's Independence Day on December 7<sup>th</sup>. On December 6<sup>th</sup> 1917, in the political tumult during which the Bolsheviks rocked the Russian empire, Finland seized the moment to claim its independence. In commemoration, each President of Finland holds a ball each year in recognition of those Finns who contributed in some ways to the betterment of the nation. For instance, in the year 2006, amongst the faces of those celebrated was the wife of musician Lordi, whose husband's band brought Finland the gold medal for the Eurovision contest, despite the initial controversy over their "monster-metal" aesthetic<sup>7</sup>.

The occasion marked a moment when people gathered together to watch the event as it unfolded on the evening television. As I, too joined what became my "family" during my fieldwork, I was given a priority seat right in front of the television as the camera showed the first guests arriving on wheelchairs. "The veterans go first," Tarja, my host mother explained. The guest list ran long and as Finnish celebrities started to appear in their suits and dresses, conversation quickly shifted to opinions on style. Tarja and her twenty-one year old daughter Salli sat with me for the entire footage of the party, but then they abruptly left to do household chores and chat on the Internet, respectively, but they insisted that I remain watching television. Playing immediately after the ball was the film "The Unknown Soldier" (1954, 1957) (*Tuntematon Sotilas*), a movie version of a book also by Väinö Linna and which serves as a kind of sequel to *Under the North Star*. As Tarja and Salli left me to watch the movie by myself, the women excused themselves by saying, "[t]hey show this movie every year." However, I was joined later by Tarja's boyfriend Jouko. "This is what I saw growing up," he said, and then seemingly randomly added, "have you seen Teppo's T-shirt?" I distinctly remembered Teppo, Tarja's nephew, and his black T-

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<sup>7</sup> Lordi himself did not attend the ball, as he got in trouble with President Tarja Halonen over whether or not he could keep his devil mask on inside her palace.

shirt, not only because of the fact that we had just had coffee together with the family earlier, but also because of the shirt's bright Finnish flag with helmeted gun-toting soldiers silhouetted on it. The shirt's slogan announced "*Kiitos*" [Thank you] in big letters. Jouko continued solemnly, "That T-shirt commemorates all those who fought for Finland's wars with the Soviet Union".

The movie itself was an action-packed commentary on Finland's major offensive against the Soviet Union during World War II<sup>8</sup>, but it contained within it different tropes of Finnish nationalism. Each soldier in the company mythologized certain stereotypes that Finns had about Finns from specific regions, and as they fell into battle against an anonymous yet monstrous Soviet army of tanks and faceless soldiers, so the enemy became stereotyped as Finland's "hereditary enemy."

The movie, the T-shirt and the public ceremonies surrounding Finland's Independence Day all strongly emphasize Finland's international struggles: the Winter War (1939-1940), the Continuation War (1941-1944), but also the end of the embittered condition of survival most commonly known abroad as "Finlandization" whereby Finland sacrificed some political freedom to the Soviet Union to maintain its sovereignty. The "original" meaning of the day – Finland's peaceful independence from Russia<sup>9</sup>, though mentioned, did not enter into the public spectacle. Instead, the party and the associated ritual of the annual showing of *The Unknown Soldier* contributed to strengthening the connection between that of past sacrifices made and the sacrifice (and hard work) of those invited to the Presidential ball for increasing the image of the nation.

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<sup>8</sup> Not to be confused with the Winter War (1939-1940), *The Unknown Soldier* concerns the Continuation War (1941-1944), where Finland, then allied with Germany, counterattacked Soviet forces, penetrating deep into Karelia.

<sup>9</sup> Ironically, given the strong anti-Soviet sentiment expressed on this day, without the rise of the Bolsheviks, Finland's independence from Russia would likely not have happened so easily.

As the mass media went around the ball room, pointing the camera at Finland's glitterati, I saw the face of Ville Valo, the lead singer of HIM, a metal band also well known in the United States. I asked Salli, what *he* was doing at such a ball. Was this not meant for war veterans, politicians and all else who won medals for Finland? However, my question itself was a surprise to Salli. "Haven't you heard of HIM before? He's famous! He has concerts in America, of course he is at the ball!" said Salli. While I attributed counter-cultural attributes to musicians, especially those playing loud, aggressive music (think of, for instance, the Sex Pistols and their relationship to icons of British authority), for Salli, rock stars as well as veterans held similar roles as ambassadors of the nation.

The "imagined community" of Finland manifests some of the characteristic of what Milan Kundera ascribes to "small European" nations:

Secluded behind their inaccessible languages, the small European nations (their life, their history, their culture) are very ill known; people think, naturally enough, that this is the principal handicap to international recognition of their art. But it is the reverse: what handicaps their art is that everything and everyone... hooks the art onto the great national family portrait photo and will not let it get away." (*Testaments Betrayed* 1995)

Taking HIM as an example here, HIM does well internationally, not only as a "Finnish" band but just as a band, and the band's international success is not lost to the nation. In a country where an outsider's even slightly negative comments receive the retort of "We are a small country..." I argue that the country's size, position vis-à-vis other advanced capitalist states and perception of "itself" as peripheral should factor into how its citizens imagine *themselves*. And further, borrowing Benedict Andersen's

(1991) idea of imagined communities, how people imagine the national community affects the rationale for which neighbors obligate neighbors to contribute to the whole. In other words, even those in the so-called counterculture, such as HIM or Lordi, are expected to (and presumably feel as though they must) contribute to the national cause, whether or not they are dressed in military fatigues or giant latex demon costumes.

Calling upon a collective moment of strife and constructing new national heroes are nothing new in the strategies of the state, but the idea of “doing one’s part” within the moral context of the social democratic welfare ideal carries with it a qualitative difference in the social meaning of individual liberty, the individual’s relationship to the state and the form of enjoyment potentiated by these fantasies.

Here, I go back to Kalela et al. (2001) and the perceived “dishonesty” of the state since the shift in Finland’s orientation to “welfare.” This criticism can be rephrased as a criticism against a perceived “theft of enjoyment” (Žižek 2000). Their point of contention rests on an assumed excess “enjoyment” on the part of the state as it kept repeating the rhetoric that to be a “valuable” member of society a citizen needs to work, while it steadily relinquished its responsibilities to provide employment. As suggested by the term “dishonesty,” the state is seen to “knowingly” demand this unfair exchange – thus, “enjoying” the “profit” from not having to engage in the provision of work despite the stipulation that, without contributing labor, citizens fail to gain value.

This sense of loss (as a perceived destruction of the myth of an injunction against personal and public excess – the very driving force for the state’s legitimacy in levying high taxes for the provision of universal needs) is exacerbated by those who succeed in gaining immense value, exemplified by those “core” workers and executives who are invited to participate in the company’s share options, the way in which they enjoy the fruits of their labor as well as enjoying such recognition as



getting invited to the ball. Indeed, Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen (2002) describe Nordic countries as particularly driven by the Lutheran ethic of work for work's sake and the associated edifice of humility, as do Stenius (1997), however, they also recognize a rise in "the culture of the new technology option millionaires, who enjoy their work and show off their wealth by driving Lamborghinis" (Castells and Himanen 2002:160).

In its February 15, 2007 edition, Helsingin Sanomat, one of the most widely circulated newspapers in Finland, published an article which referenced a survey by the Finnish Ministry of Labor showing that between the years 2000 and 2005, people who found work "meaningless" doubled. According to the article, the reason for such a dip is attributed to "the steady increase of *elasticity* to working life, whereby the position of the workforce has become more and more subjected to market conditions" (Helsingin Sanomat 2007 emphasis added). In 2006, Tapani Lausti (Polarities – Finnish Institute of London journal) wrote an article questioning how neoliberal influences spread through Finland so swiftly without anyone making a fuss. He begins with a quote by Risto Heiskala, a professor of sociology at the University of Tampere, stating that since the economic crisis of the 1990s, Finland has become "richer, more open, more efficient, more unequal and more cruel than in the 80s" (Heiskala in Lausti (2006 Polarity)).

Those informants of mine who were not profiting from Finland's economic resurrection often looked upon a perceived difference in consumption patterns and social recognition with knit brows. How do people talk about this visibility of difference in what used to be, at least politically, a "flat" society? In the next section, I explore how such a perception of inequity take shape in the form of everyday conflicts.

### ***Pissis and the Visibility of Difference***

One such incident occurred unexpectedly on a cold winter evening, when I got a call from Anita, a computer technician in her early forties, asking me to help coach her sixteen year old daughter Aune, who was soon to go study abroad in Australia, in English. I took a forty-minute train ride to Jokela, a town dotted with neat white wooden houses circled by greenery – quite a difference from the gray high-modern apartment blocks that lined the streets of Helsinki.

On my first trip out to Anita and Aune’s house, she picked me up at the station and as we went through the two layers of doors, designed to keep the cold and the wind outside, to her house, we finally pulled off our boots, as was customary in most Finnish homes. After helping me out of my coat she invited me to sit at the big wooden table in the kitchen. The kettle was already sputtering and she soon poured me some hot water for my tea. Aune came down to the room after several yells from Anita. She sat across from me at the table and Anita left the room. I asked Aune what she wanted to focus on today. “Just talking in English,” she said. I began by asking Aune what she would say if somebody in Australia asked her about life in Finland.

“Well, I would say that we have pretty nature. I think people [Australians] think that it is always snowing in Finland, so I think I would tell them about the summer... well, like going to the summer cottage and swimming and going to the sauna and eating grilled sausages.” She paused and asked, “Could it be about bad things?” I nodded.

“Well, some people are really mean.” Here, Anita who came back into the kitchen butted in, also in English, “Yes, if you are not from Helsinki, they treat you like you are an idiot. Oh, like you are a redneck! They really want to make it known to you that *they* are from Helsinki and that *you* are not! Even if we are only living sixty kilometers away from Helsinki we are rednecks to them! Oh, and teenage girls, they like to wear those Burberry scarves even though they don’t even have that much

money. I mean, those things cost too much for a scarf and their parents aren't even that rich. No! Even in Helsinki, people in Finland are not that rich – and these girls, they just want to walk around with expensive things and if you don't have one of those scarves you can't hang out with them!" The last she delivered while rolling her eyes. I asked Aune more about "these" girls. "Yes," Aune chimed in, "they are called *pissis* (in the abbreviated form) or *pissa Liisa!*" I asked her if she had a scarf like that. The answer came in a vehement shake of the head and Anita going off to the other room again.

The next week, I mentioned *pissis* to Viivi as we walked past the Kiasma museum where, on the front lawn, groups of fashionable youth lounged sharing the space with younger teenagers with dyed black hair, common to heavy metal or black metal fans in the Nordic region. Viivi laughed and patted me on the back, "Ok, so you heard about them," she said. "Somehow when the Soviet Union collapsed we suddenly felt free. It all happened after the 1990s. Before that everybody was the same. We had the same amount of money, hair, same style, same body shape – we were what we call now a 'flat society.' Even if there were rich people, the gap between the rich and the poor wasn't all that much – or made visible."

Viivi's comment on the "visibility" of difference is of special concern here, as it is also something common to Aune and Anita's condemnation of those "scarf-toting-city" girls. The early 2000s have been remarked upon by several of my interlocutors as an era of consumer diversification, economic classes and youth subcultures ([irc-galleria.net](http://irc-galleria.net), a website especially popular amongst Finland's counter-cultural crowd and established in the year 2000, supports many of my interlocutors' chronologization as well as characterization of that era).

Kirsti, a freelance journalist who specialized in writing on issues relating to the growing income gap and the so-called "new" generation linked this growing attention

and commentary on those with money to spend as one based on “envy.” Kirsti also explained that the attitude of how people enjoyed this wealth has changed. In contrast, she described that in the past:

If you made a lot of money, you didn’t want to *show* it because you would feel like something awful would happen. In Eastern Finland people are shyer about showing happiness than in Western Finland. And people are more willing to show wealth in the south where there is a bigger Swedish impact. People just don’t want to tell anybody if things are going too well, because, well, I think they fear envy. And this kind of dynamic goes way back. For instance, my parents live in between Kuopio and Mikkeli (northeast of Helsinki). When they bought new furniture, they put a carpet on the window so that people couldn’t see...In Finland you have to *deserve* everything – for example, even a glass of wine. That only comes on Sunday!

What is of significance, here, is the concern over perceived differences over one’s orientation to enjoyment (e.g. one of deferral, showing, hiding, etc.).

Kirsti’s comment is particularly telling. According to Kirsti, in contrast to southern Finland which includes Helsinki where “there is a bigger Swedish” impact those people in the northeast exhibit a particularly “Finnish” attitude to enjoyment. This idea of the eastern regions of Finland (especially Finnish Karelia) as being “particularly” Finnish comes from the role of eastern Finland in Finland’s history of national “awakening” as the birthplace of the Kalevala, the national epic. This dichotomy: the east as the seat of “primordial Finland” and the southwest as dominated by the “outside” (the Swedish-Finns as the internal elite “others”) also allows for the co-existence of the imaginary of “ancient” and “new” values. The

economic recession and the emergence of new economic opportunities not only provide new ways of negotiating one's demands at work but also how one can enjoy the fruits of one's own labor. And quite fittingly, those in the south have always already "enjoyed" the fruits of their labor in ways contemporaneous to the present, but not so in the east.

The shift in rhetoric of Finnish welfare since the economic recession then, not only affects one's response to unemployment rates or working hours, but it also affects subjects on a more intimate level. Suddenly, those who "flaunt" their furniture (by removing the carpet from the windows, for instance) live next door. No longer are they confined to the mercantile centers in the south or across the border in Sweden as in the "past." The interpretation of negative reactions against such exhibitionism as "envy" then, is envy at the way in which some people feel comfortable showing what they have – envy to the *orientation* to enjoyment itself and this envy also contains within it the assumption, according to Žižek, that the "Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us" (2000: 597). "They" are not "shy" about showing what they have "in excess": as the very "shyness" and the requirement to "deserve" come from the basic problem of ownership of something in excess of others. Envy, as an affect of judgment, is not purely about the gap between the have and the have-nots, as such a conflict always already existed (hence the need to cover the window with the carpet). What is reproached in this instance, however, is the revealing (by those who do not cover the proverbial windows) of the secret that Finland always had internal differences: "before," people *did* buy new furniture, but only now do they admit to it. The exhibition of the new "luxury scarf" or of the car makes irrelevant the prohibition against exhibition and with it makes irrelevant the "way of life" with which Kirsti, and others like herself who criticized the "new" excess, identify. Envy, then, is about witnessing the other's enjoyment that is somehow inaccessible to "us": a form of

enjoyment that also represents “our” untimely condition of being (i.e. untimely because in the face of those who enjoy luxury goods vis-à-vis “older” prohibitions, “we” cannot fathom this present state).

The fantasy of the “flat society” is increasingly superseded by this new orientation to enjoyment. Its emergence coincides with the observance of a different set of ethics (new laws, new prohibitions and new responsibilities), stemming from what Aslama et al. (2001) calls “a transfer of power from politics to economics” (2001: 168). Such a shift implies a move into a post-ideological society, where subjects no longer pay obeisance to a “tradition” of putting up a carpet screen to ward off the gaze of others: subjects are now “free” to enjoy what is theirs and also free to enjoy exhibiting that very enjoyment. The post-ideological or late-capitalist ideology transforms those like Kirsti and her parents into those who “over-identify” with tradition and who fail to keep the proper distance from “fixed identities” (Žižek 2000: 600). The new liberalism of the post-recession economy is one which makes obsolete the ideologically-laden era of the “carpet-screening” of private pleasures. What matters more than whether one “deserves” anything is whether one can afford it. The fantasy of today involves the fantasy of non-responsibility: if one cannot afford new furniture, it is of no fault but mine. The idiom of competitiveness and adaptive flexibility tell me that if I want more enjoyment, I must make myself more competitive.

The “new” attitude to consumptive enjoyment stems from an increasing rhetoric of rationalization and transparency. However, this “rationalized enjoyment” (e.g. one should enjoy what one can afford regardless of the question of whether one is “deserving” or not) ironically rests on flouting “past” norms: the irrational element of enjoyment comes from tearing away the “carpet” that masks the window.

### **The “New” Generation**

Klaus Helkama, professor of social psychology at the University of Helsinki, who conducts historical analyses on notions of “values,” commented in a personal interview that “there is a difference in between American and Finnish work values and between past and the present Finnish work values.” Americans, according to Helkama, value “ambition” while Finns worry about “hard work.” With the introduction and adoption of “American-style” orientations to work, the gap between “working hard” and being “ambitious” is increasingly filled in by Finnish business consultants who teach how to make such an ontological transition. Albeit treating categories reified by national surveys unproblematically, Helkama points to an important historical shift.

Such a shift, however, has already occurred with the “new” generation, according to Jari Hakanen of Finland’s Institute for Occupational Health, who shared with me some of his more personal observations on this shift.

When I was a child [he means during the late 1970s and 1980s], people were all the same. We had the same standards of living and nobody could pay for travels abroad or nice toys. But now people are more diverse. A Gallup study [he is referring to a poll conducted in Finland each year. I have thus far not been able to find the study to which he refers here] amongst students showed that many wanted to be a celebrity, an idol. Students wanted to be written about in gossip columns! This is very different from my years.

Finland’s first business consultant who hit the mass media in the 1990s was Jari Sarasvuo, a media figure who used to host a talk show on the Finnish channel MTV3 (which has no relationship to the American network) and who later declared that he wanted to be the Donald Trump of Finland. While taken as a joke in some circles, as he made the transition from MTV3 to business consulting, the fact of

Sarasvuo's rise in fame says something about a shift in desire and a waning prohibition against "showing" and enjoying what you have. Helkama and Hakanen both see Finnish society in general as increasing its tolerance for the exhibition of personal glory as well as moving towards the image of "Homo economicus." The symbolic habitat that nurses the imagined relation to others of the economic man – a drive towards personal benefit – is seen by Helkama and Hakanen to slowly encroach upon the utopia of social democracy. Psychological contracts – the unwritten responsibility on the part of employers to reciprocate workplace sacrifices about which I go into more detail below – now carry the shade of a time past.

And as the "now" is a time of rational calculation of efficiency, flexibility and competition, as opposed to "that" era when, as Viivi said, not like her "mother's time," the *now* is characterized by business consultants and firms as a time of heightened "potential" and "individual freedom." No longer must a skilled employee feel bogged-down by standard time regiments or team work. No longer must employers take employees out to dinners should employees work overtime, a practice, according to Viivi, used to occur often in her "mother's time." This era of competition represents a time when workers should and must work over-time if they are to become more competitive and less likely to be made redundant. In the words of Tuomo, a consultant who kindly took the time to see me,

In the 1990s we had a bad recession and those who remained at work had a hard time. We recognized the issue of mental health at work and we shifted the emphasis from labor to *työhyvinvointi* [well-being at work]. We realized we needed to address mental well-being and satisfaction at work if we were to keep people working. Yes, it is all about ... how to retain employees in the company but of course how to retain the *best* employees. Compensation is



always a headache but compensation is about making people *want* to work: it is wrong to keep the compensation the same just to keep everyone happy. And compensation not only comes in the form of money, but also in the belief in the *future* of money. To assure future success and to bring this belief in the future of money to its employees, companies use our [consulting] skills to reduce redundancies and to get a flatter, more efficient working matrix. Companies need to keep themselves more competitive and more attractive to its workers.

In Tuomo's historical analysis, the cutbacks and job losses of the 1990s led to an efficient workforce – here defined as one with reduced redundancies, but also one where people had to take on the responsibilities of their recently-fired co-workers. In order for a company to grow and compete while still retaining its efficiency, workers had to increase their store of skills and knowledge as well as their willingness to work more – or to learn how to “manage time.” And to manage time, workers needed to be able to “manage stress.” According to Tuomo, this connection between the necessary management of time and the management of stress motivated companies to address issues of mental health as a necessary condition to hold onto their employees (or at least to the ones that counted). This rise in the awareness of mental health issues at work amongst business consultants and mid-level business managers I interviewed most often located itself in the need to create a *desire* to do more work within the workforce without hiring new employees. Like Tuomo, many of the professionals in the business world I came to know throughout my fieldwork identified health issues dealing with stress, depression and burnout as resulting from a lack: lack of challenge, lack of appreciation, lack of personal control, lack of adequate supervision or a combination of the above. Tuomo, who was one of the most outspoken of the group,

was of the opinion that companies could best provide satisfaction to the workforce via offering increased compensation to the most skilled workers as well as freeing the workplace of redundancies, thereby keeping an “efficient working matrix,” and thus guaranteeing the “promise of future capital.” By his rationale, “good workers” would only wish to work harder as bonus compensation and lack of redundancies in the company workforce ensure the worker’s position and success within the workings of the company. Yet for all of Tuomo’s stress on the well-being of the individual worker (and not, it is to be noted, the collective workforce), for Tuomo, worker well-being is simply a means to the well-being of that other “subject” – the company.

This idea of well-being at work marks a shift away from the promotion of health as the basis of physical ability to work (labor) to the promotion of health as increasing the *capacity* to do work. With what Tuomo and the other consultants refer to as “satisfaction and well-being at work,” businesses hope to maximize profit and reduce losses by having their employees happier either via differentiated compensation or by providing the promise of a “future of money.” By promoting “well-being” in a quantified, profit-oriented form, companies are trying to increase the limits of the employee’s ability to perform labor, rather than simply increase the amount of labor performed.

Tuomo’s logic not only ignores the other forms of exchange such as the dinner “gift” as mentioned by Viivi, but also assumes a rational universal basis for desire that cuts away the particularities that might bind people like Viivi’s mother to feel obligated to their workplace. Tuomo’s logic and the logic of the business consultancy operate on the idea of a metalanguage of work that puts profit maximization as the basis of all economic activity and of all social relationships at the workplace. In response to my question regarding the “loyalty” of employees, Tuomo laughed. “Today, or I would say, the business world of Finland from the mid-1980s, workers

have always switched workplaces. It is even encouraged. Company loyalty is something of the past.”

Tuomo also excitedly told me about his consulting firm’s newest product – coaching. They send a “coach” to personally train, or coach, managers of their new roles in the increasingly globalizing production of labor. Projects now span the world involving different workers from the various branches of the corporation. Managers are coached on how to pitch the goals of the project to an increasingly virtual workforce (amongst other things, e.g. they also coach managers on everyday operations). He also added, that it was odd that I should not know of such goings-on, as “coaching” was developed the United States.

One public relations officer from Nokia, a corporate name made synonymous with the face of Finland’s growing international recognition, made similar claims. In response to my question, which built upon a much-celebrated critique of workplace change by Juha Siltala (*A Short History of the Decline of Working Life*), she became almost indignant.

It is not correct to say that Finland had a welfare economy from the 40s to the 90s. Even in the 30s we had a *modern* economy! [She raised her eyebrows.] When I was working in the 80s it was already the case that we didn’t have “big Daddy” taking care of us. We had to think of our future in the work force ourselves. People understood that they are on their own and that they needed to sell themselves. This is not a modern development!

As I had already talked to many people (researchers and lay alike) who seemed to suggest the obverse, I reverted back to the issue of corporate social responsibility and the feeling of obligation that characterized the era of welfare reforms. Such a

comment and angle upset her even more, and she made reference to my ethnic background for emphasis. “Finns and Europeans in general have a collective conscience, but Asia has *ten* times that of Finland. They are (she paused as if searching for words) like birds, when one bird looks in one direction they all turn together.” Her defensive posture towards *when* Finland’s “modern” economy took force and where Finns fall in terms of having “a collective conscience” vis-à-vis “Americans” or “Asians” speaks to something other than what is articulated as at stake.

Finland’s membership to the European Union (EU) and its participation in the Lisbon Strategy places it within the gray zones of one who “must” be western European and thus occupying coeval space (the same economic development, standard of living, etc.) with other “advanced western civilizations” – a place where anything that does not fit what Matti Kuittinen called the “image of successful western man” (personal communication) must be reframed as a holdover from a past generation, thus stripping it of coeval relevance or, as Aune and Anita complained, defined as something emblematic of the nation’s “rednecks<sup>10</sup>.”

Besides the less than complimentary term “rednecks,” “typical Finn” was another slur levied at other Finns who failed to fit the bill of someone sharing the ethos of the “modern” economy. Often times it was offered in the negative during a first meeting when my interlocutor and I went through our initial round of introductions. “I’m not a typical Finn,” it often went, “I’m not one to be shy or silent. I like talking” or at one party where there was heavy drinking involved, an introduction went as the following: “I’m not a typical Finn, I know enough to drink wine with dinner not just by itself.” Once it was used against another Finn with the implication that it could apply to a national “we:” I was having coffee with Kirsti, the freelance

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<sup>10</sup> Anita used the English term.

journalist and she complained that the Minister of Education was a “typical Finn.” According to Kirsti, after Finland scored very highly on the PISA<sup>11</sup> (Programme for International Student Assessment) education ranking, a minister from the Finnish Ministry of Education was asked about the status of education in Finland at a conference. “He is such a typical Finn,” she said “this minister said ‘Our education system isn’t all that good... well it’s nothing... we have problems...’ *We just don’t want to be too happy or proud in even things that we should be proud about!*” This contest over what is and is not “typical” or “normal emerged and re-emerged often during the course of my fieldwork, and was made apparent also in my conversations with Ville.

Ville was in between jobs and had a temporary position as a translator of sorts for a Finnish rug making company that had ambitions of exporting their products beyond Europe. He responded to an advertisement I had posted around the University of Helsinki for language exchange. He wanted me to help both smooth out his English translation of a Finnish-language advertisement of his company as well as to translate the document into Japanese – a new market for this rug company. After lamenting on the small population size of Finnish speakers around the world, he picked a page of the Finnish promotional material of the company and, pointing an angry finger at the last paragraph, said “This part here sounds so strange in Finnish I don’t see why it isn’t already English!” The section to which he referred basically listed the company’s “history of excellence” and their pride in the rugs woven into modern designs based on a traditional recipe of “pure Finnish wool.”

I asked him what was wrong with it. “Well, read it!” he said, forcing me to read again. I read but did not see anything strange. He took the brochure from my hands and read aloud with a supercilious air, “We only provide the materials of the

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<sup>11</sup> PISA is a worldwide scholastic aptitude test sponsored by the OECD.

best quality, blah blah,” he read. “Don’t you think this is excessive?” he asked. I must have looked rather blank, as he continued with the following: “Of course you wouldn’t! We’re doing this for *you* guys! We never used to say such things. It’s so American to talk about how accomplished you are. It’s like clap, clap, clap, clap, [he clapped his hands with an exaggerated smile] – ‘I am *so* good!’ Finnish people would not do this.” He explained that such statement would sound in contrast like the company was hiding something: that actually their products were of poor quality and thus in need of a verbal makeover. As we moved away from the task at hand, he revealed that the reason why he felt so strongly against self-congratulatory statements such as that was because he was forced to make them himself in the context of working. He had interviewed at several companies where they had asked him what positive attributes he had. As he claimed he had never thought of listing such things before, he fell silent during the interview. “I felt stupid” he said. “We don’t know how to sell ourselves here in Finland. These are all new things that happened over the past ten years or so.”

He further exclaimed that he felt nervous about his next interview as now he anticipated having to “fabricate” something which should have been self-evident – “they should just look at my resumé and know what kind of skills I have,” he complained. What also distressed Ville was not just the mere imposition of a “foreign” practice of self-appeal, but the fact that such a practice now seemed the norm and was demanded of him as part of the routine of everyday life. “Just look at these people walking around like they have something up their backs!” he exclaimed pointing to a group of people in business attire all speaking in English, “People nowadays walk around like they’re so great or something!”

We leaned back in our chairs in the café, the translation task now completely put off our agenda. I sat staring at my coffee and, seeing that he had not had anything

to drink, I offered to get him coffee. He didn't want any. Instead, he rummaged through his backpack to pull out what looked like a wad of photographs. "Here," he said, "take a look at these." They were pictures of himself in full martial arts garb holding a wooden sword somewhere in Asia surrounded by Asian faces. I drew a blank again, as it was so unexpected. "I went on an exchange program in Japan for karate and kendo. Aren't you actually *really* Japanese?" I explained I was a citizen of the United States.

He ignored this comment. "I thought you were just Asian," he said. He added that he was the head of a martial arts group in Helsinki and that he was going to teach that very night. I asked him if he were going to show those pictures to his students. "No, I brought it with me here because I thought you might be interested."

What caught me off guard was not necessarily that Ville couldn't see beyond my "ethnic" background, but that so soon after complaining about the "self-promoting Americans" he promoted himself so fully as a master of martial arts – or did he? The pictures of Ville from Nagoya, Japan, totaled thirty-five shots, all of them featuring Ville in different "exotic" locations: one with him in full martial garb whacking a target with a wooden stick, another with Ville surrounded by the "indigenous" people, and another with Ville in the hot springs cradling his biceps, and so on. As he flipped the pictures over to show me a fresh new frame, he remained silent. As it was with what he claimed of his resumé, he let the pictures speak for themselves. The exhibition of the pictures then became a neutral transfer of facts and information, as if to say "these are the kinds of things he did in Japan. This is what he can do." In the absence of a socially-recognized form of self promotion or self appeal – that is, *verbal* boasting – according to Ville, the pictures themselves fail to connect themselves with the boastfulness also common to the "American" variety.

I asked him what this obsession with Asian martial arts meant to him and whether or not he had actually responded to my language exchange poster based on my ethnicity. He put all his photos away (rather quickly) adding, “I think that the spirit of martial arts has a lot in common with the Finnish spirit. They are not about showing off, but about getting things done.” So saying, he took off abruptly, saying he would be late to teach his martial arts class.

Ville was not alone in finding the articulation of accomplishments or self-promotion “foreign.” Other young workers also complained about this need to “sell ourselves.” Janne, a worker in his late twenties in the process of applying for jobs, saw it as the inevitable future: “Now, we must all learn the American way of ‘selling’ our selves. Finns don’t like to speak so grandly about what we can offer. But now, the times have changed and we must hurry to speak up or else the job will go to someone else!” Claiming that the practice of “selling ourselves” as a foreign – specifically American – practice not only manifests the emergent nature of a such a trend in the workforce, but also to a chronologization of a reified “Finnish” representation of self as being the antecedent to the American model. For many, the “older” model was also something tinged with a romanticized association with other allochronized cultural reifications. Such elements of “Finnishness” that, according to this allochronized self-stereotype, often were Orientalistically portrayed as persisting in the Far East: much as Ville identified Japanese martial arts with “the Finnish spirit,” and the 2006 film *Jadesoturi* [Jade Warrior] reset the Kalevala myth in ancient China (albeit with a white, Finnish hero), Janne also identified with a nebulously-defined “Asia” as embodying something particularly “Finnish.” When Janne was not looking for a job, he worked at making his first CD. The name of his band was to be “Koroshiya,” the word “killer” in Japanese, but he asked for my help in properly conjugating the title, which now only said “Korosu” [to kill]. His music was a mix of heavy metal and rock



and he dressed the part. Janne sported a long chin-beard that fell past his Adam's apple, a long ponytail, and a penchant for long black trench coats, not an uncommon ensemble for someone deeply into the dark or gothic variety of heavy metal common in Norden. The first time we met, I was out drinking with some friends at a bar popular amongst Finnish rockers. Janne suddenly came up to my table, stuck his hand down his shirt to pull out a golden pendant head on a chain that said something in Chinese. In a drunk but still gentle voice, he asked very politely if I could translate what it said. It had been a present from his aunt who had traveled to Singapore.

He was also in between jobs and as he was generous with his time as he was with introducing me to his friends, we met at least once a week to just talk and exchange ideas. When the city of Helsinki hosted a China festival which was held conjointly by the Embassy of China, Janne was thrilled. He wanted me to go with him to see the vendors so that I could tell him what products were genuine and what were not – it was difficult to inform him that I had no real expertise in appraising Chinese goods and was in fact made slightly uncomfortable by his Orientalism, however well-meaning.

When I finally got a chance to ask him why he was so interested in things Asian, Janne explained that “*Bushido* [loosely, the feudal Japanese “code of the warrior class”] has all the elements of what made Finns so different from Americans and from other Europeans. I love the code of the warrior and Japanese culture in general because I think the Japanese kept this idea of honor and respect – things that I think Finns are quickly losing.” I asked him whether he knew that *bushido* had nothing to do with this China fair. He ignored this comment.

What is striking about both Ville and Janne is that they romanticize Asian others and that this imagined elsewhere also provides the space to re-imagine Finland in its mythical state. Just as Ville and Janne identified (and resisted) the demand to

objectify themselves in their job interviews as a product of modern Finland's membership within a coeval global network, allochronous others reconnected them with an era in the distant past, where people had "honor" and did not have to "sell" themselves. Orientalism provided a means of contemporary critique, just as, as I explore below, the positing of an allochronized "real Finland" where labor was less alienated provided a means by which Viivi and Anita (and others whom I describe above) to criticize the same trends.

Pertti Anttonen (2005), referring to these metaphors of cultural others and a mythic past for those elements "lost" due to the corrupting forces of modernity (or in this case "Americanization"), claims that people turn to "the medieval age in Europe or the present-day Orient, where 'ageless' and 'profound' traditions are felt to speak for a kind of social well-being that Westerners have lost due to their modernization" (Anttonen 2005:33). He adds further that "not all of this discourse on non-modern virtuousness is mere Romantic escapism or condescending rhetoric to the noble non-Westerner" (ibid), rather, it is also a tool of self-criticism and social commentary.

What unites the divergent encounters with "otherness" – starting with Kirsti and her perception of those who do not "cover up" their "shame," to Ville and Janne's distaste for the "new" demand for "self appeal" – is a common concern with the imagined relationship between the subject and something larger, what is in Mauss's terms a "total social fact." Kirsti's concern for those Finns who do not cover up their acquisition of "excess" goods, for example, does not stem from a conscious list of rules which led her to apprehend the act of "not covering up" as objectionable. Rather, the need to cover up consumption, especially that consumption which is considered frivolous, lies at a more intuitive level. Lévi-Strauss expands on Mauss's point that "the total fact does not emerge as total simply by reintegrating the discontinuous aspects [the familial, technical, economic, juridical or religious]" (1987: 26), rather, it

emerges as a socially, historically contingent, physio-psychologically *whole* experience of the individual. In this formulation, the objectification of the act of “not covering up” as a specific practice becomes possible because it causes Kirsti to *feel* that “it” or something about “it” is “off.” It is through her experience of difference that “it” comes to represent the social institution and that “covering up” as a “social fact” can be said to exist.

Lévi-Strauss further reminds us that this idea of total social fact, developed by Mauss, is not merely about the insistence on the links between “agricultural techniques and ritual, or boat-building, the form of the family agglomeration and the rules of distribution of fishing hauls” (ibid 29), or in this case the link between a particular work ethic with rules of redistribution and shame. Rather, Levi-Strauss intends to highlight that “*the observer himself is a part of his observation*” (ibid, emphases in the original). Kirsti, by way of making her observation of the presence of an “other” – those who do not “cover” – simultaneously makes a statement about herself: that “she” is different from that “other.” The presence of the other inadvertently places herself as part of the object of her observation, as comparison between herself and the other cannot be made without seeing herself as part of the objects being compared. The perception of difference and its representation (e.g. covering up or not covering up) not only articulate and shape the contours of the “new” but also point to how the speakers are reconstituted vis-à-vis this encounter with the new.

What was covered over by the ideology of welfare was the “truth” of uneven distribution of goods and of skills, reproduced by those who covered up their windows with a carpet and by those who relegated self appeal to what could be put down on paper. How the subject orients himself or imagines “his self” vis-à-vis the social plays an important aspect of how these practices as social “norm” arise. According to Caroline Humphrey (2002) what people think “it” (the “law,” state ideology,

reproduction of relationships, etc.) is, affects the very formation of the social order, that unspoken, implicit realm which causes Kirsti's parents to feel "off" about the prominent display of wealth.

In the transition from one social reality where people felt it "normal" (or at least understandable) to cover up their windows to hide new furniture, to another (e. g. where people are considered "old fashioned" or "crazy" to cover up windows just to hide furniture), certain elements fail to have complete symbolic translation, but are however necessary parts of the whole which constitute social "normalcy."

In the 1960s up until the early 1980s, the Finnish state had the autarchic role of taking a strong stance towards "alcohol, education, mass communication and cultural policies" (Heiskala and Hämäläinen 2007: 85). Heiskala and Hämäläinen (2007) claim that this role of the state reflected the way citizens were construed as "governance subjects who did not always know what was in their best interest" (ibid). However, the economic crisis provided the momentum to reconsider existing systems of collective wage agreements and labor market organizations. According to the researchers, "The new market-oriented policy regimes in the United States and the United Kingdom provided a practical example of this new paradigm" (ibid). However, what I argue in this chapter is that this shift did not merely cause structural changes at the wage negotiation tables or production patterns at work. It affected the nature of social exchange as a total social fact: who you are in relation to others within a given point in time and the form of exchange made possible based on these total facts and the social systems in which these facts come into play. For Kirsti, the "new generation" of Finns are Finns who drink when they want, buy what they want and also expose the fact that they do so with no regards to those who might be offended by this social exchange. It is only with the encounter with difference stemming from social "transition" that triggers the sense that something is "off" or "not as it *should* be" and that it provides

the schism to objectify and to give voice to that which remained unvoiced and unexamined.

The objectification of the past vis-à-vis the “new” in the wake of emergent social values does not necessarily highlight historical discontinuity. One need only ask if luxury scarves would be worn with such pride were it commonplace in Finland before the economic crash: whether young women in Helsinki and the suburbs would make such a fuss about them. The “fuss” exists *because* of the memory of covering up windows and a social demand for “deserving” goods. The scarf wearing allows for an excess pleasure, a satisfaction that not only comes from getting to wear the scarf but also from wearing a resisted item in spite of those who may still resist its open exhibition. Such satisfaction can only come from a continual relationship with the past.

Turning back to those who attend rehabilitation programs for burnout in the introduction, as traditional expectations at work and obligations fall useless and obsolete, I argue that their anger finds no outlet. Being employed and at work take on new meaning. Now, workers must work beyond working hours to stay at work. Being *at* work, no longer carries the same political or moral significance – rather, work now carries value if it contributes to the competitive edge, innovation or efficiency for the company. The financial deregulation also deregulated the categories of *being* not just at work but in terms of being a member of productive society as well as the concept of *being* as it encompasses notions of self-evidence, truth and social expectations. In the ontological shift towards global competitiveness, social life beyond work has transformed.

In the next section, I return to the question of what happens when the protective forces of the welfarist social safety net weakens while the social, religious and moral laws of honesty, modesty and sacrifice remain as significant frames of reference within social discourse.

## **No more Guilt?**

While business consultants and public relations officials for big corporations de-emphasized and described as things of the past the notions of loyalty, gifting and social exchange that fell beyond that prescribed by the visions of the new labor market, I found that those on the receiving end of welfare expressed contrasting sentiments.

Jyrki, an organizer at a NGO for people struggling with mental health shared a story of his own mother's experience after she was given early retirement:

She didn't want to go to the supermarket in the middle of the day because then people would know that she wasn't working. If you don't work you are not one of the people and you don't have value. You become part of society by working. Work is very important in Finland and it's *shameful* if you don't work if you are not over 63.

I asked Jyrki if anyone had said anything to the effect of embarrassing his mother. "No," he said, rather taken aback, "First, that will be the end, and she doesn't go shopping in the daytime, not because someone said anything, but because she doesn't want people to see her." In contrast, Jyrki proposed that the "new" generation of Finns were either getting "weaker" or were slightly more "Americanized" in a way that most people nowadays would "welcome" an early retirement, unlike his mother.

Sensitivity to what others might think manifests in the form of shame. This not only sheds light on how informal social structures uphold tacit moral rules concerning work, but also how the taken-for-grantedness of this moral directive gets reproduced despite the shifts which took place in the realm of work.

This unprovoked self-censorship by Jyrki's 63-year-old mother underscores her active recognition of herself as a subject of a particular moral injunction. Jacques-Alain Miller (2006), in his exposition on shame and guilt, turns to a Lacanian reading of Sartre's analysis of the appearance of shame at the moment when one is made aware of the potential presence and gaze of another person. The scene described by Sartre involves a person who hears footsteps approaching in the hallway just as he peers through a keyhole. Shame appears with what the introduction of the footsteps bring with it: an anonymous gaze. With reference to Sartre, Miller argues that in Sartre's formulation, shame is introduced at the moment "I recognize that I am this object that the Other regards and judges" (Miller 2006:14). This recognition by the individual of his own "object-ness" then orients the individual to "find himself seeing himself" (ibid) as an object. But as Miller (2006) argues, Sartre's focus on the subject's slip into an object is not enough to cause "shame." Shame arises as an effect of apprehending judgment – of one's acknowledgement of being beholden to an external social regulative structure. The subject's fall into the status of an object, a "being-in-itself" and thus "cut off from time" fails to induce a moral reaction (ibid). As one who was lawfully granted early retirement for legitimate reasons, Jyrki's mother has every right to go to the supermarket whenever she desires, but placed under the threat of an anonymous gaze, she has no recourse to justify herself.

Like Kirsti's parents who covered up their window with a carpet when their new furniture arrived, Jyrki's mother does not deny herself the pleasure of receiving early retirement, yet contributes to the fantasy of hardworking Finn who wouldn't "welcome" early retirement. Jyrki's mother hid the fact of her early retirement by not stepping out of her house until working hours ended and it was safe for her to shop. Shame in this sense could come to characterize the powerlessness of the subject in the face of external social structures that already categorize and judge even before the

subject gets to enjoy her freedom. The silent judgment held in the eyes of the other marks the subject in the terms dictated by this Other, but, as this mark is not articulated to the subject, the subject must deal with her own anxieties of what such a mark might mean under “house arrest.” But, alternatively, Kirsti’s parents and Jyrki’s mother did not have to give up personal pleasures. They hid what they obtained for various reasons, but they judged that they should keep what they got (early retirement and new furniture) regardless of social regulative rules. However, the fact that they kept what they deemed “theirs” is not an act of rebellion. According to Žižek (1989), hiding their “goods” despite their own judgment to keep them is the primary condition of real “obedience”: “obedience out of conviction is not real obedience because it is already ‘mediated’ through our subjectivity – that is, we are not really obeying authority but simply following our judgment” (1989: 37).

Žižek argues that “belief, far from being an ‘intimate,’ purely mental state, is always materialized in our effective social activity: belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality” (2000: 36). The fantasy of both Kirsti’s and Jyrki’s parent(s) is that of the fantasy of social equanimity and people’s collective abidance of the laws of hard work and an a priori moral “obligation” to other citizens. In both cases, they act “as if” they fully believe in the ideology of the social democratic state, while it is only through hiding aberrant actions that they contribute to the social reality of the state. It is on this point that Durkheim’s idea of individual obeisance to the regulative order set by society falls short. He claims that “Man’s characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; that is, social” (1951:252): individuals abide by the social regulative order precisely because it comes from an external place, outside of the powers of each individual. Individuals are bound to this power by “respect.” How are we to make sense of Kirsti’s and Jyrki’s parents who, while giving “respect” to social order by hiding their actions, nonetheless got what they wanted –



the regulative order failed to curb their wants. Žižek's (1989) formulation of real obeisance provides an alternative. For Žižek, obeisance is senseless and purely symbolic in a way that conscious "respect" or "conviction" have no place within the automatism with which the law is obeyed. Law is obeyed because it *is*, and this tautology is the fundament to the idea of Law's (capital "L") authority (Žižek 1989). Law points to the original suspension in the world of symbolic networks through which subjects must come into "who" they are; it is the taken-for-granted woodworks of the social stage that are never consciously pointed out but are nonetheless essential in keeping the idea of social reality in place.

In contrast to Jyrki's mother, who ended her career at the height of the transition era Pekka suffers from something other than shame. While the importance of contributing through work and independence remained a common element to his narrative, the surety of how things "really are" concerning how one *ought* to do work and what one can *expect* from others at work and in society, was radically lacking. Unlike Jyrki's mother, who already apprehended foreseen pitfalls associated with her moral and political status as an early retiree, Pekka failed to fit in so comfortably into the symbolic grid. Looking back at our conversation, he often mentioned that he felt "guilty." In contrasting guilt from shame, Miller (2006) argues that "guilt is the effect on the subject of an Other that judges, thus of an Other that contains the values that the subject has supposedly transgressed," while shame "is related to an Other prior to the Other that judges" (Miller 2006: 13).

The guilt expressed by those who attend rehabilitation programs, as I will soon show, comes from their own perception of a sense of "failure." In the face of others who manage in similar circumstances, they judge themselves and find themselves lacking. In the case of shame, Miller (2006) compares shame to nudity. Nudity depicts the condition of shame, as specific body parts signal for shame regardless of social

transgression. Jyrki's mother's shame follows this formula, as she had not "transgressed" – she does not go to shop when she "ought not." Her condition in itself, the stigma attached to her early retiree status is that which had stripped her naked. Such a baring of flesh is made possible by virtue of her citizenship in the welfare state which dictates the "normative" conditions upon which one is given retirement and her identification with the social moral regulatory framework to which she imagines herself beholden. In the case of those who leave their place of work to attend the rehabilitative programs, *guilt* is emphasized over shame, for it seems that he has only himself to blame. Crisis ensues when what one imagined was of value, "being conscientious," or just merely willing to make sacrifices for others, finds no complementary social response.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LEARNING TO COPE: REHABILITATION COURSE FOR BURNOUT

#### **Pääskynpesä**

Pääskynpesä (literally “Swallow’s Nest”) is a rehabilitation center located in Iiomantsi, a town with a population size of 6,057 on the Russian border in Finnish Northern Karelia. As I stepped out of the public bus from the larger city of Joensuu about an hour away, I easily followed the main road to the center of town. Iiomantsi suffered heavily from Soviet attacks during World War II, and the village center had been rebuilt in sparse but clean rows of gray concrete blocks flanked by birch trees, urban design that contrasted sharply with the ornate Orthodox church located at the edge of town. Although a little past mid-day, the town center was quiet and the few people milling around the entrance of the only supermarket in the district gave me long looks as I disturbed the quiet of the day by dragging my suitcase with its squeaky un-oiled wheels.

The rehabilitation center, located in between one of Finland’s largest wooden Orthodox churches and the village’s main Lutheran church, overlooked a heavily wooded lake. It was early March in 2007, and, while the sky was a crystal blue, the lake was still frozen except for the small hole near the bank kept deliberately clear of ice for those who fancied a cold splash after a long sit in the burning heat of the sauna. From the entrance, looking through the sliding glass doors and into the lobby of the gray concrete building, I saw children playing in the steamy pool through a glass wall and aged people in wheelchairs sitting motionless in front of the large picture window overlooking the lake. This queer juxtaposition of active youth and slow-moving age was explained to me by the front desk, the rehabilitation center doubled as a resort hotel [*lomahotelli*], servicing the local residents with access to the pool, outdoor group

activities involving snowshoes, kayaks, Nordic skis, tents, etc., and nightly entertainment. The center was quiet that day when I first arrived except for the two slot machines<sup>12</sup> that flanked the public restrooms, breaking the silence with their occasional clamor. I checked in and was given a quick tour of the facilities.

The building itself was refurbished from what used to be a hospital. Now, it mainly entertained domestic (and some foreign) tourists as well as people attending rehabilitation courses that were offered at the center. Traditionally, the center provided much-needed physical therapy and rehabilitation for war veterans and people with severe disabilities. However, with Finland's war generation on the decline and with movements within disability studies to rethink causes of disability as not only something physically generated but also socially derived, rehabilitation centers like Pääskynpesä have come to offer therapeutic programs for eating disorders, burnout, and depression amongst others.

Inside the center, social workers, psychologists and other clinical personnel had their own individual offices on the second floor, while the physical therapists shared an office with other activity supervisors on the ground floor in between the lobby and the common cafeteria. Mixed in with individual offices on the second floor were classrooms, entertainment rooms with televisions, a pool table, a smoking room, and a communal computer. In a small section were rooms kept expressly for Finland's aging war veterans and more seriously injured patients requiring physical therapy. Hotel guests and clients for courses such as the burnout rehabilitation course stayed on the third floor, as did I. The third floor had a common television room, a common reading room and a little room for child daycare.

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<sup>12</sup> Money from slot machines all over Finland fund specific welfare and health programs. As such, they can be found in most waiting rooms of train and bus centers, as well as at kiosks, and other such public centers.

In this chapter, I detail the idea of therapy for burnout in Finland through the lens of my ethnographic research in Pääskynpesä as well as other rehabilitation courses and groups elsewhere in Finland. But before I go into more detail about my experiences at Pääskynpesä, I explore the larger-scale national structure of rehabilitation and mental health in Finland. Unlike in the US where treatments of such conditions take individuated forms, in Finland, these issues represent structural issues of the workplace and thus something to be treated on a systematic manner.

In 2001, the Finnish government made an amendment to the Occupational Health Act in a way of response to the demand of the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions [*Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö* or SAK] for employer groups (e.g. Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers [*Teollisuuden ja Työnantajain Keskusliitto* or TT]; the Employers' Confederation of Service Industries [*Palvelutyönantajat* or PT]) to pay more attention to the links between increased demands at work and increased prevalence of burnout and other stress-related health issues at work. Basing their concern over burnout on a research report (*Prevalence of burn-out in the Finnish working population*) published by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in 1997 and which showed that over half the Finnish workforce suffered from symptoms of burnout, the SAK pointed to what they perceived as an increase in mental workload, pace, the demand to be flexible, adaptable and efficient and overall to be competitive as the basic problem for the prevalence of burnout and permanent disability.

In 2004, the Occupational Health Act was amended again to make the provision of occupational rehabilitation a statutory obligation. This Act, which encouraged both employers and employees to patronize rehabilitation services, was meant to prevent conditions such as burnout from developing into a more serious disease (e.g. depression) deserving of heavier compensation packages than burnout.

The response by the Finnish public health community to the demands by the Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) not only mirrors the consent of policy makers to see workplace issues as simultaneously political issues and one in which legal actions should be made, but also an acknowledgement of an instantiation of a “new” economic model.

When the discourse of the “new” economy shifted the till-then normative notions of work as “old,” it also transformed the notion of disability. When productivity equals work-capacity and not “work” itself, loss of professional efficacy due to decreased workplace well-being calls for a new need for intervention. The new move to include conditions such as burnout and depression as conditions in need of rehabilitation supplements this shift in the conceptualization of disability. The Finnish Social Insurance Institute (KELA) encouraged this move (Niemelä and Salminen 2006).

Mannila et al. (2005) argue that a view of “disability” that specifically viewed reduced working capacity as “impairment” diverges from the “classic” sense of disability, by which they refer to deafness, blindness and other physiological challenges. KELA specifies reduced working capacity, or “work impairment” [*työkyvyttömyys*] as a way to call attention to the potential risk of such a disability linking up with more serious conditions that may end up causing premature retirement.

Rehabilitation courses for decreased well-being in the workplace such as the one by Pääskynpesä’s “Exhaustion in work-life rehabilitation course” [*Työelämässä uupuneet kuntoutuskurssi*] boomed in the mid-2000s as work-life surveys and other such national surveys (e.g. Labour Force Survey 2002) on work-life issues by the Finnish Pension Fund and KELA promoted “vocationally-oriented early medical rehabilitation” with the hopes of reducing the heavy social expenditure incurred in paying disability benefits and medical expenses. In 2004, for example, KELA

provided rehabilitation services to “86,174 individuals (1.7% of the population) at a total cost of 286 million euros” out of which 80% were those of working age (Suoyrjö et al. 2007: 198).

Pääskynpesä started their first course for people with burnout in 2004. Based on the golden standard for rehabilitation for burnout developed by the Finnish Social Insurance Institute (KELA), the clinical staff at the center came up with their own variety of rehabilitative options that were then sold to KELA. Once sold, the program was reviewed every four years by KELA for possible renewal of their contract. While the course must pass KELA’s accreditation process (which is based on an international standard), rehabilitation centers dotted across the Finnish landscape are allowed some leeway in modifying the treatment in ways that takes advantage of the uniqueness of the location or of the equipment available at the center itself. KELA buys these rehabilitative courses from private rehabilitative centers like Pääskynpesä and then lists them on its nationwide database for availability. An individual worker officially diagnosed with burnout or work-related depression need only to visit the local KELA office to select a specific center once his/her application criteria are met.

Although most rehabilitation centers are located in relatively isolated areas surrounded by forests, Pääskynpesä emphasized as two of its unique features of its therapeutic package a “Day in the Forest” [*Luontokuntoutus*] as well as a “Day of Silence” at the Orthodox church nearby. Both these activities sought to give clients a chance to take advantage of the vast forest and lake territory of Ilomantsi and Iljala, an outpost of the Orthodox Church (Church of St Elijah), where Nelli directed a session on how to be at “peace with oneself.”

Pääskynpesä’s course ran for a total of eleven days with about twelve clients per course and a shorter follow-up session of seven days in the following summer. People attending the course were referred to as “clients” [*asiakas*] by the attendant

staff, as burnout is not a primary diagnosis and the aim of rehabilitation was not to “cure” the “sick” but to spark a process of change in the individual through the provision of information on how to overcome and cope with stressful situations (Mannila et al. 2005). Clients were to sleep and eat at the center for the duration of the course and to participate in the activities as stipulated by the course.

As I sat in the lobby having coffee on the day the clients were to arrive, I found no difficulty recognizing them as they walked in with their lightly packed suitcases: some looking rather unsure, some rather bashful, but all dressed quite distinctly different from the usual residents of the center: the war veterans, people with physical disabilities, mother and children groups going to the pool and women attending eating disorder classes. They looked professional, urban and, despite their reason for being there, rather bright-eyed and alert when asked by the front desk about their business.

My first formal introduction to the group attending the course for burnout occurred on the first group session with the attendant psychologist. As I entered the room towards the end of the session, I was given some time to explain my project to the clients and to ask if anyone would be interested in sitting with me for formal interviews. They were all asked to sign a waiver stating that my presence at the center and participation in some of their group activities did not disturb the rehabilitative process. Of the twelve participants, four signed up for the formal interviews but all signed in saying that I was welcome to join them for meals, outdoor excursions and group activities meant for fun.

The daily schedule at the rehabilitation center was unexpectedly hard. Despite the title of the course, which directly referenced curing those who had become “exhausted” [*uupuneet*] by work, rehabilitation manifested another kind of work. Morning activities began at 8 AM sharp every day except for Sunday. I shared the dark, drowsy mornings at the cafeteria before the sessions with the members, each



mechanically pushing spoonfuls of porridge into the mouth. From eight, sessions ran for about forty-five minutes to an hour and activities continued until four in the afternoon. Several different sessions were mixed and matched in different combinations each day.

Within the eleven-day period, clients met with a physician, psychologist, a team of physiotherapist, public health nurse, social worker, nutritionist and a “free-time” leader [*vapaa-ajanohtaja*], a typical round of meetings according to Miia, the resident psychologist. Of these, the physiotherapist had the most contact with clients, meeting with them nineteen times, and Miia met with groups or individuals a total of nine times. The rest of the professionals met with the group once, except the social worker, who met with the clients twice.

The physician provided the initial health check to make sure the no one should hurt themselves through participating in physiotherapy and to proscribe what exercise a client should avoid. While my access to private psychotherapy sessions between Miia and an individual client was limited, the staff openly encouraged me to attend most of the physical therapy sessions as they claimed that sessions included exercises everyone should perform on a daily basis. Activities included stretching, creative breathing exercises, demonstrations on how to solve ergonomic issues at work, and meditative relaxation. In addition to these activities meant to encourage “relaxation,” heavier exercises involved water aerobics, mid-range walks, aerobic-type exercises (e.g. skip-rope, dancing, running in place to music).

These diverse activities stem from the objectives and goals of rehabilitation as determined by the standards of the Finnish Social Insurance Institute (KELA). While KELA does not dictate the exact menu of the exercise program, KELA nonetheless provides training pamphlets and folders through which individual physiotherapists pick and choose the appropriate exercises. KELA’s standard for “Group Rehabilitation

Programme for People with Mental Fatigue” [*Henkisesti Uupuneiden Kurssi*] provides three goals of rehabilitation for burnout: 1) physical well-being [*fyysinen hyvinvointi*], 2) psychological well-being [*psykkinen hyvinvointi*] and 3) coping with occupational demands [*työelämässä selviytyminen*]. Each of the rehabilitation activities was directly connected to one of these model goals, and Pääskynpesä staff made these connections explicit.

Teaching clients how to relax falls under the prescribed methods for 1) physical well-being. Relaxation for the Pääskynpesä staff refers to bodily awareness and the ability of individuals to control their physical bodies. Stress-coping strategies come under the heading of treatment methods for 2) mental and psychological well-being. Cognitive psychological models are used together with group and individual counseling to help the individual detect early symptoms of burnout and depression. Under 3) “coping with occupational demand,” clients are prescribed how to manage “job stressors” such as workload as well as meeting demands of “flexibility in work arrangements” (KELA standard given to me in 2007 by KELA).

In phase two of the program, “coping skills” take up the focal aim. The aim of this phase includes the inculcation of “positive thinking” and “problem-solving methods and goal achievement” (KELA). Methods included in this “coping skill” phase are teaching clients how to use the “social network as a resource” and to boost their “social interaction skills.” Below, I examine the implications of thinking of rehabilitation as the development of a set of “skills,” and of burnout as conceived of as a lack of these “skills”.

### **A “Need” to Relax**

My first activity with the group began with a physiotherapy session with Taru. As we all respectively finished our breakfast at the cafeteria and slowly gathered at the

gymnasium, Taru was already in stretched position on a mat on the floor with closed eyes. The cold outside left frosty traces on the glass windows of the hall but in contrast the chill day enhanced the brightness and warmth inside. We began with gentle aerobics done in a folk-dance style to warm up: pretzel-like hand positions and simultaneously kicking up our legs in unison in time with Taru's hand clapping. The appearance was intentionally ridiculous: as people began to relax enough to laugh, Taru showed us how to stretch our necks, our shoulders and our backs – the parts of our bodies most inclined to hurt in office work. After several rounds of stretches, Taru turned on the music and told us to get stretch mats for ourselves. The sounds of a Chinese flute and strings swelled out of the CD player. Once we all had our mats, we closed our eyes and breathed according to the precise directions of Taru. "Breath in through one foot, pull it through the leg and then pass it out through the other leg and out through the other foot," she said. We had now reached the "relaxation" aspect of the therapy. She told us during our deep breathing exercises that we were listening to something called "Tao Art."

In contrast to group discussion sessions,, a sense of togetherness developed from sharing in these physical activities, expressed through a lot of joking around as one person or another failed to meet Taru's expectations. For example, Taru continually remained unimpressed about my "folk-dancing" abilities despite her good natured attempts to teach me how to loop my arms through the twisted knots of the other group members' arms. I kept missing a loop, making me lose my step, and losing my step made me bumble my way back into Taru, who then had to duck through the links of arms to keep from getting hit in the head. The repeated times at which this happened made the whole group laugh and mess up even more.

After the second day, members started to take dinners together. I often joined them for this and then continued with time in the sauna (attached to the public pool),

after which we spent a long stretch of the night at the center lobby which had turned into a bar after dinner..

For many members of the rehabilitation course whose symptoms included sleeplessness, such nights were welcomed and it was there members could discuss their personal lives, their hometown, or simply reflect upon their condition and the center. Unlike in the more formalized interviews I had with them through the week, and unlike the environment of the group therapy sessions, these conversations were spontaneous.

Nights were long at the center, especially given Northern Karelia's latitude. I often passed members quietly sitting alone or in small groups in the lobby which was located next to the women's sauna entrance long after I had swam in the pool and sat in the sauna for a good amount of time and had made myself ready to go to bed. The darkness outside my window was accentuated by the florescent light of my room at the center, and even after I had closed the curtains and lay down on the bed that was lined soft with a special therapeutic mat, I often found myself unable to sleep, too, and I often joined the group in the lobby.

While the room was clean and the bed comfortable, the past history of the rehabilitation center as a regional hospital still left its trace somewhere in the ambiance of the space. My naked feet felt pink and fleshy against the cold linoleum floor, reminiscent of sterile hospital floors. The white walls, white sheets, and florescent lighting also reminded one that this was a *medical* space, and the although I felt an initial awkwardness about joining the group in the lobby, the silence and sterility of the room made me look forward to getting out of my solitude and joining increasingly familiar faces.

One night, Kylli saw me fidgeting, eyeing the group and obviously not quite sure where to sit or how to approach the gray mass of people sitting in the half-

darkness, long after the bar tender had turned off the lights. She waved me over and pushed Onni, another member from the group, who was sitting next to her off the seat. As I sheepishly took over Onni's seat, Onni walked behind Kylli's chair to give her shoulders a rub. In between vigorous rubs from behind, Kylli told me that I was embarking on a "brave" journey trying to get at this problem of depression and burnout in Finland. "You've come all the way to Finland," she said, "I mean, not even Helsinki, but here," she rolled her eyes and moved her fingers in a circle, "here, in this little town!" she laughed. She told me that she was one of the few who signed up for the formal interviews and that she looked forward to "telling the world that Finland had reached a crisis." Suddenly, she started to cry without warning. In between big yawning gaps when she swallowed air in between sobs, she repeated, "it has been going on for a long time, but now we have reached a real crisis." Onni rushed to get her some tissues and his own glass of Gin Lonkero (a gin-based cocktail that is especially popular in the brighter seasons) for her to drink.

After the can of Lonkero in her hand and several other members who came over from nearby chairs to pat her on the arm or bring over more boxes of tissue paper, she calmed down. Some group members looked disapprovingly at me over what had happened. Or rather, feeling the eyes of these members turned upon me in the dark gloom of the night, I felt self-conscious of how I had inadvertently caused this outburst. My presence, a foreigner, younger than most of the clients and asking questions about larger issues of work and melancholia, had somehow triggered Kylli's emotional reaction. I got ready to make some remark as an excuse to leave, feeling like I had intruded upon the clients during a time when they were free of Pääskynpesä staff and official activities. Kylli however, held me back.

She started telling me about why she had come to the rehabilitation center. "I needed to communicate with different school officials so that I could put these kids

from my school into different schools, fulfill their needs... I needed to use the computer. But I don't like computers and computers don't like me!" she said, suddenly talking about her workplace. She laughed. The group laughed in reaction to her laughter, and suddenly, I felt that I was permitted to stay. I asked her if she could start at the beginning. This is her story:

I worked with children who needed special education and it was my job to find them a place in regular schools once they were ready. In Finland we have a law for special kids but then the law goes in loops [she made circles in the air with her finger]. It was all shit! [*paska!*]

We had a system of evaluation but when you do it you just put roses, roses, roses, roses. This is rosy and everything is *rosy*. You know you are not allowed to say what the problem is and you just end up feeling guilty inside. I say we have reached a critical level because schools don't want to take my kids [the special education students from her school] any more. They say they don't have room: I know it's about money but I kept saying in the evaluations that everything was *rosy*.

She stopped for a while and added, "If you are sick and you are missing a leg then you have a real problem and people accept it but if you are tired nobody says 'Why don't you go home and sleep?'" She then addressed the group, who was also listening. "We come from different places, different occupations, but I think we all have something in common. We feel shame [*häpeä*]. Shame, because we are supposed to work. We are nothing if we don't have work."

Onni, who had been continuously massaging Kylli's back chimed in as if to change the tone of the conversation and asked me, "Don't you know of people who

give a lot more than what they need to give at work in Japan?” I answered that such themes were common in workplace studies conducted in Japan. Onni then pressed for more comparisons between Finland and Japan, despite the fact that I had never said I did research in Japan on this theme. “You should know,” he pushed. “It should be the same.”

Kylli saved me by launching into her feelings about being at Pääskynpesä and how she felt like she belonged here, with the group, despite what her husband might think. “I have been feeling so exhausted [*uupunut*] for so long that now I think that I have always kind of wanted to be here.” Looking around the room she claimed that even though this was the third day she was spending with the group, she already felt as though she had spent “real time” with them. No one said anything in response, but the tension in the room was notably high again. People looked around agitatedly, some who were sitting close to the circle that had formed near Kylli had moved away to the dark corners. Kylli’s friend Onni, who had run to get her something more to drink, added on his return that he had also felt some sense of shame as he found it hard to think of himself as someone with a “mental illness.” But he admitted that the idea of getting rehabilitation intrigued him and that now meeting others who shared many of the complaints he himself had held against his workplace, he already felt halfway vindicated. Vindicated about what? “I thought it was me,” he said. “I thought that I was wrong. I didn’t know why it was that the more I tried to do well at work, the more things turned out for the worst. I couldn’t explain why I felt like things were going down. Here, you learn the words to explain how you feel.”

Kylli, who was sitting next to me, patted him on the shoulder, and they gave each other a hug. Helmi reached over and also gave him a vigorous pat on the back. It was not only alcohol that made the members more physically intimate. The group members hugged and kissed each other in ways that were extravagant and over-the-top

in comparison to the standards of social decorum I had otherwise seen in Finland. It seemed as it were, amongst “family” that such things could happen, and even then, the amount of physical interaction amongst group members vastly outweighed similar expressions in Tarja’s family back in Helsinki. The constancy of the huggings and declarations of group belonging that took place during the day when non-group residents were about in the hotel also seemed to insulate the group from the gaze of others who supposedly “would not understand,” because it was, as Kylli had put it, not like the group members had “lost leg[s].” The affectionate touching and heightened sense of group camaraderie seemed to veil as well as remind the group of the disapproval many felt would be levied against them should they share their complaints with those outside the group.

While the night was full of hushed discussions, the mornings brought tight-lipped members. As I found one member one day smoking by herself in the smoking room half asleep and nonresponsive to my question as to where to find the others in the group, I asked the Ulla, secretary of the rehabilitative unit who handled relationships with KELA, about the challenging schedule and whether it was counterintuitive that a therapeutic course for burnout – a syndrome known for its high level of exhaustion - to be so rigorous.

“We follow the KELA standard and do what it requires. And yes, it requires a lot,” she replied. I asked her what happens if people failed to keep up. She replied that the rehabilitation process begins with an initial interview set up between a nurse, a physician and a physiotherapist who will then plan a program together with the client so that the client will not have to take part in every group activity if she or he does not feel up to it. In a further response to my question of whether such diversity in individual regimen raises a concern over the coherence of the rehabilitative process, she replied, “Well, no, because there is more burnout. The newspapers say all the time



that it is so busy at work that this kind of rehab is really needed. That is why KELA decided to offer this kind of rehab.”

According to Ulla, coherence and or the strict adherence to the program by attendants do not challenge the benefits of rehabilitation for burnout, as the increased pace at work calls for intervention of any sort – even intervention that allows those on the receiving end some leeway. But this open-endedness of the program allowed for those with heavier depression to fall by the wayside. While the attendant psychologist, Miia, commented that such a loss was inevitable in any treatment program, I noticed that those (like the smoking woman) who fell not only fell out of the program but also from the sense of social togetherness that had developed amongst the participants in the informal spaces of the sauna and the lobby bar.

Here, I wish to examine this idea of “togetherness” that Onni, Kylli, and the others in the lobby bar characterized as being the principal appeal of the rehabilitation program. Such a comment is highly reminiscent of the conversations I had with people attending similar self-help groups for burnout in Helsinki, a context I turn to in the next chapter. However, what separated the participants of the rehabilitation group from that of the self-help groups was the continual recourse to physicality: they regularly hugged and cried on each other’s shoulders, physical manifestations of intimacy that were noticeably absent from the self-help group meetings ).

What was common between the two groups, albeit accentuated in the case of the rehabilitation course, was that in each case, the attendant self-help group leader or the psychologist helped develop a master narrative around which the attendees modeled their own narratives. As Miia often reminded me, “rehabilitation is not a cure. The goal here is to help the clients sort through their life and to give them the information they need should they decide they need more intensive help or if they can cope on their own.” The isolation of the group from their usual surroundings and the

intimacy of the group sessions forced individuals to form new social bonds away from the prying eyes of society and provided new opportunities for developing alternative ways of interaction – such as the highly visible physicality and intensity with which some of the clients bonded.

Both Pekka, also a client at Pääskynpesä, and Kylli reproduced in their own discourse an aspect of an informational session on burnout given by Miia: “if you have burnout, it’s not like you have lost a leg,” implying that “others” might not recognize the disease as legitimate. Pekka and Kylli both speak of “shame,” they feel the eyes of society all the more keenly because they know that their condition is not one of “objective” social fact. As mentioned above, burnout is not a primary diagnostic category. Finnish public health and policy makers give it the attention they do because of its potential link to depression, which *is* a clinical condition and, as mentioned above, one of the leading causes for premature retirement. Thus, burnout itself, and those diagnosed as burnt-out, represent risks to notions of productivity and worth. Just as in James Ferguson’s analysis of the development discourse applied by international agencies in which risk and potential failures presumed of a group are remedied through “education” (1994: 65), here, the risks presented by burnout are also countered by prescriptions on how to relax, eat well, set realistic goals and developing stress coping skills. As Ferguson argues, pointing to individual lack and potential failure (e.g. that a burnt-out worker became such through not wisely following sensible prescriptions on relaxation) allows elites and knowledge producers to increase their sphere of control in unintended ways. Similarly, Allan Young (1980:133) claims in his examination of the risk of stress, stress as an ideological framework erases structural and political differentials in power to reframe workplace issues as problems to be solved through increasing an individual’s “coping mechanisms” or through building “psychosocial supports.” Both Ferguson (1994) and Young (1980) point to

the objectification of, or rather the act of producing an archive of risks as lending support for a technical/clinical and rationalized approach to conditions born of less rational contexts.

While both highlight the connection between the objectification and reification of risks and increased governmentality, neither articulates the anxiety inherent within such processes that acts as the driving force. For instance, the inventory of what makes a nation “developed” masks over the absence of an existing realization of the ideal of “development.” Like ideals of “democracy,” “freedom,” “competitiveness” and other such visions, they exist primarily within the discursive frame and within the inventory created to judge whether a group can claim of living up to the standards<sup>13</sup>.

In the case of burnout, and of the diagnostic categories of fatigue and neurasthenia before it, psychological conditions gain temporal and social resonance within specific moments of political and economic crisis when the categories of normativity and productive ideals are themselves thrown in question. These obsessively-repeated attempts by medical knowledge experts and policy makers to inventory “fatigue” manifest what Jacques Derrida (1995) calls “archive fever.” This fever speaks to the obsession of inventorying, making objective and communicable what is in essence always beyond domestication. Derrida says of this idiom, archive fever:

Listening to the French idiom, and in it the attribute *en mal de*, to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun *mal* might name. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance, the international index of competitiveness (Global Competitiveness Report by the World Forum) and another, on international comparisons of freedom of speech.

away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no "*mal-de*" can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d'archive* (1995: 91).

The "originary" or the "original" notion of violence escapes the medical and social archives of wounds. It can only capture what Lacan (1986: 61) points to as a ghostly, empty husk of what it purports to represent. While inventories (like the Maslach Burnout Inventory) provide the tools through which to make sense of the present moment of social crisis and change, they are nonetheless substitutes of a truth which always "slips" beyond our grasp. As psychiatrists tally-up Kylli's score on the diagnostic test, Kylli's own memory of violence experienced at work translates into the memory of what it means within the archived knowledge of work-related burnout. For Onni, if he could not speak of his individual suffering in the context of larger social issues before his diagnosis, his memory of his "original" response no longer remains open to his "naked" examination. However, while the framework of burnout fails to account for *all* of Kylli's injuries, it nonetheless provides the basis of social mastery of the situation for both Kylli and others and for those treating them in a way that allows them to cure some of their wounds.

The archive develops around an empty center, or using Derrida's word, it provides a "*prosthetic substitute*" (1995: 95) that enables those like Kylli to make socially significant their conditions of suffering on the one hand, and to provide potential for control and rehabilitation on the other. Through this idiom, the risks and

meaning of the present take on a ghost-like materiality: through this idiom, the past takes on a new character. And through the prosthesis of burnout, those diagnosed come to emblemize the risks of the present even though the archive speaks to a more fundamental trauma – the trauma inherent within the subject’s habitation of the social.

“Archive fever” structures the convictions at stake in different groups and affects their relationship to the other. For the new elites of the new economy, the fever drives the archivization of competitiveness and of grounding in empirical basis the quality of “efficiency” and employee potential. For Left-leaning academics and public health officials engaged in the control of risks and failure of the present, the fever manifests in ways exploitative measures take objective form (e.g. as burnout) and the past (e.g. Viivi’s Finland of “my mother’s time”) as the antithesis of the evil present. In this sense, while some are pathologized through the archive, those who rely upon the archive to diagnose pathologies also exhibit symptoms of the fever [*mal d’archive*].

Shame and fear of “outside” eyes might stem, as Kylli and Pekka (see introduction) already mention, from not participating in the moral economy of “welfare” – becoming a citizen through work. However, I argue that “archive fever” adds to their anxious state. Their wounds cannot speak for themselves, it is not as if you “lost a leg.” Their condition as victims depends on the archive and its social legitimacy.

Žižek’s (1989) joke of the “fool” who thought “he was a grain of corn” provides a comparable point:

After some time in a mental hospital, he was finally cured: now he knew that he was not a grain but a man. So they let him out; but soon afterwards he came running back, saying: ‘I met a hen and I was afraid she would eat me.’ The doctors tried to calm him: ‘But what are you afraid of? Now you know that you

are not a grain but a man.’ The fool answered: ‘Yes, of course, *I* know that, but does the hen know that I am no longer a grain?’ (1989: 35).

In the absence of a wound that “speaks” for itself (in this case an amputated leg), the medical discourse colonizes this space. However, it provides a “prosthetic substitute,” as, without this prosthesis, subjects such as Pekka and Kylli find no way to make their suffering socially relevant. Moreover, even they themselves have no access to the “naked” wound. They can only speak of the wound – e.g. “injuries” incurred at work – through the idiom and prosthesis of burnout. But this relevance and legitimacy faces constant challenges as the invisibility of their condition creates anxiety that, despite being recognized by the medical establishment, it might not be recognized by those gazing Others out there in society – recall my above discussion of Jyrki’s early-retired mother’s shame in leaving her house during working hours. Rehabilitation and the relative isolation it provides represents the liminal space necessary for clients to be free from the worry about what the “hen” may think of them, and gives them time to re-negotiate their position vis-à-vis the “hen.”

### **Learning to Relax: A Day in the Forest [*Luontoretki-päivä* ]**

On the seventh day of the course, I joined the group for *luontoretki-päivä*, a day translated to me as “a day in the *forest*,” rather than the literal translation of “nature tour day,” the significance of which I explain later.

Two physiotherapists, Iiris and Tapio led this expedition, and the group was to meet at nine o’clock sharp in the basement with all the equipment. Iiris and Tapio were already busily gathering up snow gear, snow shoes and food by the time the group made its way down. As they saw me, they came over to shake my hand and then immediately launched into a short introduction to what we were to do for the day, after

which the group scattered, each separately searching for clothing and shoes that should fit them. Tapio miraculously found skiwear that fit me and told me that I had better get warmer socks if I didn't want to get cold. I ran back to my room to fetch them and bumped into Pekka in the process. I called out to him quite cheerfully, as he had just the prior evening talked to me for several hours about his summer cottage [*mökki*] in the eastern Finnish countryside, saying that it was the only thing he really missed from home and eliciting a sympathetic laugh from the rest of the lobby crowd. But that morning, I found out too late that he had another sleepless night and that my cheerful outbursts were less than welcome. He grunted in response and brushed past me in a hurry.

As I got back to the basement from fetching my socks from my room, I saw Pekka again and found that he seemed to have relaxed a little. Tapio offered him a warmer jacket but he flatly refused. Tapio gently persuaded him to take it and I saw Pekka slowly let himself be persuaded. He took the jacket without looking at Tapio, who nonetheless kept looking directly at him. As I stood there, ready to go in my warm gear, I noticed that others had been helping Iiris pack food and other items into the van all along without having been told. Feeling like a fifth wheel, I tried to look for things to do. But I found my efforts anticipated at each turn, and it appeared as if people had quietly picked up on what needed to be done, almost as if they had been working together for a long time. No one gave out overt directions or asked specifically for help. The necessary items were wrapped up, carried and placed in one of the three cars that were made ready for the trip by the group ready to lend a hand. When nothing remained to be packed, the group suddenly divided into three and got into the vehicles. At this time, I was still wondering what was going on. I stood there still looking around for things to do and feeling foolish when Iiris and Tapio called me over and saved me from wandering between cars.

Iris and Tapio had the car with all the equipment. I sat next to containers of food that were stacked up and placed on the back seat. As we drove through bumpy roads, the containers looked as if they might topple over. I reached over and held them in place. Iris looked over her shoulder to see how it was that the containers had stopped rattling. It was the first time that day I felt remotely useful.

On the way to Tetriniemi, our destination and a private nature reserve owned by Pääskynpesä, I asked them about the significance of this excursion in the context of rehabilitation. “Well, it is for people to relax and to be quiet and to think about themselves,” said Tapio. And in context of why it should take place in Tetrineimi, he explained it thus, “We are a small country, there are only a few of us and we like to be alone. We need space!”

Iris added, “We Finns come from the forest. It’s like we fell off the trees! The forest is a place where we feel most at home. Once we get there, you will see for yourself. We don’t have to explain to our clients. It is self-evident for us that going to the forest is therapeutic.”

Tetriniemi joined up with Petkeljärvi, now a national park, but once a battlefield during the Continuation War (1941-1944) against the Soviet Union. If the trees that flanked the roads on the way seemed still and quiet, the forest of Tetriniemi was quieter still. As I drifted off in my own thoughts waiting for everyone to arrive, I was again called back to the issue at hand by the movement of people from the other arriving cars. Headed by Iris, several of the participants were already helping with unloading the snowshoes, ski poles and food. This time I was close enough to the equipment to take part in the action. From my hands, the snowshoes went to Onni and then to Kai and then to Helmi who arranged them in a neat pile by the cabin.

Tapio put on his snowshoes first and said that we were going to walk for about a kilometer with the food. As I reconnected with the group, they seemed to have



perked up in the car and many were smiling. Kyll and Onni were engrossed in a play snowball fight. Oona, one of the older members of the group, called out to the two that they were going to be left behind. Kylli giggled, put on her snowshoes and scuttled up to the group which had moved on a little ways and hugged Oona from behind.

It was a clear day with a bright blue sky. Some people hummed. Some broke away from the little line of people that had formed behind Tapio to wander into the thick snow and some seemed deep in thought but engrossed in the hike nonetheless. I noticed one member missing from the group, Tytti, the woman who, as I mention above, would often sit alone and smoke instead of joining activities and often simply did not respond when I spoke to her. Her absence was however, almost expected, as she was often missing from activities that required intense physical exercise.

Tapio looked back now and again to make sure that we were all catching up. We crossed a frozen lake and then up an esker, and we finally saw a lean-to. Up close, I saw it had a little metal stove and chimney. Some people sat down on the bench and some even shared a plastic sitting cushion seemingly out of nowhere. Tapio put down three big thermos of warm blueberry juice. Some of the participants pulled out the plastic cups and poured themselves some juice, while the younger men left without saying anything. Not quite comfortable to just sit with the older participants inside the lean-to and with people already drinking the warm juice, I decided to follow Onni and Pekka towards the more heavily wooded area. I did not follow them long when I realized that they had not gone hiking along, rather, they had gotten up to get wood from the shed without having been told to do so. All of this happened as soon as we arrived. I marveled again at the swiftness and silence with which some clients made the seats more comfortable, some poured the drinks and how Onni and Pekka, for instance, knew immediately that they were to get wood (and where the wood was

located). How did they know what to do on this excursion planned by those at the rehabilitation center in a site unknown to them?

The activities themselves were not surprising, given the context and the needs of the group. But the lack of communication necessary to get twelve people arranged in such a short amount of time, each doing his/her respective duty caught my attention. It rather made me reflect upon my own assumptions of what being a “client,” as these participants were called, meant. In my mind, I had imagined how Iiris and Tapio would have a busy job of taking care of twelve people with insomnia, fatigue and depression. Instead, I found that Iiris and Tapio had only to start unpacking or lifting objects and the group worked around them. The manner in which participants did not miss a beat in what to carry next or to fetch made me stand feeling completely inadequate and useless. Noticing that having followed Pekka and Onni to the woodshed had put myself in their way during their return trip lugging armfuls of wood made me further self-conscious, a feeling of self-induced stress and paranoia that caught me entirely by surprise. I wrote in my fieldnotes for that day that I felt distinctly “inadequate, inefficient and stressed: something that might get me diagnosed with burnout if I were to continue in this way!”

Tapio and Onni made the fire and Iiris and Helmi opened the packages of sausages to be put on the grill. As I settled down on the corner of a bench by the fire, Kylli came up to me and handed me a warm cup of blueberry juice. She poured another cup and handed it to Tapio. I heard someone chopping wood not far off and Pekka came back with neat bits of kindling with beautifully feathered edges. They were so pretty that I made a big deal out of them when Pekka lit them on fire, causing the group to break into laughter at my amazement. Kylli held my hand and told me gently that Pekka had to feather them for us so that they will catch on fire more efficiently, and Tapio, smiling mischievously, offered me an axe so that I could “try

making more pretty wood to burn”. I declined, but the episode became a moment where the clients began to engage in national self-stereotype. Helmi, who had once told me that she had traveled to Arizona before, joked that “everyone in Finland can chop wood and make ‘pretty’ firewood. It’s what we do on most weekends instead of going to the shopping center or to the café.” Pekka added, more seriously, “You need to be able to make a fire and know your trees if want a good sauna. [Finnish] people like to go to their cottages [*mökki*] over the weekend to enjoy going back to nature.”

As Pekka and I got ready to sit down, we noticed that the bench and all of the seats inside the lean-to were taken. Others also noticed this problem. One of the older ladies nudged her neighbor while looking at me, and then the nudge continued until two clean seats were made and from somewhere a hand passed me two plastic cushions.

When the meal of hot berry juice and hot dogs was over, Iris put some snow in the kettle and put it over the fire to make some coffee. The kettle soon started to sizzle and at this, Tapio got up. With coffee bag in hand, he began the day’s discussion, asking the group to share their descriptions of “landscapes of the mind” [*mielen maisemat*] that give them peace and comfort.

Oona laughed, and described her living room at sunset when she could look out and see the lake which faced her house turn a brilliant red. Helmi described a winter landscape, of forests covered in thick snow. Onni made a joke about everyone present now entering into Helmi’s mind – a comment which reminded us that we were exactly sitting in such a forest covered in snow, but Helmi protested that what she meant was not the present situation, but being in a forest with no thought, where one has forgotten that one is in the forest.

Then, it was Kylli’s turn. She began by saying that she loved “everything about nature but [that she loved] sunshine most of all.” She got this far, but she suddenly, as

she did that first night in the lobby, she started crying. She tried to continue but she found she couldn't. People spoke to fill her silence with their own stories about summer and sunlight. Oona, who was sitting next to her, held Kylli's shoulders from the right and Helmi from the left. Thus held, Kylli half cried, half laughed and held out her hands to receive some hot coffee Tapio had poured for her from the kettle. Iris added, looking specifically at me, that "People recall landscapes that are close to them, but these scenes are something recognizable by all Finns."

Everybody had something to say on the topic and it took a while for everyone to describe their favorite place. Despite Onni's previous attempt at humor, the conversation continued in a serious tone, and the clients talked without hesitation, going forward in their descriptions while those who listened looked at the ground or at the fire, nodding. I noticed that, unlike in the sessions inside the rehabilitation center, people were less prone to private conversations as others were talking and if they, like Onni, did joke, they included or attempted to involve everyone sitting around the fire. Physically, the group sat quite still unless someone added more snow to the kettle or wood to the fire. Surrounded by the cold and feeling comforted by the heat of twelve bodies sitting inside the lean-to, and with the knowledge that someone always had an eye on the firewood, something warm to drink and something to talk about, it was easy to fall into a comfortable lull.

No analysis of the landscapes followed. Iris and Tapio let the descriptions speak for themselves. The point was not to examine, but to feel the memory of a place that gives comfort. When people started on the second cup of coffee, Iris found an unopened pack of food and produced some *pulla* [dessert bread with cardamom] and some biscuits. As it was a big *pulla* about the size of a dinner plate, Iris joked that we all needed to pitch in and eat the bread since we would be heavy to carry it back home again.

When it was time to pack up and be on the move again, Iris noticed that some slices of *pulla* still remained. “Who hasn’t eaten *pulla* yet?” she asked the group. Pekka volunteered that he hadn’t eaten any *pulla*. Iris encouraged him to have some by pouring him the remaining coffee as a chaser. Suddenly, Pekka snapped. “Coffee is better alone without any *pulla*!” he said angrily. Iris replied that she “didn’t mean that you *had* to,” but Pekka insisted again that coffee is better without any bread. In the end he re-packed the slices of *pulla*, downed his cup of coffee and put on his snowshoes, repeating for the third time that coffee was better without bread.

This small outbreak chilled a little of the warmth from the fire and dispersed the crowd again into small clumps of ski-wear-wrapped bundles trudging through the deep snow.

We traveled back the way we came (or so I thought). Along the way, Tapio made sure to point to different trees and call out to me their Finnish names. “*Kataja!*” he exclaimed as he made use of his long limbs to jump skillfully through the thick snow to point at a juniper tree with his ski pole. This, like the wood-chopping episode, became an object lesson in national images. “Finnish people are said to be like the *kataja*<sup>14</sup> because these trees do not break. You can bend them down but they will always spring back!” He demonstrated by pushing on a sapling with his pole – it sprung back.

Our last stop was at a *kota*: a wooden Sami building resembling a tipi. As the *kota* was close to the cars, we each dropped off our snowshoes in the trunk along the way. As the main group walked towards the *kota*, Onni was already chopping more wood for the new fire to be made as Kylli threw several snowballs at him. Onni made a mock growl and put the axe down as if to throw some snow back her way. She

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<sup>14</sup> This use of juniper as a metaphor for the nation comes from the writer, Juhani Aho (originally Johannes Brofeldt 1861 – 1921), who coined the term “*katajainen kansa*” (people of the juniper).

giggled coquettishly and hid behind me, using me like a shield, pulling me this way and that to dodge Onni's snowballs that never really came our way. But as we entered the *kota*, the mood of the group changed yet again.

While Onni and Tapio made another fire, Iiris pulled out a metal grill on which she laid out some salmon-bread wrapped in foil, some *karjalanpiirakat* [Karelian rice pasties] and a pot of coffee. The dark walls of the *kota* brightened from the fire and we were soon sitting amidst the smell of sizzling fish fat.

Hungry again, despite having eaten at the lean-to, we all lined up to fill our plates. Although the *kota* kept the wind out, there was a dankness within that could not be immediately erased by our fire and we sat there for a while quietly warming ourselves on the hot fish and crusty pasties. Sitting thus, in the smoke, the steam and our breath showing white in the little structure, we were allowed to relax a little before heading back to the rehabilitation center.

As in the informal lobby sessions, the interactions between group members here acquired distinct familial overtones. Kylli and Onni continued their flirtation, as when Kylli coughed the whole time we were in the *kota*, Onni constantly played the role of a worried guardian, checking the fire and the direction the air was moving inside. In the end, he gave her his jacket and squeezed her tight. But this interaction extended beyond simply Onni and Kylli, others in the group acted as if they were part of one big "family."

Group members, including the older members of the group, pitched their voices to a slightly higher, child-like when they asked Tapio for more coffee. In response, Tapio, despite his younger age compared to many in the group, acted like a father and Iiris the mother. Tapio poured coffee and cut the fish bread while Iiris laid the table and made cooing voices to jokes tossed at her that were not really meant to

be funny. Onni was in high spirits. He was never still: if he was not fussing over Kylli, he was chopping wood.

Conversation revolved around the weather and different types of foods and different ways of eating potatoes. As they cooked, Kylli resumed coughing and one of the older men of the group lent her his cap to at least keep out some of the dankness in the *kota*. Iris praised the gesture as generous and thoughtful and Oona encouraged Kylli to put it on. She did rather sheepishly, as it was a man's fur cap and far too large. Onni whispered something in her ear and she squeezed his nose with her fingers and gave it a flirtatious tug, flashing her golden wedding ring on her finger as she did so. I vaguely thought of Kylli's husband back in her town in Joensuu.

After the meal, Tapio told the group to go out for a stroll. "Go and relax. Walk around and dream," he said. The group scattered but no one moved too far. Mostly, they nervously watched the *kota* where Tapio and Iris were cleaning up. When Tapio appeared out of the structure, the group suddenly sprang into motion. They started packing up the empty containers of food and equipment. Tapio had not said a word: as earlier, hands just moved until nothing was left on the ground.

On the way back in the car, Tapio and Iris were both curious about my impressions of the event. I wondered if they could articulate the exact therapeutic benefits of the "Day in Nature." I also asked them whether the concept of the "mental landscape" [*mielimaisema*] was a widely known one, as I was rather confused at how readily people could respond to their demand for one.

"The importance of nature is self-evident [*itse selva*] in Finland. We just know," said Iris, explaining why it was hard for her to objectify the exact benefits. She turned, as she and Tapio had done often during the day, to national self-stereotype. "Nature is our private battery! It is a place where we go to re-charge ourselves," Iris added. "It is better to scream in nature than at work or at your customers," she said, laughing.

“Yes! You can scream at the rocks, you can run around like a mad man, you can do anything there [in the forest],” Tapio added. “It is a place to be alone from the world to be free of all restrictions – a place where you can do what you want and not be seen.”

“Is it kind of like in the sauna?” I asked, remembering hearing something similar said about the sauna.

“Yes, you can cry openly in the sauna and you can cry in nature, too. You see Kylli was crying today. Nature is that kind of place,” Tapio said. “I hope you now understand what we mean.”

I examine why some people might describe the “Day in nature,” as well as the public health system to me as something especially “Finnish.” Such an understanding requires a full analysis of the genealogy of “nationhood” and its associated fantasy of “the forest.”



### CHAPTER THREE: GENEALOGY OF “FINNISHNESS”

Iris: The importance of nature is self-evident [*itse selva*] in Finland. We just know. Nature is our private battery! It is a place where we go to re-charge ourselves. It is better to scream in nature than at work or at your customers.

Tapio: Yes, you can scream at the rocks, you can run around like a mad man, you can do anything there [in the forest]. It is a place to be alone from the world to be free of all restrictions – a place where you can do what you want and not be seen.

In this chapter, I examine Iris and Tapio’s reference to nature as a particularly marked space. As Iris and Tapio’s comments above suggest, the space of the forest provides a counterpoint to the expectations and obligations of the social. While none of the exercises and excursions such as the “Day in the Forest” were described to me as treatments (or for rehabilitation as a whole for that matter), many of the staff I talked to at Pääskynpesä as well as the clients themselves attested to the curative powers of the space many referred to generically as “the forest” [*metsä*]. Iris, for example, describes the forest as a place to “recharge” and describes this power as having national significance. She claims that the benefits of the forest are “self-evident *in Finland*.” For Tapio, the forest provides a place where you can “run around like a *mad* man.” Here I explore this separation of the “forest” as a space distinct from that of the social and how such a distinction contributes to the idea of the social. Specifically, I question what this separation of the forest from the social can say about the imagined relationship of the individual to the social. I start with a brief genealogy of the creation of the forest as a matter of national significance.

## **From Territory to Nation: Making New Boundaries through “Nature”**

Finland’s history is bound with that of its neighbors, as the country did not exist as such until the twentieth century. Before 1809, Finland had been an integral part of the Swedish empire<sup>15</sup> (Alapuro 1988: 19; Klinge 2003; Singleton 1998), but The Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 signed between Alexander I of Russia and Napoleon of France wrested Finland and the Baltic region away from Swedish control as a way for Napoleon to persuade Sweden into joining the trade embargo against England. When Czar Alexander I declared Finland an imperial Grand Duchy in 1809, “Finns” – for the first time conceived of as such – were not only freed from the heavy taxes and damage to human life and property incurred from being Sweden’s frontier with Russia during wartime, but also granted some degree of independence. Alexander I gave the Grand Duchy with religious, economic, and governmental freedom. Although this was a common Russian policy for dealing with outlying regions at the time, Alexander I invested heavily in keeping the new territory satisfied and peaceful, as Alexander I wanted Finland as a neutral buffer against Sweden. As a show of good faith, Alexander I increased the territory of the Grand Duchy, by “returning” Swedish territories previously annexed by Russia to the Grand Duchy of Finland. He further limited Swedish influence by relocating the capital of the new Finnish province from the former Swedish provincial capital of Turku, which lay close to the Gulf of Bothnia, to Helsinki, a region much closer to St. Petersburg. He also reorganized the Finnish

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<sup>15</sup> Finland fell under Swedish control in the twelfth-century when King Eric of Sweden led a military crusade against the Finns and brought them under his reign<sup>15</sup>. While Swedish and Novgorod’s states were already established by the twelfth century, the territory of Finland consisted of three separate Finno-Ugric “tribes,” the Finns, Tavastians, and the Karelians who had neither a centralized state nor a written language of their own (Singleton 1998). Historians Eino Jutikkala and Kauko Pirinen claim that this decentralized condition of these tribes can be ascribed to the sparseness of settlements and to the stretches of wilderness in between (1996: 39).

political structure by diluting the power of the Swedish nobility through giving more centralized power to the administration. Although convening the Diet – the Duchy’s representative legislative body – was made dependent upon the Russian monarch, the lassitude of the Russian metropole in the domestic affairs of Finland gave Finnish bureaucratic administration more political power.

Alexander I’s hand in restructuring the power base of the Swedish elites prompted early nationalists to pay attention to internal tensions (Alapuro 1988). As Alexander’s reforms diminished the power of the mainly Swedish upper classes in the context of the four estate system<sup>16</sup>, the Swedish upper classes became increasingly placed under pressure of Finnish-speaking intellectuals in the struggle for power. However, unlike the case in Romania, where Romanian elites “appealed to or allied themselves with stronger external powers against their tyrannical overlords” (Verdary 1991: 30-31), the elites of Finland did not align themselves with either Sweden or Russia. Instead, they de-emphasized their class status, and placed themselves at the forefront in constructing an idea of a “Finnish” Volk that *included* themselves as one amongst the masses (Alapuro 1988: 91; Anttonen 2005: 144).

Risto Alapuro (1989) explains the specific conditions of early struggles over class and language as stemming from the particularity of Scandinavian class structure that Finland inherited from Sweden. Unlike in Continental Europe, free peasants formed the dominant land-owning class at the time and the upper classes depended upon meeting their demands and showing solidarity with the masses if they were to stay in power. Secondly, Alapuro (1989) claims that the aforementioned Russian reforms encouraged social mobility of the Finnish peasant classes which further contributed to the shaky position of the Swedish upper classes in Finland. Aira Kemiläinen (1998) shows as further evidence of the intermingling of the so-called

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<sup>16</sup> Finland inherited the Swedish political system of the four estates

Swedish nobility with Finnish intellectuals of peasant backgrounds that by the end of the nineteenth century, the upper estates came to be known merely as “the educated class’ (comparable with “civilized people,” “*bildningsborgerskap*” in Swedish)” (1998: 108). Thirdly, Finnish independence from Sweden came as a “gift” from Czar Alexander I, and therefore took away the need for intellectuals to engage in armed struggle to come into power (Alapuro 1997; Anttonen 2005:170). Instead, Finnish intellectuals faced the task of legitimizing the status of Finland as having “innate” and natural qualities of a unique and distinct nation. The social position and legitimacy of the “educated class” stemmed from having taken the task of defining the origin and character of the nation upon themselves. As Anthony Smith (1999) argues, “the intellectual is the interpreter, *par excellence*, of historical memories and ethnic myths. By tracing a distinguished pedigree for his nation, he also enhances the position of his circle and activity; he is no longer an ambiguous ‘marginal’ on the fringes of society, but a leader of the advancing column of the reawakened nation” (Smith 1999: 84). Similar to the process described by Katherine Verdary (1991) in Romania, where intellectuals secured their authoritative position in universities and within the social sphere by transforming the discourses of the nation as an “object” requiring the attention of their expertise (Verdary 1991; 1999), so did Finnish intellectuals secure their position in the nation via universities and in politics as archaeologists, archivists and translators of “native” idioms.

However, instead of alluding to “historico-political” imaginings of Finland, as for example in the case of Poland (Walicki 1999: 271), Finnish intellectuals had to come up with the nation’s political and historic past separate from that of Sweden. Unlike its neighbors, Finland lacked what Anthony Smith (1999) calls an “organic history” that linked the existence of the nation to a noble bloodline. With no royal family tree or a history of serfs to tether “blood” to territory or to origins, Finnish

national awakening took shape along the lines of what Anthony Smith (1999) characterizes as one based on “cultural affinity and ideological ‘fit’ with the presumed ancestors” (1999: 58).

Turning to myths of a “golden age” of heroism and virtue borrowed from the rune singers from the Karelian region not only provided the “ideological ‘fit’” but also, as Anttonen (2005) argues, masked the heterogeneity of the internal population. Uniting through imagining the nation’s mythic predecessors masked the fact that the early nationalists spoke a different language from the majority of the nascent “Volk” in the nineteenth century.

Finnish intellectuals borrowed heavily from the German nationalist movements from the eighteenth century. One of their initial tasks was to create a primordial idea of the nation built upon a unique language, folklore, and geographic setting. Finnish intellectuals turned to provinces perceived of as being relatively free from Swedish influence, especially the eastern-most province of Karelia, to search for oral poems, proverbs and songs for the realization of “Finland” as a nation with a coherent ethnic, geographic, and linguistic boundary. While such a construction would seem to deny Swedish-speaking intellectuals a place in the new nation, they instead cast themselves as the midwives of this new nation, refusing to cast themselves as intellectuals but instead as “originating” from “the people” (Anttonen 2005: 148). While the language of the elites contradicted the notion of a primordially “Finnish” nation, significantly, the Swedish-speaking elites placed themselves in the position to speak for the masses “asleep” (to the notion of nationhood) and unable to speak for themselves. In addition to identifying themselves thus as “the people” and not as antagonistic elites, Swedish-speaking Fennomans wrote themselves into the national narrative via their “discoveries” and ability to catalogue “the people’s culture.” If “Finnishness” could not by definition come from the Swedish speaking group, the Swedish speaking elites

legitimized their place within the nation through the creation and ownership of everyday peasant life and oral poetry they reified as academic knowledge.

The national archive thus developed from this perceived lack within the intellectuals themselves. As Anttonen (2005) argues, the elites could not become the symbols of “the people” through a reference to the past: they instead represented its future. Creating national history and researching Finnish prehistory via ethnological research of neighboring Finno-Ugric tribes negated the Swedish-speaking elites as primordial Volk of the nation but also reinstated them as the true nationalists. Without them, there would be no national history or future.

### **The Empty Vase: *Kalevala*, Forests and Origins**

Finnish national discourse begins with the recognition of loss. For instance, nationalist discourse of ethnological research and of the *discovery* of the nation<sup>17</sup> suggest that the Finnish national spirit, its integrity, its sentiments and poetry are lost to the present until excavated, exhumed and re-discovered. The nation in a sense “awakens” as a concept already stained with this absence. The obsession of nationalist intellectuals to locate the genes, the linguistic origins, the birthplace and so on of the people circles around this absent center within the concept of the nation.

Jacques Lacan’s (1992) analogy of the vase provides an illustrative example.

It [a vase] creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it.

Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that by itself knows not of them. It is on the basis of this fabricated signifier, this vase, that emptiness and fullness as such enter the world, neither more nor less, and with the same sense.

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<sup>17</sup> Mead (1973) describes how college students from Helsinki traveled to Finland’s eastern peripheries to collect cultural artifacts and to hear the songs of rune singers.

This is the moment to point to the fallacious opposition between what is called concrete and what is called figurative. If the vase may be filled, it is because in the first place in its essence it is empty. And it is exactly in the same sense that speech and discourse may be full or empty (1992: 120).

In creating the vase, this tool, we bring into reality the potential for fullness and emptiness “into a world that by itself knows not of them.”

In the nineteenth century, the relationship between Russia and Finland began to sour as the Finnish nationalist movement gained steam. In what was perhaps the most significant move in the creation of Finland’s national narrative, Elias Lönnrot set out to compile the most comprehensive collection of folklore in the province of Karelia: the grand epic of Finland – the *Kalevala* (1835-1836). Anttonen (2005) argues that the choice of Karelia as the hunting ground for such an undertaking stems from territorial anxieties over Finland’s easternmost province. While Karelia exemplifies a region with the least Swedish influence, it also represents a region with a long history of territorial battles with neighboring Russia. Territorial battles with Russia under the reign of Sweden often involved fighting over the region of Karelia and thus, even after Finland’s separation from Sweden, Karelia represented a sacral spot in the national imaginary. Thus, mythologizing Karelain poetry via transforming it into a national epic consolidates the place of Karelians as an integral part of Finland’s ethnic totality as well as the territory as the heartland of national romantic aspirations. Treating the *Kalevala* as “national history” served to discursively reverse the sequence of events leading up to the birth of the Finnish state by obscuring the *making* of national history. Casting Karelians as the quintessential Finns was in part a *realpolitik* attempt to delegitimize Russian claims to the region on the basis of religion (Karelia is largely Orthodox) or recent history.

Wilson (1976) argues that “the nationalists saw in the *Kalevala* not only a record of a noble, heroic past but also the model after which they were to pattern the future of their country” (1976: 42). The ideological construction of Karelia as a place of heritage brought the region of Karelia deeper into the core of Finnish national imaginary. As such, the region became a place of pilgrimage for nationalists – during the (late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century), it became common practice for individuals from the city areas of Helsinki to travel to Karelia in search of what they believed to be the “fundamental character of Finnish culture,” and the “former Finnish Golden Age” (Anttonen 2005; Wilson 1976; Klinge 1984) and what Sihvo calls “romantic illusion” (Sihvo 1989: 61).

If Karelians, living remote from urban areas and Swedish influences, and existing in a posited allochronous time became the repository of national myths, Finland’s forests and lakes also became a “resource” for poets and painters. Painters such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela and musicians such as Jean Sibelius further made the idea of Finland as a nation available for domestic and international consumption through the image of its natural environment. These artists’ works, meant to inspire the nationalist movement in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century,

Aside from the grand, national trope of Finland’s forests and lakes, a more tangible everyday orientation towards the concept of Finland’s “forest” developed with the publication of Aleksis Kivi’s (1834 – 1872) book, *The Seven Brothers* [*Seitsemän Veljestä*] (1870, 1991). Aleksis Kivi, originally with the Swedish name of Alexis Stenvall, was the first writer to publish a novel in Finnish instead of in Swedish, which was until that point the language of the academy, politics and of the arts. His novel, which was published less than thirty years after the publication of the *Kalevala* (a short version in 1835 and the official publication in 1849) proved Finnish as a language viable for the production of “culture”: and not just as a resource *for* culture.



Not long after its publication, *The Seven Brothers* [*Seitsemän Veljestä*] (1870, 1991) – each of the brothers said to represent a facet of the people – became one of the “best-known and most revered work of Finnish literature” (Impola 1991: *iii*) after the *Kalevala*.

In his novel, Kivi brings to life the conflicting relationship between the individual and society through the adventures of seven orphaned brothers. They experience repeated conflicts and setbacks in dealing with the village community: and, when told that they must learn how to read and write to be confirmed by the Lutheran church, they escape into the forest. However, even in their “freedom” from the village, their thoughts return to the life they left behind. Their reconciliation with the people from the village comes through their transformation into literate and hard-working men. If the requirement to observe the social rules of the community drove them into the forest, the terror and solitude of expansive time unregulated by social convention drove them back to the village.

While focusing on landscapes and “ancient” legends avoids the issue of contemporary internal linguistic and cultural heterogeneity (besides the Swedish speakers, the Samis in the north speak their own language, as do Karelians), the emphasis on things “natural<sup>18</sup>” also stems from Finland’s peripheral status vis-à-vis the European region as a whole. Early nationalists took as a matter of concern the perceptions of Finland amongst those who came to visit and European intellectuals abroad (Mead 1989). The characterization of themselves as the “northern frontiers of settlement in Europe” and as a people who live in “isolation separated by vast amounts of lakes and forests” (Mead 1968: 26) must be considered as perspectives that came not only from a need for self-definition but also from the recognition of Finnish elites

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<sup>18</sup> Pertti Anttonen (2005) argues that nineteenth century nationalists often exoticized Karelians via relegating them in the past and representing them as people imbued with “mythical” and “natural” knowledge, thereby, “feminizing” them in the mode expounded upon by Edward Said.

themselves of their peripheral and peripheralized status vis-à-vis European centers of power.

Finland's geographical location and its relatively smaller fame in the annals of continental European history often gave elites of Paris and London an image of Finland as the last European frontier, inhabited by polar bears, reindeer and "Mongoloid" people (Kemiläinen 1998; Mead 1973). The fetishization of themselves as "the forest people" comes with ambivalence, as it implies both a lack of artifice as well as primitiveness, both the appeal towards national essences invoked by the Fennomans in addition to the unflattering characterizations of "Finns" by other European scholars. As Finnish nationalists appealed towards "forest" essences as a defining feature of "Finnishness," they were subsequently faced with the specter of being "Mongoloid" in a racial hierarchy that placed non-white groups as being closer to nature than, using the race terminology of the times – "Aryan" groups. By casting Finland as the home of Europe's "noble savages," Finnish nationalists faced the task of walking a fine line between pushing for national uniqueness whilst not overly fashioning themselves as mere "savages."

Thus while the trope of the "Forest Finns" still lives on, as exemplified by its use by Iiris and others I came to know through fieldwork, the continual question of Finland's place in the European "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) creates anxiety, an anxiety often reflected in the continual repetition that "Finns are European" and a denial of any cultural or genetic connection to Eastern Europe or Central Asia.<sup>19</sup> In a section of a website created by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs entitled "Guide to Finnish customs and manners" (virtual.finland.fi 2006), Olli Alho from the Finnish Broadcasting Company states that "Finnish customs and manners are clearly

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<sup>19</sup> Linguistic links between Finnish and languages in Central Asia are strong enough to be unquestioned, but Finns often describe Finnish as a linguistic isolate in Europe – a flat denial of the extremely close links that Finnish language shares with Estonian.

European.”<sup>20</sup> In a different section entitled “Remarkable features of Finland plus some common misconceptions” Maarit Ojanen writes, “Regardless of the fact that we are European, our country is often missing from maps of Europe. Television weather maps are typical of this omission. The capital is called Helsinki, not Helsinsky [as it is often misspelled by non-Finns]. People who live in Helsinki, and Finns in general, are offended by this erroneous spelling, because it makes Finnish look like a Slavonic language, which it is not.”<sup>21</sup> Reflecting a similar concern over national identity, a plaque entitled “Ethnic development” at the National Museum in Helsinki states “Genes of Finns are 75% western (Europoid) and 25% eastern (Mongoloid), while our culture is western.”

These reified notions of Finnish culture, genetics, and the dichotomization of the West and the East are prominent in spaces where “Finland” assumes a space of difference such as in tourist and business brochures, museums as well as in scholarly journals and edited volumes on Finnish economy, politics and history meant for an international audience. Thus, while Finland joined the Nordic Council in 1956 and the European Union in 1995, the recurrence of the assertion that “we are indeed European” point to an assumption or a fear that Finland would not be seen as such. Claims about identity often go hand in hand with those elements felt to be most challenged or contingent and therefore uncertain. While the supranational ideology of the EU integration process headed by the European Commission attempts to naturalize and standardize a common sense of belonging in the European Community (EC), this creation of normativity ironically apprehends a sense of deviation and particularity.

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<sup>20</sup> Olli Alho, Guide to Finnish Customs and Manners. In *Virtual Finland* <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=25001> Last viewed 3/20/2006.

<sup>21</sup> Maarit Ojanen, “Remarkable features of Finland plus some common misconceptions,” in *Virtual Finland* <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=25001> Last viewed 3/20/2006.

Although the Europeanization process projects an image of a common “European” “community” with new borders, I argue that this image is viewed in distinctly different ways between those who can trace their European genealogy through the map of Europe and by those at the peripheries of Europe. For those nations such as Finland, who lost its place on the map of Europe during its status as a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire and, although located on the “right” side of the Iron Curtain, was politically subordinate to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, being European is not taken for granted.

While those at the “core” of Europe take their very way of life as something synonymous with the standards and ideals of European civilization, those at the periphery must recognize these ideals through recognizing simultaneously that they themselves are not the providers of an ideal Europeanness. As Ulf Hannerz (1997) argues, the process of global and regional integration is never egalitarian and that, “with regard to cultural flow, the periphery, out there in a distant territory, is more the taker than the giver of meaning and meaningful form” (1997: 107). Ieng Ang further notes that while there is a pan-European movement, the idea that some members are always ‘more European’ than others “undergirds the power politics which is currently being undertaken to launch ‘Europe’ as a renewed world power into the twenty-first century” (1998: 98).

These repeated assertions of presumed “western” superiority and “eastern” inferiority and physical lowliness not only confirm an imagined racial hierarchy, but also speak to the subjectivities, specifically to the ambivalences of belonging for those in the peripheries. In my archival research, I came across scholarly articles with little to do with issues of national identity that made detours in the specific arguments just to make a point about Finnish Europeanness or exceptionality. In an edited book on the history of the Finnish national economy, authors often compare the Finnish

economy to that of “Western Europe.” In a chapter entitled, “Foreign Trade and Transport,” Yrjö Kaukiainen (2006) concludes of Finland, “A remote and sparsely populated northern corner of Europe” (2006: 127) as having engaged in an unflagging relationship of trade and commerce with “the developed ‘core’ areas, that is, western Europe” (ibid 159). This connection and unflagging engagement with the “west” thus differentiates Finland from other Finno-Ugric states such as Estonia. Even in clinical and medical journals on burnout (Ahola et al 2005), authors specifically place Finland in with other “western countries” despite the equal prevalence of burnout in countries outside of this “western” imaginary such as Japan and Taiwan (Maslach et al. 2001).

The categorization of Finland as a specific place in need of a caveat (e.g. it is a western nation with eastern influences) animates both a concern with national identity in an era of increasing Europeanization and the anxiety of falling short of being “European.” Such a discourse of anxiety shows not only a concern with how others’ perceive the nation, but also contributes to the reproduction of the notion of an “us”: an “us” always already in danger of being mis-percieved, and thus also always desirous of being perceived anew. In short, it presents those who participate in such an “imagined community” as continually subject to the process of objectification. Further, an understanding of the self which stem from such an imaginary as one in lack vis-à-vis a more symbolically powerful other (e.g. “Europe,” “the West”) in turn, solidifies the perception of the self as a “national” and “nationalized” object.

### **Ambivalences of being Finnish**

I first visited Finland in 1993 during the depression following upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. I was struck immediately by a widespread preoccupation with ‘Finnishness’. Every conversation seemed to lead to the subject. This was not just because I was foreign – at the conference I was

attending this formed the subject of a number of academic papers intended as much for a Finnish as a non-Finnish audience. I had traveled fairly widely in western Europe over the years, and whilst national characters and traits flitted in and out of conversations (‘typical French’, ‘part of the German mentality’, ‘how very British’) I had never encountered such a sustained concern with a seemingly palpable national essence. Indeed, I thought it naïve, even quaint. Here was a nation on the edge of Europe which, with its welfare state, regulated economy and strong sense of an ordered society, seemed a strange survival of a pre-sixties, national-service world before counter-cultures, rock ‘n’ roll rebellion and the ironic blasts of post-modernity and consumption-driven lifestyles.

(Justin O’Connor *Polarities* January, 2007

<http://www.lausti.com/focus/alphabetical.html>)

In 2006 when I began my fieldwork, I, too encountered what O’Connor calls a “preoccupation with ‘Finnishness’”. This attention towards managing perceptions of “Finns” extended to nearly every interaction: I remember once being quite perplexed when a bank clerk asked me what I thought about Finns as she helped me open a Finnish bank account. However, as O’Connor suggests, rather than reify this relationship “Finns” have to the “imagined community,” I build on my arguments above to state that the idea of a nation and of the self in need of continual reassurance and mollification comes from both the way in which subjects perceive themselves to be part of the imagined community and also from how that imagined community in turn is then posited vis-à-vis an ideal Europeanness.

Indeed the question, “What am I to you?” follows the Lacanian construction of the hysteric’s discourse in that both discourses develop from a sense of lack which

stems from an unequal relationship of power. Lacan describes the hysteric's discourse as one which speaks to the elusive issue of the subject, more specifically, what the subject *is* to others within the symbolic field as determined by those in power. The hysteric "wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, he does not govern" (Lacan 2007 (1991): 129). In this configuration, or what Lacan calls the hysteric's discourse, the subject sets up a powerful Other from whom she<sup>22</sup> demands to be told of her true value. Lacan argues that this discourse provides knowledge, as it is the only discourse that reveals the limits within the master discourse.

For example, I found that answering such a question (e.g. "What do you think about Finns?") often met with a direct contradiction. For an answer that was positive (e.g. "I think they are very nice!") the response came in the negative (e.g. "No, we are not!") and vice versa. Such contradicting actions, asking a question only to counter the answer, parallels the hysteric's discourse in that it demands that the other know the value of the subject (or its incarnation in the nation) only to show the other that he or she in fact does not have such a knowledge. Lacan's figure of the hysteric then, mirrors a condition of lack. A condition which could be said of Finland or of any nation that comes into existence as "latecomers" to embodying an European ideal. This condition of lack manifests in the need to provide constant reflections upon one's Europeanness or to provide caveats at every turn. This lack, or this desire, for becoming and acceptance repeats as assurance for one's "European" or whatever status falls short. The Other fails to stand in for the authority figure that would once and for all provide the proof demanded by the figure of the hysteric. This shortfall of

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<sup>22</sup> Hysterics often take on the female pronoun after cases of hysteria made famous by Freud (e.g. Dora).

those presumably in the know (or those we construct as “knowledgable” of an ideal) contributes to a re-reckoning of national ideals and the repetition of this concern over Finnishness.

Besides asking foreigners about their perceptions about Finland, I found that people often provided a disclaimer about themselves for not being “a typical” Finn. Anita (mentioned in chapter one, as the mother of the Anne to whom I taught English) commented when I told her I had to cancel class next week as I was going to Tallin, Estonia, that

Oh, I am sure you will see so many drunk Finns on the boat going over there! Did you know that Finns behaved so badly that our Minister of Culture, or was it Tourism, I forget, and it doesn’t matter, but one of them wrote in the newspaper telling Finnish citizens to ‘Behave!’ and to ‘dress more nicely!’ You see, Finns would go in hoards to buy cheap alcohol<sup>23</sup> in the duty free stores wearing sweatpants and waist pouches... Something had to be done before other tourists start snubbing their noses at us! Of course, when I travel with my family, we are not like that, we are really not *typical Finns!*

Like Anita, I found that my Finnish friends often provided a caveat upon their own stereotypes of the nation by stating that they themselves are not “typical Finns” but that they know of others who fit this label. Thus, while for instance, Anita knows that the stereotype does not apply to herself, she confirms the notion of “typicality” as a social reality through her presumption that it be embodied in some *others*. The “typical,” as an expectation that finds social resonance enables a particular form of

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<sup>23</sup> ALKO, the national alcoholic beverages monopoly in Finland levies heavy taxes, making trips to Estonia a way to buy cheap alcohol.



subtle violence. For Anita, it becomes a reason for her and her family to “dress more nicely” and to not buy cheap duty free alcohol by the box. This in no way translates as “violence” proper, but in the sense of informal injunctions within the everyday, these subtle imperatives operate in the most intimate ways to demand obeisance to its laws.

Riina, a graduate student at the University of Helsinki, I had met at a party was one who strongly believed herself not be a “typical Finn.” She explained to me what she meant through how she felt about coming back to Helsinki after a year in Argentina as an exchange student. “Buenos Aires felt so free,” said Riina.

There, people were more physical with each other, they hugged each other more, they told each other that they loved them, and families talked a lot more about everything over dinner. When I came back to Finland and I turned on the news I fell down laughing because Finnish people make Finnish an already monotonous language more monotonous and flat sounding. I mean, ok, it was the news but people [in general] are not very expressive. They think that if you get angry and you lose control, then, you embarrass the person you are angry at as well as yourself. Typical Finns think that if you blow up it becomes your problem because it means that you can’t control yourself. Women are allowed to have more outbursts, but men are absolutely not. If men blow up they are seen to be rather feminine.

Feeling “free” when outside of a familiar milieu seems to be a common enough phenomenon. What makes Riina’s statement here more significant and supportive of the links between a notion of “typicality” and expectance to what I see as the subtlety of social violence comes from what Riina said immediately afterwards. “In Buenos Aires I didn’t care about blowing up because no one expected you to hold it in. But

here [in Helsinki], I just feel that I shouldn't. I would just appear as the weak one.” Riina's belief of a “typical” or expected form of address frames how she feels she can express anger.

As we sat drinking for a while and the crowd got louder, she jokingly explained that drinking is a “free ticket to get angry and shout.” This freedom from social injunctions parallels the freedom expected in the forest. As Tapio said, “you can run around like a mad man” in the forest: similarly, when quite obviously under the influence of spirits, you can act as if “mad” and not suffer the social consequences. While Riina denies that she herself manifests any of these “typical” traits to any great extent, and she provides a judgment that she felt more “free” in Buenos Aires, she nonetheless reproduces the very injunctions from which she desires to be freed by observing these rules she thinks apply to the “typical” Finn. Even though she might want to “blow up” in public, the imagined presence of “typical Finns” and the unspoken pressure of their social judgment cause her to censor her own behavior – the very “subtle” form of violence I mentioned above. One can argue that the desire for a space against the social then comes from this unrequited desire – for example – to “blow up” in public without appearing “weak” or unable to live up to an imagined ideal. These perceived injunctions then contribute to the sense of sacrifice one must make for the sake of the social and thus make spaces such as the forest and drunkenness all the more full of *jouissance* and unbridled authenticity (e.g. the space for the “real” self). The forest and or acting drunk gains more significance as these spaces (and conditions) manifest the extent of one's participation in the social.

Anita's and Riina's responses to notions of typicality and expectation cannot be simply framed under obeisance or acquiescence to social expectations. Rather, they show how certain imaginaries of what count as “Finnishness” circulate and through its circulation engenders a response. “Typical Finnishness” here, however cannot be

made synonymous with reified notions of cultural stereotypes. The rather pejorative term “typical” becomes most relevant when in the case of Anita, individuals happen to see themselves in a less than pleasant light based on unexpected criticisms received from outsiders (e.g. Finnish tourists in Estonia and their fanny packs). For Riina, she “fell down laughing” when she heard the newscaster in Finland after a year away in Buenos Aires precisely because she had forgotten what to expect when she turned on the evening news. These encounters with the unexpected, much like in gift exchange, where one feels the weight of the gift even more when receiving something from the least expected donor, engenders a response. Thus, while Anita and Riina (and most individuals in general) do not see themselves as being particularly “typical,” and may also laugh at clumsy depictions of “Finns” by the foreign media, their encounters with unexpectedness within their so-called “own society” upholds the notion of a particularism that must be embodied by others within the imagined community if not by themselves. Thus, while they may opt out of such typicalities, encounters with unexpectedness which cohere around the notion of “Finnishness” upholds the fantasy of its existence and thus creates a response: Anita feels a need to dress up when travelling abroad, and Riina feels she must hold in her anger. The unfamiliarity of the familiar is domesticated through its translation into the “kernel” of what makes Finns different.

As in Mauss’s logic on the circulation of gifts, individuals do not reciprocate in gift giving merely through acquiescing to the injunctions of gifting. Rather, the spirit of the gift engenders an affective response – it gives birth to affect such as guilt, obligation and pleasure. As the gift comes from somewhere – so do these affective experiences. Similar to the impossibility of a “pure gift,” as Derrida argues, “Finnishness” and the notion of “typicality” act as the pure symbol for what is never fully embodied in any one person but comes to stand for the subject. In terms of the

gift, a gift becomes an impossible object inasmuch as it obligates a return gift (for such a return would contradict the very definition of gift giving), but like this notion of “typicality,” it comes to symbolize that which it cannot put into social play. Anita and Riina may not have felt anything particularly “Finnish” about the way Finnish tourists dress or how Finnish newscasters speak. However, in both cases, noticing something unexpected (e.g. criticism in the case of Anita and seeing the news in Finland after a considerable amount of time for Riina) amounted to their categorizing of this accidental recognition under the symbolic framework of “Finnishness.” Further, as typicality always resides somewhere beyond the self and in an anonymous other, the term “typical Finn” comes to stand in as a pure symbol of a characteristic that is immediately not self nor immediate other but for the fantasy of a collective that nonetheless becomes the cause of one’s affective experience.

If, on the one hand, Finland’s nobility’s self-categorization and mystification as “the forest people” referred a non-cosmopolitan, simple and peripheralized country vis-à-vis the rest of Europe, on the other, being a “forest people” also signified for a sense of moral superiority reserved only by those without artifice, different from those at the center of power. For Terhi, my friend who attended hotel school in Helsinki, what typified “Finnishness” manifested in not “putting on airs.” Once, Terhi, her two friends and I met at an up-and-coming bar in Helsinki. The place was immaculately decorated and when one of her friends produced a camera I offered to take a picture of them under a huge chandelier made of reindeer antlers bound by leather thongs. They stood tall and smiled but kept their hands to their sides, keeping a tight profile. I jokingly demanded that they relaxed and posed for the camera a little. “Just take the picture. We’re not Russians!” Terhi said. Later on that night she brought up the topic again and explained, “Finns don’t act like that!” As more people joined the scene, Terhi ran up to our table from the bar and pulled me to the side. Peering from behind a

pillar she pointed to two girls standing under the same chandelier getting their pictures taken. In each shot they took several different poses. “See!” Terhi said, pointing to one of the girls who careened dangerously on silver heels as she arched her back to highlight her long shiny hair, “They’re Russians! They don’t care. They’ll do anything!”

I refer to this anecdote as something representative of a common stereotype of “Russians” that people often used as a way to define “Finnishness.” “Russians,” according to many of my informants, were loud, wasteful, self-involved and into physical appearances. As such, they obligated those near them to deal with their excesses. Such stereotypes played out on an international stage as well. For instance, in 2006, smoke from wild forest fires across the border in Russia caused alarm in Helsinki. Around the coffee table, several comments were made amongst friends about how “they,” meaning Russians, didn’t know how to take care of “their” forest and how “we Finns” must suffer from living next to such a big but irresponsible neighbor. “It’s just infuriating they [Russians] think they can get away with everything! They’ll say anything to cover up what they are doing,” said one of Terhi’s friends as we sat around the coffee table on a separate occasion. Terhi commented that Finns lose out in dealing with “the Russians” because Finns “are too honest.” This sentiment also came up against big players within the European Union<sup>24</sup>.

In the next section, I turn to how people often blended the trope of having no “artifice” into the imaginary of being a “forest people” during my field research.

## **Marking Space**

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<sup>24</sup> See also Susanne Ådahl’s (2007) dissertation on the plight of Finnish farmers. She describes how the Finnish farmers she came know critiqued farmers from other EU countries for not being “honest” about reporting on needs for farm subsidies.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I spent several weeks without appointments and without friends. It was summer and most of my key contacts had left Helsinki to enjoy their cottages [*mökki*] tucked away in the forest, ideally, by a lake in their parents' hometown. "You can't come around this time of year and expect Finns to stick around," said Anne, one of my few correspondents who had decided to remain in Helsinki, "around this time of year, the city is left for people with no place to go and no one except for Japanese tourists<sup>25</sup> with their cameras!" She advised me to seek out "the Finns" in their "natural" dwellings. She directed me to Nuuksio, a national park located not too far from Helsinki, where she guaranteed that even a foreigner and a city-person like myself would come to understand the call of "the Finnish forest."

After a bus ride of less than an hour, I made it to Nuuksio and clambered about on the rocky terrain. Having walked for several hours into the woods, I sat down on a patch of soft reindeer moss having seen virtually no one on my trip. However, to my surprise, I found that I was in fact not alone. Behind a rounded gray mound of rock (Nuuksio was famous for these rocks) peeped a pair of legs. I immediately felt conscious of having made several loud sighs when I had believed myself to be alone. Becoming more aware of my surroundings, I noticed that people sat quietly in groups or alone in discreet shadows of the forest. Compared to hiking trails I knew in the US (mostly Ithaca, NY and Oahu, HI), the trails in Nuuksio were not exactly trails, but suggested paths. People sat off the "trail" and beyond it, often even in big trees. I also got off the path to find a better place to sit. Once ensconced in a dark glade away from the afternoon sun, I heard teenagers laughing somewhere off in the distance and someone singing. I sat there just listening to the sounds and voices of the invisible people surrounding me and thought of what Anne said before I left on my excursion: "You will see that Finland is a place where you can enjoy yourself without having

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<sup>25</sup> Here, Anne is engaging in a common tendency to categorize all Asian tourists as "Japanese."

much money! It's not like in the US, where you have planned activities, \$100 for scuba diving, another \$50 for snowboarding... Here, you just go to the forest alone or with your friends, with food or with just wine, you just go and you enjoy yourself." I sat there until I had to catch my bus back to my district in Helsinki, but as a final prize, I came across a patch of blueberries, where a group had already gathered to pick the fruit<sup>26</sup>. "Go ahead! Try them! They won't kill you!" joked one college-aged man. I rode the bus back with fingers stained blue and a quiet satisfaction.

Once my friends came back from their respective *mökki*, I had plenty of time to ask them what they did. While they chided me for not telling them of my fieldwork schedule, many modestly claimed that "we did nothing. All we did was the typical Finnish thing – drink beer and grill sausages [*makkara*]." While they played on the national stereotype of the "typical" Finnish thing, with more probing, Terhi, a student at Helsinki's hotel school confessed that her summer was so "crazy that after a while you feel numbed by it!" A group of her and her boyfriend's friends gathered at someone's family *mökki* to drink and swim in the lake. "Doing nothing" involved getting together with intimate friends, usually from childhood, to drink, to eat and to enjoy the sauna. "I was getting annoyed because the boys were getting so drunk they started taking their clothes off and running around the forest naked! One guy got his penis stuck in a beer bottle and the other guy went to steal some more booze from another *mökki* not too far away!"

Kalle, another friend who had spent time at his *mökki* was less forthcoming on information, but he, too explained that a lot of drinking was involved, as was swimming, fishing, going into the sauna with his childhood friends and grilling a lot of *makkaraa* (sausages) out in the open. These examples of summer life amongst the

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<sup>26</sup> Finland's law – *jokamiehenoikeus* (everyman's right), allows the gathering of flora in any part of the territory for the sake of personal consumption, if it does not destroy the crop or land.

small group I came to call my friends exemplify a common thread that ran through many excursions into the forest: many involved going to the forest with only intimate others and engaging in “doing nothing” while eating and drinking by the lakeside.

The importance of having only “childhood friends” [*ystävä*] for “doing nothing” became clearer to me after I made the blunder of calling someone I had just known for less than a week or so “a friend.” “Americans are so quick to call anyone a friend!” chided one researcher to whom I was introduced through this “friend” of mine. “Here, in Finland, we make a big difference between acquaintances [*tuttava*] and friends. Friendship here is not as opportunistic as it is in the United States<sup>27</sup>. When we call someone a friend, we mean that we will do anything for that person. Americans call friends they think will get them somewhere and for that they are always worried about keeping them interested.” Thus, the forest not only provides refuge for those who wish to “scream,” as Tapio says, but also to be amongst the select circle of “real” friends, friends one does not need to worry about “entertaining.” “Doing nothing,” then, implies the degree of personal intimacy and the mutual nature of exchange. Intimate friends demand more sacrifices (e.g. as per the researcher, “we will do anything for [a friend]”) but the exchange between “intimate friends” [*ystävä*] do not end when these individuals no longer provide what made them desirable in the first place as in the case of the “Americans.” “Americans” in this researcher’s formulation must “do something” (e.g. “constantly entertain and make small talk”) if they are to get what made the “friend” appealing in the first place. The “friend” here, has a utilitarian function. As this researcher charged, I “used” my friend of very young maturation to get him to notice my request for an appointment. Such a friendship based on self-interest, he argues, creates a need to entertain the other to keep the other interested enough to

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<sup>27</sup> This statement here purposefully or inadvertently described how I came to know this researcher. My “friend” was a close friend of this researcher’s and I included her name when I asked for his time.



provide the utility in question. In contrast, when one considers only intimate others as friends [*ystävää*], such a need to entertain and to keep the other interested becomes irrelevant. Something other than self-interest brings the friends together.

According to the researcher, one sacrifices “all” for an intimate friend but paralleling Mauss’s (1990) logic of the gift, as each member of this intimate relationship obligates the other to a mutual “contest of honor,” the return gift is just as bountiful. Unlike in the case of utilitarian exchange where a specific function creates the need to entertain the other, and thus once this exchange ends no bond exists between the two to outlast this exchange, the sacrifice made between intimate friends further increases the social bond. Amongst mutually engaged others, mutual trust and an extended timeline of such a bond makes “having to entertain” the other on an everyday level irrelevant. And as implied in the formulation “to not *have to*,” this kind of engagement creates a mask of authenticity. Individuals do not engage in anything that stems from a force they “*have to*” recognize. This sense of authenticity comes from the perception that as they do not “*have to*” perform, then what they do must be what comes “naturally.”

This notion that amongst intimate others one can do what one wants echoes Iris and Tapio’s explanation of nature as a space where “you can ... run around like a mad man... [and] do what you want and not be seen.” Like in the forest, the space between intimate others represents one where individuals feel they can step out of certain expected rules of society. Moreover, this distinction between intimate others from the public (including acquaintances) points to a specific relationship the subject *imagines* it has with the social. Pauli Kettunen (2000) argues that a “Nordic” relationship to society stands in contrast to Margaret Thatcher’s claim that “there’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look

after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours” (1987).

Kettunen (2000) claims that in the case of Nordic, or social democratic countries (and especially in the case of Sweden), “‘society’ ... has to carry the responsibilities for social security instead of private and voluntary actors” (Kettunen 2000: 162), or rather individuals are expected to feel responsible for the provision of universal guarantees of basic security for all. In other words, unlike Thatcher’s formulation where the individual imagines *himself caring for himself*, in a social democracy, individuals look after themselves via looking after their neighbors. The tenets of universalism and equality pushed by social democratic ideology posit that what your neighbor gets, you will also, but all must hold off of hoarding wealth for himself.

Such a difference in the imaginary of the social also affects the meaning of individualism. Viivi put it most succinctly when she complained to me one day of her experience as an exchange student in Stamford, Connecticut. “I felt so dependent and embarrassed,” she said. She explained to me how she had to ask her host family for a ride in their car whenever she needed to run errands. “I couldn’t even go to the supermarket by myself!” she said. “In Finland, we are all ensured our independence. Our country makes sure that each of us has access to great public transportation.” Independence, according to Viivi comes not from private property ownership (e.g. you own car), but from a public concern for all citizens to go where they want without having to enter into a commercial contract.

This ideal of universal access to resources and the injunction against hoarding put towards the subject also affects his relationship not only to “himself” but also to his neighbor. As the subject must watch himself from over-stepping his boundaries, he also watches the other. Åke Daun (1991) links the valuation of this form of

individualism in Sweden to everyday rules of interaction between neighbors. He claims that “many Swedes hesitate to ask neighbors for assistance, since they do not want to get into a dependency relationship outside their private sphere” (1991: 166). In this formulation, “dependence” is excused within the “private” sphere of close friends and family but not in the public sphere unless through the anonymous arms of the state bureaucracy. Superficially, it echoes Thatcher’s claims about the primacy of individuals and families over society; yet, on a second reading, it appears to be quite the opposite. Avoiding dependence on one’s neighbor parallels the relegation of relations between acquaintances in pejorative terms: relations with non-intimate others involve an obligation to perform. In the lack of a mutual bond of trust that characterizes intimate relationships, relations with neighbors and other public figures require that one entertain and make “small talk” – another common complaint many of my friends had about the “encroachment of American” ways of doing business that forced people to talk about “nothing.”

In a conversation with Viivi during one of our frequent mid-week coffee chats, she claimed she believed Finland to be a nation of people who “*pärjään itse*” (managing by oneself): a society of individuals who “don’t need help and who don’t want to bother others for anything small like building a house! Of course,” she added, “if a childhood friend asked me for help, I will do anything to help her. But it’s because when a Finn asks for help, it means they really need it.” The subtext here can be read that “Finns” only make demands upon others when the need surmounts individual abilities to cope: also that one should only demand from an other in times of great need<sup>28</sup>. This comment came about during a low point in my fieldwork when I

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<sup>28</sup> “It is like winning the lottery to be a Finn” (*On lottovoitto syntyä Suomeen*) was a phrase often said with irony but with a certain acceptance that compared to liberal states with high income gaps, Finland at least offered a “good life” to all. What threatens the system, however, according to one professor at the University of Helsinki, is the immigration into Finland of those others who do not understand what it means to be part of the *yhteiskansa* - a productive member of society who feels an obligation to

made slip that I found it hard to get around sometimes in Helsinki. Especially during the first few months of living in Finland, I held up the line getting onto the tram, the train or getting food at cafés. It took me some figuring out to see where the line began for the food or to buy tickets for the tram. I often found myself bumbling around searching for things for a lack of signs. “People will think you are managing by yourself and will not offer help unless you ask for it,” Viivi said. “Finns think it’s rude to think less of you and it’s also considered rude to approach strangers.”

While this sense of non-interference differs depending on how well one knows the other person, Viivi interpreted my situation as an effect of the belief that it is rude to interfere in what someone else’s business. Similarly, I came across this concept of social decorum via non-interference again in my Finnish conversation class. The conversation topic of the week happened to be “making small talk.” The teacher started with her dislike of making small talk and how this concept came to Finland with the new need for Finnish business people to participate in joint projects with their cohorts in the English-speaking world. “Why talk about the weather? What’s the point?” she joked. “In Finland it is polite to not come out of your house or your apartment when your neighbor is also coming out or waiting for the elevator. You don’t want to force people to have to make small talk!” We all laughed but we each

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return the debt incurred by access to public services. At a reception party where I met this professor, she commented that “now the force of globalization can be felt in the smallest village of Finland.” As examples, she noted having seen workers from Thailand picking strawberries at a farm in her hometown northwest of Helsinki, as well as the increasing numbers of refugees from Somalia now moving into government housing in Helsinki. “They just want our *godis*,” she said, using the Swedish word for “candy.” The problem, according to this professor, was that “they” – these immigrants – do not understand how the system works. Similarly, in an editorial section in *Tööläinen* (Matti Huhtamäki 2006), a free newspaper that was delivered to the doors of each resident of the neighborhood of Töölä, Huhtamäki lamented that

In the buildings built during the last fifteen years, half are in use by invited foreigners or by illegal immigrants.... Even though most African or Asian refugees who escaped the jungles or big city slums are accustomed to environments far from the luxury of Vuosaari or Mellunmäki, these good residential areas are now destroyed by gangs. Helsinki citizens or other Finns are last in line to get housing and are discriminated against.

had similar stories of never having shared the elevator with neighbors from the same floor. In fact, on several instances when I waited for the elevator I thought I heard my neighbor clicking open the locks on the front door as if to come out, but then closing the front door shut again.

This idea of non-interference also extended to casual greetings on the street. Once I happened to be walking down my street with Salli (Tarja's daughter) and I bumped into a woman I knew who lived next to me. I said "Hello!" [*Terve!*] and she most politely lifted her hand. Salli looked at me and asked laughing, "Where do you think you are!" I had no idea what she meant but while it was common to say "hello" to strangers in Helsinki, she told me to think better of it outside of the capital. "It's a good thing you look like such a foreigner," she joked, "if I said it, she's going to wonder if she had another granddaughter she's forgotten about!" For Salli, greetings are not casual. Greeting and making someone on the street acknowledge you, in her formulation, forces yourself into their thoughts – you thus "bother" them. Yet I recalled Salli's characterization once during my first visit to the rehabilitation center in Ilomantsi. As I walked from the room I had rented to the city center, I passed by a man in his late fifties who seemed to be on an afternoon stroll. Much determined to make an affable impression in a new town, I gave him a very cheerful "*Moi!*" [an informal "Hello"]. He appeared not to hear me and walked on, but after I had passed him, I heard him stop and ask, "What?" [*Mitä?*] Much encouraged, I turned around and repeated "*Moi!*" He seemed very taken aback. "*Moi?*" he said as if asking me to confirm whether what he had heard addressed to him was correct, and then he repeated in succession, "*Moi... moi!*" and then looked me in the eye the third time and said, "Moi!" He then laughed. Then he waved his hand and left.

Putting these events together made me rethink my own taken for granted notion of personal space. It was obvious the old man had no malicious intentions. He

had merely not expected that someone unknown to him would address him on his late-afternoon stroll. Thus, he moved on until it struck him that someone *did* address him. The first “*Moi?*” he voiced as a question addressed to himself, repeating and confirming that he had indeed heard someone saying “*Moi!*” The second utterance confirmed that I had indeed addressed it to *him* and the third “*moi*” he addressed to me. The “*moi*” he returned to me however, seemed to be more of a triumph at having recognized the intentions behind my address to him. It then appears that my greeting obligated him to acknowledge my presence, since if I had not addressed him he would not have been forced to think through what I had wanted of him. In a way then, I had forced him into an exchange he was not initially obligated to enter. In greeting the elderly man on the street, I had *forced* an impression on him: forced, seem an appropriate term here, as he had to take several steps to come to terms with recognizing what I had demanded of him.

Trägårdh (1997) argues that the Nordic conceptualizations of “society” protect men from the “spectre of personal servitude,” and that resistance exists in Sweden to the idea of getting “maid” service – i.e. showing obvious class differentiation. For instance, an article in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat raised a related issue on the problem of table-service in Finland. The article framed reluctance for table service in Finland as an issue of expense but also one of social “awkwardness”: if you are able-bodied, why not get the coffee yourself?

Finns are burdened by history. In the postwar period there were no services, nor did people have the money to pay for them. Appreciation for doing things one's self and instinctive penny-pinching became imbedded in the subconscious of a prudent nation.

Those who are more affluent do not like to show it. In addition, many find

the idea of hiring a domestic servant to be awkward, even if cleaning help is bought from a company that seeks to make a profit.

Good public services have made Finns used to the idea that it is not necessary to pay for everything. In addition, buying services has been, and still is, expensive.

This lack of familiarity with services is apparent. Finns continue to be the ones who will jealously hold on to their suitcases while abroad, defending their luggage against a hotel porter offering to help carry them.

*(Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, Eeva Eronen 8/13/2006)*

As the article claims, few cafés and restaurants (if of a smaller caliber) offer table service and café entrances would often display a note that simply says “self-service” [*itsepalvelu*]. Besides the abhorrence involved in the “spectre of personal servitude” as mentioned by Trägårdh (1997) the specter of elitism haunts the idea of table-service as well. It is not simply that this “penny-pinching” is so “instinctive” that personal service is rare. The Helsingin Sanomat article clarifies this initial characterization by explaining that table service does indeed exist, but that “Those who are more affluent do not like to show it.” Similar to the case mentioned before in chapter one of Kirsti’s parents who covered up their window with a carpet, the “burden of history” then, is the imagined egalitarian relationship with one’s neighbors that makes one hesitant of a move that sets oneself above the other. For, in addition to revealing the truth of economic differentiation, one could potentially prove oneself as a hoarder and therefore incur the envy and wrath of one’s neighbors.

### **The Social Fantasy and its Effect on the Ethics of Exchange**

I met Terhi for a cup of coffee at her workplace after her classes at the city's hotel school and before her night shift at the club started. As we sank into the soft white couches of the club, she said in English, "I am burning to the end."

I instinctively asked her whether she wondered if she had *työuupumus*, the official category for burnout. "Your problem is that you keep asking people about *työuupumus*" she laughed. "People don't say in an ordinary context '*olen työuupunut!*' [literally, I am work-exhausted] instead they say '*olen loppuun palamassa*' [I will burn to the end]." She explained that this metaphor commonly expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed by "pressure," and that the use of the metaphor had nothing to do with *työuupumus* – something requiring medical intervention. "It's more about expressing suffering, normal suffering that you get through having to deal with people. It's about dealing with something beyond your control" she said. And as an example of one such social force, she pointed to a co-worker of hers who visibly grimaced as she walked past us with a tray of new glasses. Terhi explained: "She has a bad cold, but it's Friday here, it means we will be very busy. If she took off today, she knows that we will all feel her absence. It's a matter of honesty." And she added as an afterthought, "There is a lot of pressure to be honest in Finland."

Coming into work despite having a bad cold becomes a matter of "honesty," as Terhi articulates: the more pressure there is for her co-worker to be present at work, the more there would be a need for the sick worker to provide evidence that she really *is* sick. According to Terhi, "normally" people would not doubt her, but with a high turn-over rate and no supportive friends at work, in her formulation the sick co-worker lacked the social network necessary to legitimize her condition – she lacked friends who would vouch for her "honesty." According to Terhi's analysis her co-worker came into work, as "People would much rather just show up to work rather than have



to worry about what others might think. It's competitive nowadays and there's just that much more pressure," she said.

Thus, with high-turnover rates and the "competitive" nature of the present, one's moral standing as an "honest" worker falls under constant scrutiny. Terhi's referral to "dealing with something beyond your control" and the pressures associated with such an experience, then can be seen as the pressure of having to continually build up one's moral credit in the face of a constantly changing workforce. With so many new faces turning up to work, Terhi, nor her sick co-worker, Sara, has no time to build a relationship with others in a way that allows mutual trust. The negativity implicit in the metaphor, "burning-to-the-end" [*loppuun palaminen*] then speaks to a sense of limit that appears from responding actively to this social pressure.

Moreover, as the example of her co-worker showed, it is not necessarily the case that it is "work" per se which adds to the sense of "pressure" incurred by the subject: rather, it is the experience of being under observation of others (and not even just the supervisor's) that contributes to the guilt and obligation to respond. The term "burning-to-the-end" [*loppuun palaminen*] speaks to the trauma of an impression made upon the subject by the social valuation of "honesty."

Moreover, seeing Sara struggle at work, prompted Terhi to note: "There is a lot of pressure to be honest in Finland" [*Suomessa on paljon paineita olla rehellinen*]. It seems thus "honesty" or how such a category gains social relevance must be through Sara's struggle and the impression it made on Terhi. More specifically, the translation of Sara's struggle as one that should be framed under national terms (that of the myth of a "Finnish" valuation for honesty), speaks not only to the specific relationship between Terhi and Sara, but to the force of the laws of exchange at large.

I turn again to my conversations with writer and business consultant Seppo Tamminen who broke down this notion of exchange in terms of a differential

understanding of trust. He explained to me that the biggest challenges facing American companies that operate in Finland as follows: “American supervisors like to chit chat with workers and follow up on their progress. Finns find these practices intrusive and off-putting because it feels like the supervisor doesn’t think the worker is up to do the job. Finnish supervisors let workers do their work until it’s done. It’s like a challenge: Can he do it or not? But the sense here is that there is trust. The worker said he will do it and so you trust that he will do it!”

As I have suggested in the case of Sara, Seppo, also points to a build-up of credit: that is of moral credit. Unlike in the case of “American” supervisors, “Finnish” supervisors give credit to individuals in that they already believe or “trust” that the employee will live up to the challenge. Seppo historicized this trust as stemming from Finland’s agricultural past in which parishioners had to depend upon each other’s labor for survival.

It’s a matter of *honesty*. Everyone must do the same amount of work and if you are given a task, you must do it. In a small country, others depend upon you and trust that you do it. It’s honest to do what you said you will do. We are a really small country! Our success is built upon this trust. There are no free-riders here, and if there is one, we’ll make them suffer!

Indeed, agricultural cooperative work or *talkoot* work, as it is called, has a long history in Finland and is the system through which individuals in a village contributed their labor for communal projects. In the past, *talkoot* labor made possible the construction of public buildings: today in rural areas where *talkoot* still refers to community based projects, it brings individuals together to solve common issues such as keeping public areas clean (Haddad 2007: 151). As Haddad (2007), who did a study

on the notion of voluntarism and *talkoot* in Finland notes, shirkers are accused on both moral and social grounds for not contributing to the community and thus while not paid or made mandatory by law, most everyone from the community participates in *talkoot* activities. The question of honesty in cooperative work revolves around putting in *enough* of one's labor and becoming a part of the social through working together. When one member of a "team" holds back from pulling their weight in this system, others must put in more effort to compensate for this lack. The idiom of "honesty" [*rehellisyyttä*] matters in this way, as your lack of efforts translates as more work for others.

Sara's dilemma to come to work or not despite her obvious malaise, must be considered within the notion of moral exchange particular to the history and myths which uphold the social moral exchange system. Defending one's honesty occurs at a cost as *not* coming into work – the "honest" thing to do in the case of Sara does not count as acting honestly. "Honesty" is upheld via engaging with the social in the way that it dictates in a "mutual contest of honor." I use these terms that Mauss (1990) used to describe the potlatch to refer also to the demand to be "honest" as in the case I describe here, as both cases point to a display of destruction that nonetheless constructs the social ideal. If in societies engaged in the potlatch, social hierarchy that build upon notions of "honor" take shape through the frame of the potlatch, in the case of Sara (and in Terhi's understanding of Sara's actions), the symbolic ideal of "honesty" come alive precisely because of and through the "destructive" act of coming into work despite suffering from a bad cold.

Mauss says of the potlatch and of gift exchange in general that such forms of exchange take place "in a form that is both disinterested and obligatory. Moreover, this obligation is expressed in a mythical and imaginary way or, one might say, symbolic and collective" (1990: 33). Even as Mary Douglas argues against Mauss

that he should not apply the logic of the gift to social democratic mechanisms of redistribution because individuals in such a society fail to obligate the state in a “mutual contest of honor,” I argue that while individuals may not have the power to obligate the “State” as such, they nonetheless succeed in obligating neighbors, co-workers, and community members to comply. And further, that this obligation to enter into an exchange with society through the contribution of one’s labor manifests in a discourse other than that of the political discourse of social democracy “proper” in the symbolically laden speech of “honesty.” This notion of honesty thus refers back to discussions on shame and guilt made in chapter one, without which, the political and redistributive mechanisms of the social democratic state fail to gain social resonance.

The value of social democracy or of the fantasy of the “Nordic good society” comes from the merging of the discourse of a highly nostalgic agricultural past through the fetishization of a national sense of honesty as well as from the annual commemoration of those who died during World War II. These symbolic edifices not only serve to bridge the political idealisms of social democracy with everyday imaginaries of citizenship and what one owes each other, but also undergirds the notion that the present state of affairs come as a gift from those who died saving the nation and from the sacrifices of those who struggle at work in the present. The field of meaning which surrounds the notion of social welfare then, obligates members to reciprocate.

In comparison to the language of social democratic law and the laws of exchange characteristic of business which makes explicit the value of that to be exchanged, the value of a gift remains hidden. The gift circulates based on this very fact that one can never fully give back enough. And as the value of the gift remains unknown, one never fully satisfies the obligation to respond. This unknown value cloaks the obligation to reciprocate in mythical terms. The repetition of the references

made to Finland's Winter War against the Soviet Union and the nobility of the Finnish farmers as they work in communal harmony, feed into the present condition of wealth and economic prosperity as stemming from the ingenuity of the Volk and of the sacrifices of "our" forefathers to ensure that "our" land does not fall behind the Iron Curtain.

Moreover, James Siegel (2006) argues that calling an act or an object as "gift" amounts to the "domestication of the pure gift" (2006: 8). Following Derrida's logic that no "true" gifts exist, in that a gift by definition should not incur a counter-gift as such an exchange would negate the gift as gift. However, Siegel argues that a gift that comes to us as a surprise approximates the quality of a true gift. If nothing about us obligated another to give a gift, that gift appears to us as proving "previously unknown attributes" (ibid 5) about ourselves. In this way, the gift contributes to the emergence and confirmation of something within us that we didn't know existed before. This value symbolized by the gift however, remains a mystery until it gains social value as "honor" or "honesty." The conversion of this mysterious element into social meaning as "honesty" then amounts to the domestication of the pure gift and its potential for the propagation of "more honesty."

For, as Siegel argues, the circulation of the gift does not involve the volition of the participants. The gift given to me that confirms some value in me does not result from the immediate volition of the donor himself. Instead, the donor only circulates the spirit of the gift that transcends the relationship between him and me. He merely mirrors a societal value placed on what is in me that I do not yet know. The gift then, communicates this value. The naming of which frames the sentiments and affective experience such as guilt, shame and fear that stem from a failure to respond to its dictates.

## **The Forest as Symptom**

Through the use of several vignettes I attempted in this chapter to examine why certain social spaces stand out in everyday discourse as desirable. I began with the genealogy of the “Finns” as the “forest people” through an examination of Finland’s national beginnings and its relationship to idealized European others. In light of Finland’s “lack” of European-ness, which, as I argue above, is something compulsively denied but anxiously admitted, such positings of a judging social other contribute to the reproduction of the discourse of “Finnishness” and of the social reality of the national *Volk*. As Michael Herzfeld (1997) argues in *Cultural Intimacy*, national elements which gain international derision or are found to be embarrassing or undesirable are often paradoxically made the very things which invoke and inspire a sense of national unity. Alternatively, the experience of embarrassment in itself, transforms the imagined nation into a tangible social reality. Individual experiences of embarrassment speak to how the concern with “Finnishness” manifested by the short excerpts in this chapter blends into a concern about the subject.

The point is not, as Timothy Mitchell warns, to see people as a “‘self-contained totality’ – a ‘them’ against an ‘us’” (Mitchell 1988: 17). Edward Said argues that an encounter with difference runs the danger of confirming for the anthropologist, what the anthropologist already knows – that “they” are different as a whole and that the reason for difference lies within the particularities of the people rather than in the particularities of class, political circumstances, and/or economic factors (see Said 1979:107). Naoki Sakai, adds further, that such a perpetuation of difference for instance, the idea of “the Finn,” or “the Japanese” or the “values of the Japanese,” (a common category during WWII in the Allied nations) comes from “a desire that is made possible by the positing of ‘Japanese thought’ as its ultimate objective” (Sakai 1997:42-3).

Here, following John Pemberton (1994), I treat these “differences” as “effects” of history and of the particular ways in which the symbols that came to signify for “Finnishness” blended with notions of self, subjectivity and laws of social exchange. Discursive and affective manifestations of guilt and fear of dishonesty, as per Terhi and her interpretations of “Finnish society” and its demand for honesty reproduces as affective experience, the force of the social within the subject. The circulation of symbols that spell out what it means to be part of the imagined community brings about these effects as affects. These experiences, manifest as an effect of entering into an exchange with others and through the belief that “I am part of this imagined community.”

Thus, the desires and self-identifications of the individuals mentioned here do not speak to “Finns” but to the construction of self that is always formed within a dialectic with the Other (the symbolic order: for example, the discourse of the state, national myth, political ideology, etc.). As Riina shows, her fascination with Buenos Aires or her experiences there, stem from the injunctions and demands she grew up in Finland. While her fascinations, her desires have nothing to do with the “nation,” Finland, itself, her affective experiences stem from her imagined relationship with the symbolic order of which she believes herself a part. The “freedom” she felt while in Buenos Aires then does not depend upon whether Buenos Aires itself provides more freedom than Helsinki, but rather depends upon Riina’s own perceptions about being “freed” from the “typical” expectations that she believed bound her at home.

By focusing on the imaginary of “society” via the specific manner in which interlocutors spoke about spaces created as *against* the social, I teased apart the desires and fears of individuals based on the laws which regulate social exchange. While one does indeed *imagine* the larger society, as per Benedict Anderson (1991), the community takes on the quality of social reality through the affective experiences of

subjects that stem from the particular history of religious, moral, ethical and juridical registers that give rise to feelings of obligation, guilt, embarrassment and a desire for freedom. How one imagines social exchange within a community, for instance, what one can expect from one's neighbors, and how one can be expected to be treated from others, all profoundly make tangible the violence of the imagined community on the subject. Sara's fear of appearing "dishonest," to Terhi's own ideal to not pose in front of the camera – a practice she made synonymous with "putting on airs," both point to the rules that apply to the individual as well as to those others the subject believes should adhere to the same rules as themselves. These fears of failure speak to the force of the social, which obliges individuals to respond. The obligation to contribute one's labor, the obligation to be honest, the obligation to participate in the redistributive mechanisms of the social democratic welfare state – on the flip side point to the subject's having already been credited with trust, having already received benefits gained through the sweat of one's neighbor's labor, etc.

In contrast to Althusser's (2001) notion of interpellation, where the subject always already appears to *be* the object of the call, examining the demand for honesty through the logic of the gift highlights the fact that ambivalence accompanies responding to such a call. Just as in the potlatch, a notion of "credit, of time limit placed on it, and also the notion of honor" (Mauss 1990: 35) compels each clan to maintain prestige chiefs do not enter into this competition of honor out of volition and agency but by the force of the gift. A chief at a potlatch can only prove "he is haunted and favoured both by the spirits and by good fortune, that he is possessed, and also possesses it" (ibid 39) via sharing and destroying in the most extravagant manner possible his possessions. A chief does not merely respond to a call, as per Althusser, as a subject who already sees himself as in need of such display. Rather, something other than his own agency animates and drives him to respond. Thus, the logic of the



gift shows that the subject engages in the social as a split entity: something possesses the subject to engage. Without the conscious knowledge of the subject, the subject nonetheless participates in the mutual competition of honesty. Even if Sara may not necessarily edify herself as an “honest” person, a force despite herself possessed her to respond. In the eyes of the observer, such as Terhi, such an act of sacrifice takes on the significance of a “gift” – here symbolized by the term “honesty.”

The fantasy of universalism of law within the particular history of social democracy in Finland then produces “the forest,” “real friends” and the “real self” as symptoms. However, these “symptoms” paradoxically reinstate the social ideal. These symptoms do not alter the hegemonic ideal, they in fact “re-charge” the subject so that he can better observe the social rules. As Lacan argues even something as subjective as desire paradoxically manifests the desire of the Other. The desire for solitude or for the forest then, stem not from the subject but from the injunctions placed by the social. The imaginary of the forest as a space for authenticity helps reproduce the very ideals against which they come into being.

While the “Day in Nature” and “relegation” of individuals diagnosed with burnout to rehabilitation centers located far from their homes help distance these individuals from everyday expectations, the course itself, with its emphasis on “energizing” the self as a way to combat workplace stress reminds participants of their own failures. Although the rehabilitation course helps reconstitute the clients’ ego by focusing on self-objectification, it also shores up traces of the original violence. The use of the forest as a symbolic cue for participants to talk about themselves further reinstates the notion of a particularized demand placed upon citizen workers within the culturalized framework of “Finnishness.”

In the next chapter I turn back to the lobby of the rehabilitation center, where I spent many nights staying up with the clients of the course for burnout. I also

introduce discussions at self-help group meetings for people with burnout as a way to further explore how these social pockets enable expressions of individual suffering as socially relevant experience and why then individuals repeat telling the “same” story. Why doesn’t making socially acceptable an involuntary refusal to go to work – in other words – to engage in socially and morally expected conduct, resolve the repetition of the traumatic moment?

## CHAPTER FOUR: SHIFTS IN THE EVERYDAY

The staff at Pääskynpesä generously gave me language assistance as well as a physical examination room to conduct personal interviews. In the white washed doctor's office, Pekka's eyes appeared intensely red. Pekka was one of the first people to volunteer for interviews and he came ready with answers to questions I had already given him before hand. The questions mostly inquired after the most recent workplace.

“My employer didn't tell me what I *should* or *shouldn't* have to do. So it was *again* a kind of a mess,” said Pekka. The stress he made on the word “again,” turns the latest workplace from which he got sick as repeating the failures of his previous place of employment. He said with some degree of exaggeration that in his previous position at an IT company, he worked with his other four colleagues doing what a hundred worker should do. In the height of Finland's IT revolution led by Nokia, he said that back then in the late 1990s, it was such a position of prestige that he felt he was lucky to be working in that industry let alone have a job. However, despite his pride in his position, he quit after four years of working for the IT company, and moved on to work at a local ice rink – an idea he said at the time had given him much pleasure. He explained that while his knowledge of information technology would be ill-used at the ice rink, that *there* he would at least have the satisfaction of completing what filled his task-list – something which he claimed was impossible in his previous position.

However, it was at the ice rink that his struggle with insomnia began and his health deteriorated. Going back to his earlier statement: the mess – or in his words, not knowing “what I should or shouldn't have to do” kept him up countless nights. Pekka explained that not being given exact limits on what to do made it impossible for him to “complete” anything at work and that this frustration between not being able to finish

and feeling guilty *because* of his supervisor's poor managing skills disabled his ability to sleep. His latest job at the ice rink thus repeats the problems of the previous workplace at the IT-company in that in both cases his work had no limits – no sense of “completion” was allowed. Nights interrupted by anger, frustration and guilt also resulted in days of torpor, irritation and more guilt.

Once, he said that he decided to confront his supervisor at the ice rink about the confusing demands made upon him, but his supervisor only told him that he could either “take it or leave it.”

“He was so inspiring, my boss,” said Pekka with a wry smile. It was soon after this confrontation with his supervisor that Pekka went to see his occupational health professional for the second time. The first time, Pekka said, he left the occupational health professional's office in anger. “I couldn't accept that I had something wrong with my mind!” he said. The second time, however, he said, “I felt I could not cope with myself alone. I felt hopeless.”

He told me that he really wanted to be sent to Pääskynpesä because he felt too ashamed to be seen at a rehabilitation center close to home. However, he confessed he felt less ashamed of himself after taking this course. “Before I came to the rehabilitation center, I thought I was a bad person, someone who couldn't do what he was supposed to do,” he said. But he claimed that through attending the course and getting to know other people who suffered from similar conditions as himself he said that he came to “see” that the problem lies not with him *per se*, but with his relationship to a transformed society. Through the course, Pekka came to see the problem as something beyond him, and that he cannot just blame himself. Pekka explained that the camaraderie he developed with other participants at the rehabilitation center who had similar narratives helped bring about this change. “I

want to thank the people here for giving me the tools to talk about what happened,” he said.

Yet, as we got closer to the end of the rehabilitation course, Pekka still showed signs of sleeplessness, irritability and depression. Pekka often appeared highly energetic at group sessions, physical exercise and relaxation training sessions. He seemed quick to act upon the commands of physical therapists to grab a mat, pick a partner, and so on, yet outside of these contexts he still complained of an inability to sleep, and a sense of dread in terms of going back to his hometown. Thus, despite the benefits he ascribed to the rehabilitation course as letting him see that he cannot keep blaming himself, he still relives the anguish he experienced at his previous workplaces. When I asked him what concerned him the most about returning home on the last day of the course, Pekka repeated the phrase, “It’s not like I lost a leg.”

James Siegel (2006) speaks of repetition and of trauma as “The person who suffers from trauma repeats the traumatic event in his dreams or in his speech precisely because he cannot believe it. He cannot understand what happened to him, even though he can say what it is that occurred” (2006: 48). The Finnish public health understanding of burnout provides the grammar through which Pekka’s dread of facing others outside of the rehabilitative context take on social meaning. However, Pekka’s ability to “say what it is that occurred” in no way shows that he embodies what he says. After the rehabilitation course ended, he sent me a picture of his hunting dog with a message stating that he decided to take an extended time away from work by spending time at his summer cottage [*mökki*].

If some clients from the rehabilitation course for burnout, like Pekka, went their own way, some who lived in bigger cities turned to private psychiatrists. Often, clients from smaller cities with no access to public health specialists with knowledge of burnout and who seek further help, turn to programs hosted by non-governmental

organizations. Staff at the rehabilitation centers see referring clients to self-help groups and other NGO programs which operate locally as part of the rehabilitation package. As a resident psychologist at Kaisankoti, a rehabilitation center on the outskirts of Helsinki explained, rehabilitation courses do not “cure”: instead, they provide clients with resources for further opportunities to seek treatment. In this chapter, I refer to my fieldwork with five self-help groups for people with burnout to explore why treatments for burnout defer its cure.

For instance, Kari, a member of a self-help group led by Tarja mentioned that talking about the past helped “unhook” bad memories that had hooked themselves into the present. Yet, the repeated instances in which Kari spoke of the “same” slights he suffered at work manifest that his “hooks” still remain hooked. Thus, despite the fact that, as Pekka commented, rehabilitation centers provide the “tools” with which to speak about suffering and self-help groups as a continuation of the work of healing provide group members with the potential to “unhook” themselves, those diagnosed with burnout remain under the power of their traumatic experience. While the public health discourse of burnout provide members with the language through which to make their suffering socially meaningful, those traumatized nonetheless fail to domesticate this discourse as their own.

Michael Herzfeld (1986) argues that as the labeling and treating of symptoms as illnesses are symbolic activities, they may also “serve as acts of moral commentary” (Herzfeld 1986: 107). Pekka’s case, then, needs to be seen as part of an overall rise in public concern over what comes to constitute “realistic” possible pathologies for workers and the degree to which workers can make demands on employers based on this risk. The one hundred and thirty two symptoms attributed to burnout (Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998) in themselves have no social meaning: yet, through the frame of burnout they come to represent the risks of participating in society in the present. And

while many of the symptoms could be made redundant under other clinical labels<sup>29</sup>, it is only through framing Pekka's symptoms (the main complaints being sleeplessness, depression and restlessness) as effects of burning out that any statement could be made against society through them.

However, rather than using their socially-acquired syndrome as a critique of the conditions that made them burnout, I found that other course members shared Pekka's hesitance to tell his family or friends about what he was going through or what had transpired. During our usual evenings in the lobby of the center, another member, Päivi explained her own unwillingness to speak about her diagnoses or how she got burnout. "Everyone is tired. We are the only ones here treating it like a sickness. We can't talk about this, they will laugh!" she said. Indeed, many during the interview stated that the best part of the course for burnout was the opportunity to talk about their problems with others who can "understand" and re-articulate what they are going through. In the following, I ask why burnout does not open a space for social critique and why speech fails in contexts outside of the rehabilitative contexts.

### **Self-Help Group**

Non-governmental organizations (NGO) that worked closely with the Finnish Insurance Institute (KELA) sponsored most of the self-help groups [*itseapuryhmä*] for burnout. These same NGOs often sold rehabilitation packages to the Finnish Insurance Institute (KELA) and were thus fluent in the language and framework through which people came out from the public health programs. Since the economic crisis of the 1990s, the role of NGOs grew in terms of supplementing already existing state health programs as municipalities faced broad budget cuts on all public programs. NGOs

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<sup>29</sup> Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) note that burnout could be considered as work-related neurasthenia as per the ICD-10.

provide the final bridge between rehabilitative and everyday life for those seeking further assistance after attending public programs for burnout.

NGOs often relied upon volunteers to assist them run their programs and people like Tarja, who once attended these programs as a participant but had since recovered, became key assets as role models. Knowing Tarja, a volunteer and a group leader for two self-help groups for people with burnout, I had an easy access to the discussions and members whenever Tarja and the group felt it admissible to have an observer in their midst. As a group leader, the NGO allowed Tarja to decide how to run each session. The self-help group meetings took place once a week at a small conference room in an annex wing of an office complex. Five group members and Tarja, the group leader, sat around a big wooden table set under bright fluorescent lighting. I sat a little to the side, not at the main table but from the corner of the room where I could see their faces. The members included Minna, a former nurse, a single mother in her forties who worried constantly about her high school daughter who suffered from periodic panic attacks, Kari, a former railway worker in his fifties, Saana another former nurse, Tilda, who taught at elementary school and Taisto who held a clerical position at a firm. Their ages ranged from 45 to 58, and according to Tarja, who had led groups like this for almost five years, most members turned out to be women even though men often called her on the hotline. Those who sought more help after taking the basic rehabilitative course for burnout had the option of joining face to face meetings such as the self-help group or to contact volunteers such as Tarja who worked for a non-governmental organization that worked closely with the Finnish Insurance Institute (KELA) for advice. While women came to these meetings more than men, Tarja and others at the NGO explained that this did not mean that men did not find the services offered by the NGO beneficial. “I think women find it easier to talk about their symptoms with others more than men,” said Tarja. “Men find outlets



elsewhere.” Amongst the “other outlets,” Tarja pointed to hobbies, summer cottages and fishing.

Although Tarja has no professional clinical background, as a “survivor” of depression and burnout symptoms herself, members of her group often looked up to her as a “spiritual guru.” Group leaders who volunteered their time played key roles in mediating between the public rehabilitative sessions as they themselves went under the same treatments as former clients of the Finnish public health care system. In fact, group members often made explicit the value of the group leaders as providing what clinicians fail to offer. At the meetings, many spoke dismissively of doctors who failed to understand their suffering from their perspective. “It’s not that they don’t care,” Minna explained to me after one long meeting in which the members came together to complain about their treatment at the local health centers. “It’s just that many of them [doctors] don’t see burnout in the same way we do here.” As examples, Minna pointed to the time when her doctor prescribed her antidepressants and told her not to work so hard. Echoing a common sentiment during the group meeting, Minna complained of his prognosis as showing that her doctor didn’t understand her at all. She said that her doctor kept emphasizing the need for her to balance both work and life. However, as she exclaimed, “It’s not the work.”

Saana, another member of Tarja’s group complained of a feeling of not being able to explain how she felt beyond the patient-physician relationship. “My family and friends will never understand what I am going through, but here, with Tarja and the group, I feel that words just come [*sanat vain tulivat*].” Saana described how a sense of “hopelessness” she felt about trying to explain how she felt led her to stop talking to her family about her insomnia and constant feelings of fatigue and her friends when she came out of the rehabilitation course for burnout. Why do rehabilitation centers

and self-help groups enable speech? Why, as she claims, do “words just come” [*sanat vain tulivat*] in the context of the self-help group?

I explore this point by now turning to Saija, a former telephone dispatcher for an office supply company in her early thirties, who had just been released from the hospital. Viivi, our mutual friend introduced me to Saija several weeks after she returned to her hometown in Lahti for a much needed change of scenery. The informality and intimate way in which we came to know each other allowed me to get to know Saija individually much more than I did the other participants of the five self-help groups I came to know. The members of the groups already had a space through which they could “unhook,” that is, inhabit through speech their past traumatic experiences. Not many felt inclined to spend time with an outsider who already sat in on their discussions. In contrast, Saija was new to her diagnosis of burnout and was only beginning to attend her own self-help group. It was Saija, who had asked Viivi to introduce me to her. She wanted to speak to a foreign researcher who could, according to Saija, “tell the world” what happened to her at her former workplace.

One day I got a call from Viivi asking me whether I wanted to join her to a trip to Lahti to see Saija. Saija had taken some time for herself and had moved back to her hometown in Lahti, a city an hour away from Helsinki by train. I immediately agreed. As the train passed through green fields and ochre colored barns, Viivi described how Saija used to call her about how she hated her workplace. “She used to call me on her bad days and I would just hear her crying through the phone. She’s one of those people with a real Finnish work ethic. She feels too responsible in a world now that doesn’t feel responsible for her,” said Viivi. She explained how Saija suddenly stopped calling her but how she had a surprise call from her from the hospital. Saija had complications during her back surgery and had to spend an extended amount of time in the hospital. According to Viivi, Saija explained later that removed from the

responsibilities of everyday life in the hospital, she felt herself paying more attention to her own needs. Viivi surmised that Saija had called Viivi that day as the context of the hospital had an effect of making Saija need a friend.

Viivi explained that the hospital brought the two together and she visited Saija at the hospital frequently loaded with magazines, brochures and questionnaires on the medical condition of burnout. Although Viivi said that Saija initially refused to read the articles, by the time I got to know Saija, she spoke of herself as “burnt-out” [*“Olen palamassa loppuun”*].

As Viivi and I made our way to the café by the lakeside, Saija was already there wrapped in a purple shawl waiting for us. We sat together watching seagulls fight over scraps from empty tables until Saija asked me how I would like her to begin. I asked her to begin where she wanted.

“I felt like I was wrapped in plastic [*muovikäärössä*],” Saija began. She explained the days leading up to this condition as something typical – typical, in that she felt that her co-workers assumed that she would “be the reliable one” and help. She however, described how despite the typicality and everyday banality of the injustices she experienced those days right before this condition, she nonetheless felt that she had reached the limits of her tolerance. “I felt those several days before this happened that I could take no more,” she said. She explains the context in detail as follows,

I had a very bad day a few days before it happened. My other colleague came late and as the only other dispatchers were on sick leave or on holiday, I was alone on the phones for three hours. For three hours, I tolerated it, but then afterwards I walked up to my ball-less boss [*munaton mies*] and told him that I wanted to quit, that I wanted to go away, that this is *enough!* I started yelling

and screaming and crying a lot. He didn't know what to do. He called in this woman, his own boss – and the only woman in management, well, he called her in. When this lady came into the room I stopped shouting and I just cried. I became quite quiet. She asked me what they could do so that I could continue my work.

Saija then described how she went quietly back to her desk without responding to the female supervisor's question. That whole week she worked as if nothing had happened, but then she said, "One day I found myself unable to leave the couch [*Eräänä päivänä huomasin etten kykene nousemaan sohvalta*]." The idiom of being "wrapped in plastic" [*muovikäärössä*] she explained referred to this condition, a condition in which she said she "found herself" no longer the agent of her own body. She said she sat on her couch, immobile, looking at the ceiling. But from the way she described this condition as "finding herself" thus, her idiom also points to observing *herself* observing the ceiling. Her idiom refers then not to a mere state of fatigue, but to a condition of disembodiment in which she finds herself estranged from herself.

To rouse herself out of this condition, she confessed that she took to drinking. She said that some nights she would drink so much that she would fall asleep on the hallway of her apartment building. Viivi interjected that Saija stopped calling Viivi about events that took place at work around the time Saija started to drink. I asked Saija why she couldn't answer her supervisors when they asked her directly what she wanted changed. Why did she go back to her desk without replying when she was so ready to quit – when she had nothing to lose? To this, Saija replied, "When she asked the question, 'What can we do for you to continue your work?' it was the worst because I realized it was hopeless [*pahinta oli että tajusin sen olevan toivotonta*]." Instead of seeing the direct inquiry made by her supervisor as a chance to speak her

mind, Saija felt hopeless. Why does Saija feel *hopeless* the moment she has the chance to speak? Why could she only “yell, scream and cry a lot” and return to her desk? Why did speech fail to take shape vis-à-vis her supervisor, when in front of Viivi and her self-help group Saija has no problems explaining her demands? I explore how this sense of hopelessness undergirds the significance of the claim by those at Tarja’s self-help group members that “words just come” in the group sessions when they fail in other contexts.

### **Hopelessness of “Honesty” in the New Economy**

At Tarja’s self-help group meeting, Sanni, a young woman in her late twenties who used to work as a secretary at an office complained that no matter how much she worked she received bad reviews at her monthly evaluations [*kehityskeskustelut*]. “I kept telling myself I shouldn’t care about this so much,” she said. Someone slid a box of tissues across the table over to Sanni, which she accepted. Her voice broke as she held herself back from crying. “I don’t know what a normal amount of work means anymore,” she said. If Saija described her condition as being “wrapped in plastic,” Sanni told me how an inability to sleep and sudden crying fits followed by severe depression forced her to seek medical help. While the Finnish Occupational Healthcare Act (No. 1383) of 2001<sup>30</sup> made specific references to the importance of face-to-face discussions [*kehityskeskustelut*] between supervisors and workers to take workers’ opinions into consideration when setting an appropriate workload for the department, Sanni’s and Saija’s inability to state their case expose the weakness of such reliance on communication.

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<sup>30</sup> The Healthcare Act of 2001 emphasizes the responsibility of the employer to ensure that the workload matches the resources (e.g. job control, training, support, etc.) made available to the worker and to provide healthcare services. And in turn, the Act holds workers responsible to communicate their health concerns directly to the supervisor, as only the worker knows his own limits.

Out of Tarja's group, Sanni was most willing to meet me after these group meetings. One afternoon when we got together for coffee, she told me how she could not get any sleep at all the night before. I asked her what kept her up at nights. Instead of answering my question directly, she replied by comparing the workplace today to her "mother's time."

"In my mother's time people were more appreciated as workers and were more prone to be loyal to the company," she said, "But today," she continued, "you could be fired at any time and the feeling is more like 'Why put all your heart into it?'" Paradoxically, she explained how she did just that: "put all her heart" into work. Under the slogan of her department loosely translated as "Cooperation makes things go smoothly [*Yhteispelillä se sujuu*]," Sanni explained how she felt she needed to put in that extra time if she were not to appear "dishonest" [*epärehellinen*] to others in her team who were presumably also putting in that extra time. Sanni explained that she *had* to hide the fact that she took work home if she did not want to confirm her supervisor's suspicion of herself as the slow, inefficient worker. Moreover, she worried about not "letting everyone down." According to Sanni, it would be "dishonest" not to do as much work as her co-workers as she assumed that each relied upon the other to "do their part." Most of all, she feared that she would "let them down" by not finishing her part of the job and thus having others make up for the amount of work she could not accomplish. She explained that at nights, verbal abuse and frustrations she suffered at work came back to keep her awake. She described how she started to take work home secretly so as not to appear as the weak link in her department section. Hopelessness set in she said as no matter how much work she took home, her efforts went unrecognized in her monthly work assessment [*kehityskeskustelut*].

According to writer and business consultant Seppo Tamminen, *yhteispelillä*, which literally means to “play the game together,” is an old saying that developed with Finland’s agricultural history but which today has new meanings. If in the past, the slogan pointed to the necessity of everyone in the team pulling their weight together to get things done, today, he argues, it highlights those who fall behind. In Sanni’s context, it supplements the call for workplace competitiveness. Thus, Sanni’s fear of appearing dishonest must be considered within the notion of moral exchange which stems from the *talkoot* system (chapter three) and the form of sociality outside of the arena of work that upholds and makes this system possible. The difference, however, lies in the fact that while these notions of honesty and cooperation find relevance in the office context, as shown here by Sanni’s statements, unlike community-level work, in which the extent of your neighbor’s labor is made visible through the open way in which people work together, recent calls for competitiveness makes “cooperation” at the office-level into a matter of competitiveness.

For instance, Sanni said that none of her co-workers gave her a straight answer as to exactly how much work they accomplished at the office. Individual attempts made by workers in her department to appear efficient and productive got in the way of Sanni’s attempts to gauge by how far she fell behind, if at all. No one confessed to taking their work home, even though Sanni claimed that she could not have been the only one doing so.

Sanni sees the slogan “Cooperation makes things go smoothly” as conjoining her ideals of “being honest” with being efficient at the workplace. Yet, frustration mounts as her efforts to fill herself into the ideal worker image fail to gain social response. Her continuing symptoms of sleeplessness speak to the gap in what she expects from responding to her supervisor’s demands and social resonance of her actions. Sanni expresses this dissonance by comparing the present with what she

imagines as her “mother’s time.” If in her “mother’s time,” social pressure to “volunteer” one’s labor nonetheless begot participants of this exchange recognition, today, the parameters of this exchange duplicates the premise of the competitive economy. Volunteering one’s labor, or rather, responding to a paradoxical obligation to give labor *voluntarily* fails to beget a response from management or from co-workers as the competitive logic of the labor market frames this moral obligation not as a “gift” (e.g. “voluntary” labor given to the group) but as a way to boost the value of the donor. Keeping up with others then in the language of the competitive economy translates into keeping up one’s competitive edge. In such an equation, Sanni will not receive the kind of social and moral approval she seeks.

Her question: “What’s a normal amount of work and what is being normal these days?” manifests the effect of the gap between what she expects and what she gets as a response from her supervisor. Despite her efforts to work as much as the others, she feels herself falling short of their expectations. She complained that as she had always managed to complete her tasks on time, she could not understand how she could become the worker who would “let everyone down.” Her symptoms recur, as she cannot control how others should come to recognize her efforts. She falls dependent upon their approval, as she herself falls dependent upon the belief that she is not someone who will “let everyone down.” In this struggle of recognition and self-objectification she loses a sense of who she thinks she is. Neither her conviction to be “honest” nor her ideal image of herself no longer resonate with the social, and in this moment of doubt, she asks “what is being normal these days?” Wrapped in doubt as to the legitimacy of herself as how she imagined herself to be, she finds it hard to communicate her demands. Moreover, not knowing how far behind she fell in terms of her work and not knowing how others fair in terms of the monthly evaluations, she



cannot make demands to the management in the way expected by the Occupational Health Act.

Her question of normalcy also exposes how burnout not only speaks to stress and over-work as per the public health community, but also to the historically and ideologically contingent nature in which “normal amount of work” gets defined. If working enough as to not let “anyone down” as Sanni says in her “mother’s time” consisted of offering labor in ways publicly visible and thus demanding of recognition (here it is beneficial to look back to chapter one in which I describe how Viivi imagined her “mother’s time” as a time in which employers had to take employees out to dinner should they work over time), then Sanni faces a demand for labor that differs from what she thought she knew. In a context where the amount of work accomplished is only revealed to the supervisor, Sanni has no way of knowing how much work should be considered socially reasonable, moral and ethical as per her contribution to the group effort. Moreover, she has no way to legitimize “reasonable” stress due to “work over-load” from that of her distress as her own failure to cope with the new demands. What comprises “over-load” in an era with limitless demands for surplus production? Burnout then, appears as contingent upon how those in political power define “normative” levels of workload as well as “normative” orientations to work.

Paralleling the history in which conditions of fatigue and stress have been dealt by clinicians (see introduction), Finnish researchers of burnout often pointed to “extreme” individual character and orientation to work such as, idealism (e.g. seeking work that goes beyond one’s skill level or seeking impossibly utopic aspirations at work) and “workaholism” as factors contributive to burnout (Aho et al. 2007; Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 2004). Building on a well known research by Ayala Pines (1993) that “a worker must first be ‘on fire’ to burn to the end” (1993: 41), some occupational health professionals I interviewed complained of those who suffer from burnout as

suffering from “unrealistic” motivations. According to one such professional who worked for a large IT firm in Helsinki, people with burnout “are not sick. They only suffer from their own lack of self-knowledge. They take on tasks and positions that they are actually not qualified to take and because they don’t know their own limits, they get stressed and then they complain about getting sick.” This professional recommended that in her professional opinion, workers with burnout are often highly ambitious and motivated individuals, but that once they start to see how they do not measure up to the demands at work, they should get to know themselves better and possibly look for a new position elsewhere.

While linking individual “character” to an illness has the universalizing function of allowing clinicians to recognize the “same” tendency in individuals across societies and contexts, at the same time it makes irrelevant local cosmologies of why and for what moral and ethical ideals individuals catch “on fire.” It further disregards how “actors create and produce beliefs, values, and other means of life” (Fabian 1983: 24) in ways relevant to specific moments in history. Why syndromes like neurasthenia, burnout and chronic fatigue syndromes take center stage in national discourse at moments of political and economic shifts and fade in others needs to be considered within the dialectic of how local time gains its contours from its relationship with universal time: how, for instance, external global forces affect the definition, management and allocation of time (e.g. how to spend, use or save production time) in national, local and regional contexts.

Durkheim (1951) argues that what moves people to do the things they do and the idea of doing what they are “supposed to do” hinge upon certain expected social rules of conduct that background specific public opinion concerning social reciprocity and prohibitions against the excessive pursuit of individual desire. In the words of Durkheim, “It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to

our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone” (Durkheim 1951: 247). In his discussion on anomic suicide, Durkheim points to society as the guarantor of limits to which individuals acquiesce: society plays the “external” regulative role that provides the justification for the demand for individual sacrifices for the sake of collective interest as well as the rationale for a just response. As social order provides the basis for the distinction between realistic and unrealistic expectations, when the regulative frame of society loses its authority in the event of a crisis, an abrupt economic boom and de-regulation, anomy appears. As a time when “the limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate” (Durkheim 1951: 253).

In the case of Pekka, his initial bout of sleeplessness began in the mid-1990s when his IT company ran out of funds to hire more people. He said with some degree of exaggeration that he worked with his other four colleagues doing what a hundred workers should be doing. To make things worse, instead of feeling rewarded for his sacrifices by his supervisor, he said the demand for longer working hours increased. Pekka claims that during the economic recession, an era in which “we all had to contribute more,” such demands were considered normal and he even considered himself lucky to have kept his position. But it becomes clear that Pekka had alternative hopes for even such an era characterized by huge sacrifices. He quit his position and he moved on to work at the ice rink – an idea he said at the time had given him much pleasure. This step away from the booming business of information technology to a more low-key job on the ice rink would seem to disqualify Pekka from Pines’s (1993) definition as one “burning” with ambition or with “unrealistic” ideals. Pekka hoped that, while his knowledge of information technology would be ill-used at the ice rink,

that *there* he would at least have the satisfaction of completing what fills his task-list. However, it was at the ice rink that Pekka lost hope.

Pekka's statement, "I feel there is an imbalance between the things I want to do and the time provided to complete them," reveals not only an assumption about what *he* ought to do, but a double assumption that precedes as well as feeds into Pekka's imagined desire: his convictions about his own responsibility build upon a presumption that a supervisor will only demand what is *possible* within standard working time and as such, Pekka *should* be able to comply with what his supervisor demands, even though he consistently does not. Pekka's convictions then demarcate the sphere of what comprises possible workplace social exchange and the "social reality" of how "others" will act. However, he shows that his ideal to "complete" his tasks remains beyond his power. Mastering his ideal, becoming his ideal, remains contingent upon his co-workers and society at large who must validate his claims.

Part of Pekka's "hopelessness" then comes not because he was already "on fire" as Pines (1993) would have it, but from coming face to face with a morality and way of marking time that collided with his – his supervisor was not conforming to Pekka's expectations and vice versa. The idiom of "hopelessness" then speaks to one's powerlessness as an individual to express oneself beyond the framework given to individuals to objectify one's experience. Pekka, Sanni and Saija feel hopeless in the face of those (including themselves as judges of themselves) who ignore their pleas for recognition of their efforts. Unlike the case of anomic suicide, where falling out of sync with what Durkheim calls the "external regulatory scale" that balances the pursuit of individual needs against that of the whole, here, I show through my close analysis of these three narratives that rather than social disintegration, they suffer from the recognition of themselves as unlike they have ever "known" themselves. Faced with a demand they do not seem to be able to satisfy, they feel themselves not only as

failures to society but also to themselves. In effect, burnout makes manifest not only the effects of Finland's economic and political transformation, but also a sense of alienation from the assumptions one had about oneself. I now turn back to my field notes from the self-help sessions. Seeing oneself as alien to oneself, Pekka, Saija and Sanni fail to inhabit their speech: they feel unable to speak to their supervisors. They remain silent until rehabilitation and the community of others diagnosed with burnout provides them with the grammatical unity through which their suffering take objective shape. The framework of burnout with its reified notions of individual character and "ideal types" provide members with the language through which as Sanni says "words just come."

However, unlike the Durkheimian sense of anomie in which individuals freed from the bonds of a socially shared "external regulating scale" that curbs the pursuit of individual needs suffer from a loss of social norms and dies, these individuals show that they in fact identify strongly with a work ethic in which they feel they must be honest, conscientious and a team player. Thus, burnout appears not at the moment of release from social norms but from a loss of the ability to convert the sacrifices they make into social prestige. Their perception of themselves as an individual with burnout becomes manifest when the archive of burnout fills in for their inability to communicate their demands and while their symptoms recur, they nonetheless regain the ability to narrate.

### **Burnout: Speaking Through the Plastic**

Here, I return to Saija and the question of why she found herself unable to speak when confronted by her supervisor. Echoing many at the self-help group, Saija said that she rose to the challenge whenever instances of voluntarism arose as it depended upon her feelings of "honesty." For instance, Saija recalled a time when her

supervisor asked for a favor and, despite already helping a new co-worker set up in the office, Saija volunteered to offer more of her time. She spent several evenings showing two upper-level managers from the company headquarters in Amsterdam around Helsinki, and, as the host, she lost much needed rest and sleep as she stayed out late and couldn't come home until three in the morning.

"I can't let things be. If I know that someone is having a hard time doing something and I have the ability to do it, I feel it's dishonest to not offer my help" she said. But by doing so she had expected a sense of reciprocity from her supervisor, so that it came as a shock when she requested to come in thirty minutes late for work and was flatly told that "[they were] trying to run a business here" and that he could not accommodate for individual demands.

These experiences of dissonance, as exemplified here by Saija, Pekka and Sanni, manifest an encounter with the "present" as a state in which assumptions about the moral economy of exchange and sociality no longer holds. A direct question such as the one addressed to Saija by her supervisor (e.g. "what can they do to change?") thus fails to address this fundamental schism. In essence, Saija's desire would be nullified by making a request outright. The moral economy of reciprocity is implicit: if she were to make explicit her desire, it would only reinforce the fact that what moves and inspires her supervisors to act the way they do does not animate her in the same way. Saija no longer inhabits the *total system* of ethics, justice and morality that drives social exchange within and beyond the workplace. If her supervisor participated in what Saija takes for granted as a just exchange, he should have been able to anticipate what Saija would find offensive and would have been able to respond to her without having to ask her. Saija faces the dilemma of one having given a gift and repeatedly not receiving anything in return: expressing this anxiety through asking "Where is my gift?" would only further increase this anxiety. Making such a demand explicit already

negates the possibility of an expected return. In the spirit of Marcel Mauss (1990), one can never openly *demand* a gift, as a gift must be given voluntarily, and must circulate based on the total ethical, moral, just, and religious facts of a given society.

Saija's statement that "it was the worst" when her supervisor asked her the question and why in that moment Saija felt "hopeless" and she could only "yell, scream and cry" further support this analysis that Saija's demand represent something that cannot be voiced. She desires a response to her voluntary labor but that as she cannot make her desire manifest, her desire takes the form of symptoms. Taking seriously Saija's idiom of being "wrapped in plastic," we see the transformation of Saija from an agent to a spectator of her own self. Quite notably, she describes the day she felt "wrapped in plastic" as "finding herself unable to get out of bed." Here, I turn to my discussions with Taru, a self-help group leader like Tarja, who willingly shared with me her story.

I came to know Taru through accompanying Tarja as she manned the hotline for inquiries concerning depression, burnout and suicide at the NGO headquarters. On these days, when Tarja sat at her desk by the phone, I had plenty of opportunities to meet and talk with other self-help group leaders and other group participants who came by Tarja's office. One afternoon, when the phones were unusually quiet, Taru asked me to explain my project. As we sat at a round table in the middle of the office, I ended my project summary with my concern over asking people to re-live frustrating points in their lives by re-telling their stories to me. Taru politely stepped in and assured me that "It is also good for us to keep retelling our story." She seemed to know exactly where she wanted to begin her narrative of how "it" happened.

Taru was diagnosed with burnout in 1999 and by the time she allowed herself to be taken to the hospital by her family she said she already had lost "all reason to live." She said she wanted to kill herself, but the thought of leaving her two children

behind kept her from doing so. She used to work as a chef at the symposium center (*Messutkeskus*) organizing and cooking meals for thousands of conference goers. She said that while she loved her job she felt “tired” and she “felt nothing inside.” I introduce her story, below:

I had too much work. I was too kind. I never said, “No” to work that came my way. I was a “Yes-person.” I couldn’t sleep. I never had a holiday and I never thought of myself. But one day, I was in bed all day and *I found myself unable to get up*. I got six months off. The doctors (at the municipal health center), especially the older doctors had difficulty understanding that people with burnout need holidays. But now, these past five to seven years they know better and if they can’t help they will refer you to someone who can. But the problem was that I didn’t want any holidays. I already knew about burnout but I didn’t understand that it was happening to me. I didn’t know and of course my family didn’t know. Nobody knew. But taking the rehabilitation class, I realized that I wasn’t the only one and that it’s not just my own fault. I realized that I had a right to feel what I feel but that I had to accept all the sadness: that I had to give something up to get better. Things were in pieces and I learned to put things together. It really helped me to know that there were others like myself. The people in the group are still my friends. We are family. We have the same blood. We understand each other.

The bosses were not so understanding, however. Nobody asked me how I felt. I also had problems with finances with my co-workers. The executive chef and my company were all money and profit oriented. My boss said that she was a “chef for money and not for people.” They only cared about being efficient and cutting costs. It was very busy and cooking meant being efficient.



I am now fifty and for twenty years I have worked as a chef in hospital kitchens and restaurants. It was hard but chefs were like a big family. It is sad that since the economic recession the board of kitchen owners only thinks of money. If the restaurant is not efficient they just sell it without telling the employees why!

Taru echoes the sentiments of many who attend self-help groups for burnout and continue to keep in touch with former classmates from the rehabilitation course for burnout. She also exemplifies, along with Saija, another common idiom of burnout in which she describes how she “*found*” [*huomasin etten*] herself unable to get out of bed. As it was with Kafka’s hero, Gregor Samsa, who one morning “found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect” (1948: 67), Taru and others describe similar discoveries. They “find themselves transformed” one day, metamorphosized and unsure of what the everyday holds for them. Saija explicitly comments that she found communication hopeless as she herself fails (e.g. she “yells, screams and cries a lot”) to put into words what it is that is beyond her tolerance at work. Her subsequent discovery of herself as “wrapped in plastic” suggests a subject wrapped away, sealed off: visible but made silent to the social sphere. Thus disembedded from the everyday, she finds no easy prescription for her return – until she finds a way to speak through the framework of burnout.

For many who attend rehabilitation courses and self-help groups and who described how they “found” themselves with the condition (or, in the case of Saija, immobile and “wrapped in plastic”) instead of saying “*I couldn’t get out of bed*” [*En voinut nousta sängystä*], burnout provides the necessary prosthesis with which to reclaim the position of the first-person pronoun. Through identifying with the image of the lacking worker, they are able to categorize themselves as someone existing in a

particular category within the “new” everyday, someone allochronistically more tied to a past way of being at work.

In comparison to when they speak of “finding themselves” transformed, burnout allows them to reclaim themselves. For example, in terms of how he understood why he and not his co-workers got burnout, he explained that others did not suffer as according to Pekka, “*I am a conscientious and good worker.*” Besides implying that his co-workers were not as conscientious as he is he added,

There isn't enough capacity in my head so if you get it filled up you will lose your life - will to live, your life. This is what happens if you are conscientious. But those who don't get burnout have a different character and different attitude towards life. They always see positive things even when bad things happen. With that kind of person it's impossible to get him down. Oh, if there is not enough time to do the job right now, this kind of person will say, ‘Oh, there is always tomorrow!’ that kind of thing.

However, while Pekka and others like him at places of rehabilitation regain the ability to inhabit their speech, this idealization and nostalgia for past ways of working together with others fail to bring solace. According to Eeva and Tarja, those who attend self-help groups rarely quit coming to the meetings even after attending regularly for two years. Even Tarja, a group leader who was admired by many in her group as a “spiritual guru” confessed that despite the fact that she now helped others with burnout, “you never completely heal after this illness.”

I turn to an incident that occurred during a time when Tarja invited me to participate in a symposium for NGOs that worked with people suffering from mental illness. At the symposium, NGOs set up booths along the sides of the wall of a large

conference to distribute information pamphlets. I joined Tarja and her group as they also set up a booth as well as a small area that sold T-shirts and cloth bags with the NGO's logo. Two NGO members manned the booth desk while several others kept an eye on the merchandise. Two other members manned the entrance to a lecture hall which was only open to those who had paid in advance. Tarja took over this position as guard of the door and she told me to go ahead and look around the conference hall. I gladly took leave, but found that upon my return, Tarja looked extremely pained. As she shifted her weight from one leg to the other she explained she had a bad knee. I immediately rushed to get her a chair but she quickly held me back. Instead, she insisted that I should not miss out on this grand opportunity for interviews and that I should continue making my rounds around the conference hall. She refused to sit until other NGO workers from her group came to replace her position.

Back at Tarja's house that night, her daughter and I forced her to roll up her pant-leg to expose her knee. The multiple tram-rides – where usually we would walk to the central bus station – to make our way back from Helsinki proper to Paloheinä where Tarja lived made immediate sense. Her knee felt hot to the touch and almost purple in color. Her daughter, Salli, ran to the fridge for some ice. As we lay Tarja down on the couch and silently wound down for the day, Tarja volunteered an explanation, "It's not like you can just sit down and take it easy when everyone else around you is working so hard. I can't do that. I'm a reliable person."

Her plaintive explanation stuck in my mind as I took the last bus back from Paloheinä where Tarja lived, back to the Punavuori district of Helsinki with Salli. Instead of meeting Tarja at her office at the NGO as usual, I took the short bus-ride from central Helsinki to Tarja's house with Salli for the next three days. At her house, Tarja had plenty of time to nurse her knee while Salli and I made use of this opportunity to make a spectacle of the wounded matriarch, much to Tarja's

displeasure. When we, Salli, Tarja and I were all sitting in the living room, Tarja repeated, “*Somehow* you can’t stop giving. I didn’t think I really needed that chair at the time,” and then she added as if suddenly thinking of my project, “This is how people can burn out.”

Tarja’s use of the word “somehow” deflected an earlier comment I had made about her attendance in a course that specifically taught participants “How to say No!” Ironically, just last weekend, Tarja had attended a rehabilitation class entitled “*Kuntoutus ja Työelämä*” (rehabilitation and work life) for people with burnout and depression in the capacity of not one *taking* the class but as a team leader. It was the practice of her NGO to provide not only psychologists, physical therapists, nutritionists and physicians in attendance for the classes, but also those volunteers at the NGO like Tarja who had gone through the classes themselves (the belief being that these non-clinical, non-medical members of the NGO team would be more accessible to the attendees).

Tarja told me after she returned that about ten of them, including people who currently worked as volunteers at the NGO like herself, attended a weekend long course set in a rehabilitation center close to Helsinki. According to Tarja, the exercises encouraged “heavy soul searching.” She said that they had exercises and discussions from nine o’clock in the morning until midday and then lunch and break until three in the afternoon. From three o’clock, they had group activities such as going on walks, golf, bowling and water aerobics mixed in with thematic activities. Thematic activities were like mini “social rehearsals” where attendees were given a specific challenge which mirrored a conflictive social situation but within a controlled context. As an example, Tarja told me the gist of one such social rehearsal. The attendees separated into two groups, each group lined up against the wall facing the other. They were then asked to slowly walk towards each other. As the Finnish public health community

identified the problems of people with burnout and depression as having a tendency to isolate themselves and develop a propensity to close-in on themselves, the exercise forced them into a situation where attendees came into close physical proximity with another person. The exercise exposed how uncomfortable attendees felt about making personal demands. In the exercise, each paired couple slowly walked closer to each other until they met in the center. They then had to decide for themselves if they felt comfortable enough to hug and if not, to say “No, I don’t want to hug you.” The activity was meant to show participants that denying another person what is “expected” does not end in tragic consequences, or more specifically, disappoint the other. The unsaid moral of the exercise underlined the fact that people will still love you despite going against what others expect from you.

Given Tarja’s training and leadership in lessons concerning the balance of “giving” and significantly on saying “no,” why couldn’t Tarja sit or ask for a chair when clearly that was what she needed given her physical condition? At the critical moment when Tarja could have used a chair at the symposium, something deterred her from expressing her need. Her perspective: “everyone *else* around you is working so hard,” with an emphasis on “everyone *else*” points to how her observation of others who “work so hard” shored up a perceived lack in herself. In comparison to “everyone else” in her observation, she came up lacking. Moreover, her statement that it was “*somehow*” that she could not express her desire parallels the expression by self-help group members that they “found” that they couldn’t get out of bed. These inability occur as if “beyond” the will of the subject. No matter how versed Tarja was in the ideals of the rehabilitation program and to prevention of burnout, “somehow” she found herself, again, “giving too much.”

As if plugging into the gap in Tarja’s explanation for why she couldn’t bring herself to sit, Salli had a ready story at hand. Whether she was humoring my

foreigner's eye for something cultural, she provided a joke that for her summed up what occurred to her mother in that moment. "Here's a pretty common joke in Finland that I think explains what happened to my mother," she said.

A man's car breaks down on the highway and he realizes he needs a jack. He starts walking towards a house in the distance but along the way he thinks to himself why anyone should lend him their jack? The more he thinks about it the more he feels that they would not lend it to him. By the time he gets to the house he is so angry that they will not lend him a jack that once he gets to the house he throws a rock through the window.

In the joke, the man begins with a concrete need – he needs a jack. However, this need gives rise to a desire to be recognized as someone to whom they ought to lend their jack. As he contemplates as to whether the people in the house would actually lend *him* their possession, he turns his gaze onto himself. His confidence falters in the face of his own gaze despite the fact that the people in the house remain anonymous. This self-inflicted wound causes anger and moral indignation – against such bad neighbors he appears the better man. He thus throws a rock through the other's window.

Tarja did not push the matter of the chair onto others, she consented to an implicit demand not to sit based on the potential criticism she imagined would be raised by others. She sacrificed her need and therefore appraised her deed as coming from "giving too much" in the face of those who failed to show her lenience. Salli's joke point out that in both Tarja and the man suffer from self-aggression. They deny themselves their needs based on a belief in their fantasy of how society would respond.

The above reading of the joke is my own: Salli interprets the joke as saying “Finnish people can be very negative at times.” According to Salli, her mother’s attitude resulted from a negative outlook, as she gave up asking for the thing she needed even before she made the attempt to ask for it: just like the man in the joke, for Salli, they both suffer from a “negative” respond from others in response to personal needs. Taking Salli’s interjection that “negativity” lurks in the representation of the man in the joke seriously, one can argue that both the joke and Tarja’s incident at the symposium expose how social force can make extreme demands on subjects. Not only must subjects become the objects of their own gaze to become social subjects, but they must also suffer the ramifications of such a gaze. The “external social regulative scale” as per Durkheim (1951: 247), is in effect radically “internal.” While Durkheim does not address where externality begins in terms of the subject, examining the “external social regulative scale” as radically internal to the subject allows a look at how shifts in the moral, ethical, juridical aspects of production and associated informal exchange of voluntary labor affect how subjects aggress against themselves.

While anthropologists of emotion and culture (Lutz 1986; Rosaldo 1980; White and Kirkpatrick 1985) focus on “indigenous understandings of ‘self,’ ‘personality,’ ‘motivation’ and the like” (White and Kirkpatrick 1985:38), I differ from such analyses by taking the Lacanian position that individual affective experiences fail to map completely into “cultural” symbols. I argue that an overreliance on the symbolic coherence of “cultural” understandings of affect not only by-passes the relevance of politics as a cause, but also fails to take into account the possibility of an experience so negative that it fails expression as a specific “emotion” category. Analyses of this kind foreclose the examination of symptomaticity – of why some experiences of suffering manifest as symptoms, as experience that spills out of the fringes of idiomatic understanding. Rather than seeing “self” and “emotion” as pointing to something

“culturally normative,” as is implied in analyzing emotion through “indigenous understandings,” I argue that notions of “self” do not merely express the social. Experiences of rueful embarrassment which nonetheless lead to a feeling of belonging, described by Michael Herzfeld (1997) as “cultural intimacy,” can be alternatively read as the accidental recognition within the behavior of others of aspects of “self” one had hoped one had already under control. Rather than a Durkheimian totemic identification with the whole, embarrassment ensues precisely because even when you think yourself different from the other, the other exposes something within you *you* thought you had overcome. Seeing an action regarded as derided in the “global hierarchy of values” (Herzfeld 2004) causes this affective reaction, as it produces anxiety – anxiety that the inclination exists within you, too. You believe yourself to be different from the other, but this differentiation occurs as a paradox: difference-making between you and the other occurs as a process of recognition. In seeing the other, paradoxically, you see yourself. In recognizing the other’s intention, you feel yourself exposed. The uncanny resemblance-of-the-other-to-self engenders conflicting notions of “rueful” acceptance and denial. Thus, holding onto a notion of self as something different and autonomous causes anxiety.

Lacan argues that this conflictual recognition and misrecognition of the subject in the other lie at the base of subject formation. The conflict for Lacan emerges through an infant’s identification with his image (*imago*) in the mirror, an image which shows his whole body in its ideal form and one in which his “motor impotence and nursling dependence” (2002: 94) remain hidden. This identification with the ideal, with the coherent image of himself in the mirror rather than with the phenomenological existence as a dependent entity driven by fragmented needs translates the specular “I” into a social “I.” Through this misrecognition of the infant of himself in the image, the child’s physical and material needs take on symbolic



meaning, for example, as a need for recognition and a need for love. The image in the mirror and what it stands for fills in for the absence of such an ideal and thus acts as a prosthesis through which the subject comes into being.

This transition also brings the child to recognize itself symbolically as an entity which also signifies. According to Lacan, this moment takes the form of self-aggression. Compared to the un-alienated self prior to the identification with the image, the image that stands for an ideal, this moment of post-identification speaks to a subject persecuted by this misrecognition of himself. The image as a symbol appears to him as an ideal mediated by the linguistic structures beyond his control. Lacan argues that this misrecognition leads to his alienation. According to Lacan, the subject enters into a violent relationship with his *imago* as the subject must now take into account the degree to which he has mastered or failed at becoming that image. Mastery of this ideal state however, never quite occurs as the ideal represents something always beyond the subject. As this subject is only represented in its symbols, the subject is as yet not there. These representations stand in for the subject, yet are not the subject. This anxiety over self-lack vis-à-vis the “other” instantiates the moment of violence which manifests as self-aggression. The conflict of the mirror stage speaks to a process of recognition that simultaneously engenders difference between “me” and the image. This difference also produces the momentum for further alienation of the subject from himself. Mastery and the possibility to become the ideal proceeds via the subject’s taking an inventory of his lack. The narrative line of “Why I got burnout while my co-workers didn’t...” that I heard repeatedly from members at self-help groups for burnout and at rehabilitation centers for burnout follows this logic in that the more the subject feels himself out of sync with society, the more he seems willing to reify and to archive what makes him and others different. While this process of what Lacan calls “self-mutilation” fixes and freezes notions of “self,” “identity,”

and “social ideals,” thus deferring the question of what these categories mask, the creation of fixed culturological differences and ideals nonetheless provides a narrative that supplements the identification formed and desire for mastery as well as the fear of failure. For Lacan, without this initial (mis)identification with the imago, no subject formation is possible: the possibility of a “self” emerges through the mediation of the social symbolic realm.

Those I met at the rehabilitation center and at the self-help groups such as Tarja, Saija and Pekka, turn to codified notions of personality and national character that have become part of the lay and professional understanding of why some workers get burnout at moments when they feel most unsure of why they worked as hard as they did. For example, although Tarja insisted that she decided against taking a seat at the symposium because she is a “reliable person,” she made this statement rather ruefully, and more as an excuse to Salli’s concerned accusations that her mother, Tarja, would “never get better if she can’t practice what she preaches at the NGO.” The inventory of personality character archived with the symptoms of burnout projects another mirror image through which those diagnosed can re-invent themselves as well as the past. However, the recurrence of their stories and the repetition of the drive that moves Tarja to sacrifice her knee remind self-help group members and rehabilitation goers alike that this supplementation of a “new” image of themselves in no way equals their mastery over their drives.

While the narrative of burnout born of Finland’s economic recession and the rise in concern over both health care expenditure due to workplace absenteeism and potential shortage of labor in the face of Finland’s aging population provides a framework through which policy makers can attempt to manage this risk, it also provides continuity in the symbolic understandings of the self and historically rooted system of moral exchange. If social ostracism and shame befell individuals who did

not participate in *talkoot* labor, today, those diagnosed with burnout struggle under a public perception that they embody workers who failed to “survive” (Hietanen 1999) in the new era of work. However, unlike celebrities who can convert this negativity into something socially positive, those not favored by the public live in fear of the public (e.g. most participants of the rehabilitation course I met feared going back home). I argue that burnout speaks to a fundamental anxiety that underlies the call for individuals to master demands of the social. This reasoning also explains why pathologized forms of fatigue recur under different forms at specific moments in industrial history as burnout, chronic fatigue syndrome, and neurasthenia.

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