

# Constructing the Nation through Managing Sex

## *Discourses on Nationhood and Commercial Sex in Finland*

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### Abstract

This article examines discourses through which the nation is imagined in relation to commercial sex in Finland. It is based on interviews with non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, policymakers, law enforcers, social service workers, and experts on issues of trafficking victims in Finland, who deal with commercial sex, migration, or both. Drawing on the concepts of nation, community of value, sexuality and gender, the article highlights the discursive strategies used to reconcile the existence of commercial sex in Finland with the national value of social equality. As the interviewees identify gender and social equality as the building blocks of the Finnish nation, they attempt to conceptualise the management of commercial sex in terms of those values. This article also examines the positioning of Finnish and non-Finnish women engaged in commercial sex within these discourses. It suggests that by constructing Finland in terms of social equality, interviewees leave little room for issues surrounding Finnish women within the field of commercial sex, while positioning foreign sex workers as the primary targets of intervention and the legislation of commercial sex.

KEYWORDS: equality, Finland, gender, nation-building, prostitution, sex work

### Introduction

The regulation of sex and intimacy is one of the cornerstones of the national project. Who can have sex with whom and how, whose sexual relationships are legitimate, and what are the preferred circumstances of the sexual relationship are all regulated by the law of the land or the social mores of a group. This process can be seen in family planning legislation (see Dwyer 1999; Martin 1999) and in the regulation of the visibility of fe-

male bodies in public space (see Billaud & Castro 2013), as well as in a direct regulation of what is considered to be deviant sexual behaviour (see Pryke 1998). It is often female sexuality that forms the focus of national discourse on acceptable sexual behaviour. This stems from the particular role women play in the gendered process of nation building (Yuval-Davis 1993). These regulations, however, are neither static nor uncontested – they can and do change over time. For example, many

Western countries went from viewing same sex relationships as deviant and criminal to legalising gay marriage in a relatively short time.

Commercial sex has often been considered to be deviant sexual behaviour along with masturbation and homosexuality, and regulated as such (Pryke 1998). A number of scholars have commented on how the legislation of commercial sex is one way in which nation-state boundaries are drawn (see Bucken-Knapp, Schaffer & Levin 2014; Cheng 2011; Mosse 1985). Commercial sex also poses a problem as it exists on the border between the private and the public, as a sexual behaviour which is explicitly economically driven.

In Finland, there has been a lot of scholarly attention paid to questions of national identity and the role of gender in the national project (see Engman 1995; Häkli 1999; Saukkonen 2013; Valenius 2004). However, there are very few studies that consider the relationship between sexuality and the nation, with the notable exception of Johanna Valenius's (2004) study that analyses the role of sexuality and gender in construction of the Finnish nation. Commercial sex in Finland has been studied quite extensively (see Jyrkinen 2005; Marttila 2008; Mattson 2016; Tani 2002; Viuhko 2010). Still, few studies have analysed it from the perspective of national discourses. Nevertheless, some of these studies do consider the relationship between commercial sex, community building processes and societal norms regarding gender and sexuality. In her research on Finnish clients of transnational prostitution, Anne-Maria Marttila notes how, for her interviewees, the rationale for buying sex hinged not only on men's understandings of themselves as neoliberal subjects taking part in a globalised pattern of consumption, but also on the wish to free themselves from the burden of the "woman friendly society" of the Nordic states (Marttila 2008, 48). Research conducted by Sirpa Tani (2002) on the politics of street prostitution shows how a community can

express its values by engaging with issues of commercial sex. By protesting street prostitution and consequently influencing public policy, the people in the neighbourhood shaped and reaffirmed their values in relation to female sexual behaviour, male sexual behaviour, and displaced those whom they perceived as "Others" from the space they considered their own. Anne Maria Holli (2004) has analysed the changes in prostitution legislation in relation to women's participation in politics and state feminism. And when looking at cultural politics of prostitution reform in Europe, Greggor Mattson (2016) has suggested that the Finnish approach to prostitution can be best understood in terms of Finland's position as a welfare state and its cultural and historical place between Sweden and Russia.

This article will expand on the relationship between commercial sex and national discourses in Finland that has only been touched upon in the studies described above. Its aim is to contribute to the growing number of discussions on how certain values, often framed as national, can be used to symbolically exclude certain individuals and groups from membership in the national community (Billaud & Castro 2013; Keskinen 2011, 2012; Tuori 2007). This article is part of a doctoral research on Russian-speaking sex workers in Finland and their access to rights and services. To gain a better understanding of the environment in which Russian-speaking sex workers work in Finland, a number of people were interviewed who work with sex workers, migration or both in different capacities. The actors interviewed were policymakers, police, NGO representatives, healthcare providers, experts on issues of trafficking, and migration officials. All of these actors operated at different levels and had different relationships to commercial sex in Finland. While policymakers created the legislation that could affect sex workers, NGO representatives and healthcare providers addressed their more mundane needs. While many other studies examin-

ing the relationship between commercial sex and the nation focus on legislation (Bucken-Knapp, Schaffer & Levin 2014; Cheng 2011), studying the opinions and attitudes of the actors who are directly connected with creating, enacting or working within the confines of this legislation gives a novel perspective on how commercial sex relates to discourses on nationhood.

In the context of this article, commercial sex refers to a range of activities where sexual or erotic services are exchanged for money or other goods. This includes exotic dancing, the adult film industry, escort services, street work and so on. The terms sex work and sex worker will be used in this article to refer to the activity and the people who provide sexual and erotic services. However, when referring to other studies on commercial sex, the terminology used will follow that of the original authors in order to avoid confusion.

The article seeks to understand how the actors, who come in contact with commercial sex in their professional capacity, construe sex work in relation to the Finnish nationhood. I argue that the actors discursively construct Finland as a nation of equality as its essential value. In doing so they exclude sex workers from the notion of Finnishness, positioning only foreign sex workers as the targets of management through social control and legislation. In what follows, I discuss how the nation is theorised and how it relates to gender and sexuality, outline the Finnish legislation on commercial sex, describe the methods of data collection and analysis, and analyse the ways in which commercial sex is conceptualised in relation to the Finnish nation, Finnishness, and social and gender equality.

## Gender, Sexuality, and the Nation

To make sense of how the nation is conceptualised, it is first necessary to outline what is meant

by it. Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an *imagined community*, which is a collective held together by a shared idea of the past and a common vision of the future (Anderson 1991, 6). As such, the process of constructing a nation involves defining a community, setting up boundaries and articulating its national character (Nagel 1998, 248). Such boundaries demarcate the limits of inclusion and exclusion, and while they are constantly shifting and changing, the nation relies upon both inclusion and exclusion to define itself.

Benedict Anderson's concept of nation has been criticised for its disregard of gender and sexuality, and the role they play within the nation (Pierson 2000; Valenius 2004; Yuval-Davis 1993). More recent debate has highlighted the role of women and gender relations as a central element of the national project (Keskinen 2013; Lewis 2005; McClintock 1995; Nagel 1998; Yuval-Davis 1993).

Joane Nagel argues that women have been absent from the discussion because "citizenship, nationalism, militarism, revolution, political violence, dictatorship, and democracy – are all best understood as masculinist projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities" (Nagel 1998, 243). Furthermore, Valenius (2004) notes that the masculine project of nation building in liberal democracies is best understood not as patriarchy in the sense of "rule of the father", but as a fraternity in the sense of a brotherhood of equals. She further suggests that this excludes women from full participation as citizens of the nation, but also positions them and their bodies as a site of mediation, transference and exchange between men, which solidifies male bonds to each other. In fact, male bonding through the use of commercial sex has been well documented (Jyrkinen 2005; Marttila 2008).

There has been a wide range of studies exploring the concepts of nation, nationalism, and na-

tional character in Finland (Engman 1995; Häkli 1999; Saukkonen 2013; Valenius 2004). While the masculinist roots of the nation-building project in Finland have been noted (Valenius 2004), there is a widely circulating idea that Finland, along with other Nordic countries, is a paragon of gender equality. And, in Finland, the welfare state, with its emphasis on equity, is perceived as a guarantor of a high level of gender equality (Kantola, Norocel & Repo 2011). However, this notion of gender equality does not necessarily correspond to the reality of people's lives (Holli, Magnusson & Rönnblom 2005). When discussing the development of Finnish state feminism during the early 2000s, Holli and Kantola come to the conclusion that while there has been a lot of development in the gender equality machinery, its implementation has lagged behind. They suggest that the stalling of this development could be attributed to the prevalence of the idea that gender equality has already been achieved. (Holli & Kantola 2007.)

The imagined community that constitutes the nation not only shares a sense of a common past and future, but also a set of ideals and beliefs that they can claim as their own (Nagel 1998). Bridget Anderson (2013) has suggested the use of the concept *community of value* to describe the modern state, emphasizing not only the imagined nature of the community described by Benedict Anderson (1991), but also the importance of ideals and beliefs in shaping and holding this community together. The community of value is imagined as consisting of good citizens who live according to certain values, while those who are perceived as failing to live up to these values can be symbolically excluded.

It can be argued that in Finland, gender equality is often identified as one of the core values of the community (Tuori 2007). However, though this value may appear egalitarian and inclusive, it can

be used to mark the lines of exclusion from the national community (Anderson 2013). Within the Finnish context researchers have shown how the rhetoric of gender equality can be mobilised in populist debate to serve racist or sexist agendas (Keskinen 2013; Lähdesmäki & Saresma 2014). In fact, Holli argues that "lately, 'gender equality' seems to have evolved into a concept the main purpose of which is to maintain the sense of 'us' as a national community." (Holli 2003, cited in Tuori 2007, 21).

The relationship between the regulation of commercial sex and the nationalist project has been studied extensively (see Billaud & Castro 2013; Bucken-Knapp, Schaffer & Levin 2014; Cheng 2011; Munro & Della Giusta 2008). However, there is much less research that examines the role played by different governmental and NGO actors working with commercial sex. Tove Pettersson and Eva Tiby (2003) discuss how the concept of prostitution itself is shaped by the actors charged with working with prostitution issues in Sweden. Carol Harrington (2012) compares the different discourses that experts in Australia and Sweden use to construct particular approaches to commercial sex. And Jane Scoular (2010) shows how laws work through a complex web of actors and institutions to create similar results despite differences in legislation itself. Mattson (2016) uses a wide range of data to discuss the control of commercial sex in Europe, among them are interviews with a group he refers to as *bureaucratic insiders*, who comprise of public figures, politicians and bureaucrats that he identifies as knowledgeable about commercial sex. These studies suggest that the legislation of commercial sex and its effects on the experience of sex workers cannot be understood without examining the attitudes and ideas of key actors who draft, enforce or are constrained by this legislation. In the subsequent section, the Finnish legislation on commercial sex is discussed.

## Legislation of Commercial Sex in Finland

The starting point of this research project was an interest in the most recent attempt to implement a law in Finland that would criminalise the purchase of sexual services. This form of regulation, commonly known as the “Swedish Model”, considers prostitution to be a form of violence against women and it penalises the buyers, while decriminalising the sellers (Jeffreys 2010). In Finland, this model has been proposed several times, yet it has failed to gain traction (Buckenknap, Schaffer & Levin 2014). Holli (2004) writes that, while the issue of prostitution united female politicians across party lines, there was simply no agreement who, the client or the client and the prostitute, should be penalised, and so the legislation was watered down. Mattson (2016), on the other hand, suggests that while there was political will to enact the abolitionist feminist model, the reality of a border with a large sending country such as Russia had to be accepted and that prevented the implementation of the Swedish Model.

Currently, Finnish legislation primarily deals with commercial sex in the form of prostitution. The Criminal Code of Finland defines prostitution as sexual intercourse or a comparable sexual act offered for remuneration (Skilbrei & Holmström 2013, 103). Selling sex is not illegal in Finland. However, the purchase and sale of sexual services in public places is prohibited (Public Order Act [2003] 2010). Pandering and trafficking as well as purchasing sexual services from victims of pandering or trafficking and minors is also prohibited (The Criminal Code of Finland [1889] 2012). While the most recent attempt to ban all purchasing of sexual services did not succeed, the law has been changed so that the purchase of sexual services from a person who has been pimped or trafficked would be penalised, whether the buyer knew about it or not (Oikeusministeriö 2015). In addition, non-EU citizens can be refused entry

to Finland if they are suspected of selling sexual services (Aliens Act [2004] 2010). In practice, this means that non-EU citizens can be turned away at the border or removed from the country on the suspicion of being involved in commercial sex.

When discussing the Finnish legislation on commercial sex, May-Len Skilbrei and Charlotta Holmström (2013) point out that by criminalizing street work and organised commercial sex, these laws primarily target migrant women who are more likely to work on the streets and need assistance in creating Internet ads or finding accommodation. In effect, the law seems to criminalise buying sex from migrant women. The interview data presented in this article suggests that discourses of equality are used to rationalise the use of legal and social interventions in case of migrant sex workers, while, largely, positioning Finnish sex workers as outside of these controls. The next section will outline the data used and the method of analysis.

## Data and methodology

This article is based on semi-structured interviews with 17 key actors working for the police, NGOs, healthcare services, policy drafting, immigration services, and services for victims of trafficking. The goal was to interview a wide range of individuals who, in their professional capacity, have an influence on the lives of sex workers, foreign sex workers, or both. It was either direct influence in the form of service provision or law enforcement, or a more general influence exercised by policymakers. Not all of these individuals were exclusively involved with commercial sex. Some of the healthcare providers and migration officials worked with issues of healthcare and migration in general, and sex workers were just one group that they sometimes met. However, it was deemed necessary to go beyond a group of interviewees

who worked with sex workers exclusively, since sex workers come into contact with different organizations and services, and these are not always the ones that work exclusively with issues relating to commercial sex.

The different actors were asked questions pertaining to their particular area of knowledge and experience, as well as some general questions about their work. Thus, migration officials were asked about laws that regulate the expulsion of migrant sex workers from the country, while healthcare providers were asked about the medical services available to sex workers. The study was introduced to participants as research on migrant sex work in Finland or the adult industry in Finland.

Four interviews were conducted in Russian; one was conducted in Finnish; and all the others took place in English. The non-English interviews were translated for the article, and all of the interviews were edited for clarity. All interviews but one – a telephone interview – were conducted in person.

It has been suggested that the stigma associated with commercial sex is so strong that it affects even those who research it (Hammond & Kingston 2014). It was, therefore, the goal of this study to provide interviewees with a level of anonymity and confidentiality that would permit them to freely express their opinions and shield them from any potential stigmatisation. Since the number of individuals working with issues of commercial sex and migration is relatively small in Finland, it was deemed necessary to avoid pseudonyms and minimise any identifying information save for the general field in which they work, that is to say, *police*, *NGO representative*, *healthcare provider*, *policymaker* (i.e. politicians involved in drafting or approving laws), *immigration official*, or *trafficking expert* (i.e. experts on issues of human trafficking). There were seven NGO representatives interviewed from three NGOs. However, when

quotes from NGO representatives are presented in the analysis section, they are not marked in any way to show that they are from different NGO representatives. This was done in order to minimise the possibility of identification. However, it must be, nonetheless, acknowledged that since the numbers are very small and many of the people interviewed are public figures, identification is still a possibility. The interviewees, were, therefore, informed about the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in detail, and asked if they would allow the transcripts of their interviews to be submitted to archives for future use.

The interview transcripts were systematically read with a focus on discussions regarding foreign women involved in commercial sex in Finland. From this reading the actors' understanding of Finnishness *vis-à-vis* commercial sex emerged. The method of analysis used in this article is critical discourse analysis (see Dijk 1993), where discourse is understood as “a form of social practice that both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 61).

The interviewees were all positioned in different ways in relation to commercial sex. Some of them were working closely with sex workers, while others exerted their influence from a distance through legal reform. Their attitudes to commercial sex were also vastly different ranging from criminalization to decriminalization with a wide variety of opinions on what aspects of it should be criminalised or decriminalised. Some interviewees either did not hold a definite position on a preferred form of regulation, or chose not to discuss it. Despite these differences, they drew on very similar discourses to make sense of commercial sex in Finland. Their attitudes and descriptions of sex workers, clients, traffickers, and other aspects of commercial sex were all expressed in terms of

what they thought Finland was and should be, and who they thought that sex workers were. Regardless of their attitude to sex work, they tended to draw heavily on an equality discourse, and occasionally a gender equality discourse.

## Commercial Sex in a Nation of (Gender) Equality

In the Nordic countries, including Finland, commitments to social equality and personal freedom have been conceptualised as core national values (Keskinen 2012). And the idea that gender equality is one of the fundamental aspects of the Finnish nation has been noted before (Huttunen 2009; Tuori 2007). The sphere of commercial sex served as a site through which interviewees could articulate their vision of Finland as it is or should be in relation to these values. In fact, in some interviews, this process became very explicit.

We are losing the foundation, somehow. It is battled and it is discussed and debated: what are the defining factors of Finland. Human rights, gender equality, all these kinds of issues are being discussed at the moment. Nationalism. Fear of the stranger. (Trafficking expert)

The interviewee saw commercial sex as a battleground in which the debate over Finnish values and their definitions unfolds. The quote suggests that there is a sense of anxiety about certain values being lost that the interviewee perceives to be the foundations of the Finnish nationhood. Thus, the debates surrounding commercial sex were perceived to be constitutive of what the nation is like.

The values that the interviewees predominately articulated when talking about commercial sex in Finland tended to focus on equality, social justice and human rights. There was a common narrative that seems to suggest that commercial sex in Fin-

land should be approached in a certain way because Finland is a country with certain values and it is these values that should inform the approach. An NGO representative said that problems of exploitation exist in commercial sex because of global structures of inequality. This interviewee suggested that because there were fewer visible differences between people's statuses in Finland, there was, consequently, less exploitation, than in other countries. The interviewee constructed Finland as a country with high levels of social equality and suggested that this is what should inform attitudes to commercial sex.

With decriminalization, at least, some of these people who are involved with sex work, their situation could be better. Because they could do it more safely, controlled and independently. And, I think, society might actually somehow benefit from that. (NGO representative)

The interviewee presented Finland as an oasis of equality in a world of social injustice, and by alleviating the inequality created in other countries, Finland could assert itself as a nation of equality. By treating sex workers in a way that would promote their safety and independence, the Finnish society could reap benefits. The interviewee never specified what these benefits could be, but based on what has previously been said about equality, it could be assumed that the social benefit for Finland would be the promotion of its key national value of equity.

Discourses of equality and justice were often used to construct an image of Finland in relation to commercial sex, but gender equality was used more sparingly. While there exists a common misconception that gender equality has already been achieved in Finland (Holli & Kantola 2007; Kantola, Norocel & Repo 2011), the interviewees did not tend to think so. Instead, they spoke about it in comparative terms, suggesting that equality ex-

ists in Finland in greater quantities than in other countries. One interviewee noted that Finland's dedication to gender equality is what lies at the core of the nation.

I think it's something that they [young Finnish women] have to understand that this [gender equality] is not something that has been won, that it's not self-granted or not self-evident. But we have to push it forward, we have to fight for that, every year, every day. It is something which is important and makes us a good state and nation as we are. It's one of those ingredients, those fundamental ingredients of Finland. I'm very proud of it. And everybody should be. (Trafficking expert)

Finland was, thus, constructed as a place where gender equality has not been reached yet, but also as a place where its value is recognised and where it should be strived for. It is this striving for gender equality which in the eyes of the interviewee defined Finland not only as a nation that is supposedly different from other, less gender equal nations, but as a moral, "good" nation also. But gender equality was also seen as a continuous process that had to be enacted constantly through some sort of practices. Commercial sex, then, was perceived as a site where the value of gender equality could be reaffirmed.

When a gender equality discourse was used, it was to frame commercial sex in Finland as either proof that gender equality has not yet been achieved or as a direct threat to it. However, gender equality was not used on its own, but was presented as a component of social equality.

The other thing is, of course, the fact that we don't see prostitution as threatening equality between women and men. I think this is about equality. This is an equality issue. And this is about societal equality of all people. And especially between women and men. (Trafficking expert)

In these cases, commercial sex was imagined as a menace to gender equality, and subsequently to social equality. And since Finland was consistently framed as a country of equality, commercial sex was presented as something that could undermine the very foundation of the Finnish nation. It is notable however, that the gender equality discourse was almost always used in conjunction with a discourse of social equality. In one case, at least, this emphasis on social equality over gender equality was used to distinguish the Finnish approach to commercial sex from that of other Nordic countries. It was suggested that the Finnish approach with its emphasis on social equality was better, since its aim was not only to eradicate commercial sex as such, but to improve the social positions of those engaged in it. Thus the emphasis on social equality provided a way for interviewees not only to distinguish Finland from countries that were seen as less egalitarian, but also give it a unique place among the other Nordic states.

The discourse of equality as a national value possesses a certain level of plasticity. The interviewees could construct Finland as a nation of equality and argue for certain assistance for those who engaged in commercial sex. At the same time, they could appeal to the same value and call for restrictions to some areas of commercial sex. For example, Finland could be constructed as a nation of welfare, which could justify expulsion of those who did not contribute to this system.

So I think if we can do our job and send these people [who do not pay taxes] away from Finland, this is always an advantage to those people who are legally staying here and paying their taxes. [...] Also we have social security, it's so high, so some of these people come here because everything is free. So is this right to have these illegal immigrants [...] here? And we are paying for everything. (Migration official)



In this interview, Finland was imagined as a nation of social security. And it was through taxation that people contributed to this system of fair redistribution. Consequently, the expulsion of migrants who did not pay taxes, such as those engaged in commercial sex, was framed as necessary to maintain a just and equal society where everyone must pay their taxes and reap the social benefits.

In another interview, the management of commercial sex through establishing trust and cooperation between police and sex workers, rather than expulsion, was seen as a more efficient method. This approach was also reflected upon through the prism of Finland as a nation with certain values. Specifically, as a nation where authority figures are upstanding, fair and not corrupt.

When I start working with girls, they start to ask, "Ok, you're police, ok. When do you want to come back here? In the evening?" "Ugh, why?" "In my country it's normal - the police come and fuck us." But not in Finland (laughs). We don't take money, (laughs) I mean, we have a good salary here; we don't take money. [...] So it takes time before you can have this good contact with these women. (Police)

The situation recounted by the interviewee creates a contrast between the sex workers' country of origin and Finland. It is used to illustrate the interviewee's viewpoint that in Finland police do not take sexual or financial advantage of sex workers. The police are not only presented as upstanding, but also financially secure, which precludes the need for corruption. The behaviour of the police does not only reflect on them personally or professionally, but engenders certain aspects of the Finnish nation. As the interviewee, says, unscrupulous behaviour could happen somewhere else, "but not in Finland".

The aim of this overview of how interviewees spoke about commercial sex and Finland was to

highlight the tendency to discursively construct the nation as one of social justice and equality. The interviewees did this by reflecting on the ways in which commercial sex is managed or should be managed specifically in the Finnish context. However, the forms of management varied significantly despite the fact that interviewees appealed to very similar national values. These forms of management depended on the interviewees' professional relation to commercial sex and the organization they represented. Nevertheless, if they discursively constructed Finland as a nation of equality, the figure of the sex worker presented a new challenge.

## Sex Workers and the Community of Value

While Finland was discursively constructed as a nation of equality, it still left the interviewees with the need to account for individual sex workers within the field of commercial sex. The interviewees tried to make sense of commercial sex in the Finnish context in different ways.

As already discussed, control and management of any sexual activity that is deemed deviant is part of the process of constructing the nation (Pryke 1998). As the interview with the trafficking expert suggests, in the Finnish context, commercial sex can present a particular problem as it can be perceived to be in conflict with gender equality and the values of an equal society. In such a context, different strategies can be used to conceptualise commercial sex. One such strategy is framing commercial sex as a foreign issue.

We don't have so many Finnish citizens who work in this business [commercial sex]. Of course, we have, but they are, OK, if these days they are Finnish citizens, but they are Russian or Estonian or whatnot. The real nationalities are not Finnish. But

they're living in Finland or married, so they have a Finnish status. (Police)

The interviewee places the sex workers outside the national community of value by stating that they are not Finnish. While there is acknowledgement that they may acquire Finnish citizenship or residence permit, they are still framed as non-Finns. This quote starts out with a statement that there are not so many Finns doing sex work, but what seems to be an acknowledgment that there are some Finnish women doing sex work, is immediately followed by a qualifier that they are not really ethnically Finnish, merely those who acquired Finnish citizenship. It suggests that real Finnish women do not engage in commercial sex. And those who do, are not real Finnish women. It has been noted that foreigners are left out of the concept of Finnish identity almost entirely, and gaining Finnish citizenship does not bridge that conceptual gap (Lepola 2000 cited in Koivukangas 2002). In this case, by framing the sex workers as not truly Finnish allows the interviewee to separate commercial sex from Finnishness. Yuval-Davis (1993) has pointed out that the nation's honour is threatened if its women fail to follow the accepted sexual scripts, and so by casting these women as ethnically different, it allows one to account for commercial sex in Finland while at the same time preserving the integrity of the nation.

Furthermore, sex workers are not only constructed as being foreigners, but they are contrasted with Finnish women. When the subject of trafficking is broached, Finnish women are brought up only to act as a contrast to foreign women.

Naturally, Finnish girls are at a very low risk of being victims of trafficking. But that is no reason to ignore the fact that girls from Nigeria, from Russia, from Estonia, and from wherever are being brought here. That is no reason to ignore the fact

that our men can use these girls and women from poor countries, just because they had been born in that poor country. (NGO representative)

The interviewee connects trafficking with poverty, and by framing countries from which women are trafficked as poor, can present Finland as not poor. This, arguably, obscures any poverty that may exist in Finland and how that could contribute to commercial sex in Finland. The interviewee sates that the "Finnish girls" are unlikely to be sexually exploited, unlike "girls from Nigeria, from Russia, from Estonia". However, Finnish women have been known to be victims of trafficking in Finland (Viuhko 2010), and so their exclusion from the trafficking discourse suggests a particular framing of trafficking as something that happens to women from elsewhere, but also constructs Finland as a place where trafficking is a predominately external issue. Finnish women could not be comfortably included in the discourse of trafficking as victims, as such an inclusion could undermine the conceptualisation of Finland as a nation based on gender and social equality. At the same time, there is a need to extend support to foreign victims of trafficking since that would promote those same values. In fact, Raevaara and Saarikoski argue that in Finland gender equality is not only understood to be a national value, but a value Finland should strive to export to other nations (Raevaara & Saarikoski 2002, 282, cited in Tuori 2007). The interviewee presents the Finnish men as exploiters, yet they are not symbolically cast out of the community of value. Instead, the interviewee suggests that the community should take responsibility for "our men" and protect the foreign women from them. The discourse of trafficking leaves out sexual exploitation of Finnish women by Finnish men, but frames the relationship between foreign women and Finnish men as one-sided and exploitative. In this context, the control of foreign women, and Finnish men, is justified as a way of protecting them from exploitation.

A policymaker used similar rhetoric to talk about a proposed law that would criminalise purchasing of sexual services in Finland.

The law, if it will have an effect, will affect the demand. So, of course, as the demand goes down, it's possible that selling sexual services will go down. Trafficking and pandering will be less profitable. Hopefully, the law will have an effect on them. Finland will not be seen as a profitable place for trafficking for sexual purposes. (Policymaker)

Sex workers are completely absent from this interview. There is no statement about protecting their rights as either sex workers or victims of trafficking. The discussion focuses on the law criminalising the purchase of sexual services. Namely, the law is expected to protect Finland from trafficking, which is, once again, imagined as an external force. Here, the control of sexual behaviour of citizens is justified by the benefits such control would have for the nation.

However, the Finnish sex workers were not completely ignored. They appeared in overt and covert forms in different interviews. However, at times, their Finnishness was rather implied than stated outright. In such cases there was a clear division between powerful sex workers and the powerless ones.

[Sex work] is not even ordinary work for the Lady Domina. This is what I think. But I can allow that. You know, if she wants to do that, I don't mind and nobody minds, really, in Finland. Not that much. The police officers, they are not after those people, really. [...] We have to all the time keep in mind that those who are the most powerful and who have the voice, they come out and they tell about their stories which are usually not that horrific that I encounter every day at my work. And their stories are as real as my clients', or my customers', or my victims' stories. And I understand

it. But they are only stories of one or two persons, you cannot generalise those stories as being the general experience of prostitution or sex trade. (Trafficking expert)

The "Lady Domina" is constructed as an archetype of an independent sex worker, a dominatrix, who can express her opinion and has no experience of the more horrific side of sex work. While it is never stated outright, it becomes apparent from the context of the interview that this character does not seem to be imagined as a foreigner. The interviewee suggests that the "Lady Domina's" engagement in commercial sex is her own personal choice, and, therefore, her own business. As such, it is outside the jurisdiction of law or law enforcement. If the "Lady Domina" is, in fact, imagined as a Finnish sex worker, then her freedom to engage in sex work and the society's lenient attitude towards it allow the interviewee to construct Finland as a country of social and gender equality. The "Lady Domina" is constructed as not being forced into her work by a, presumably, male pimp or trafficker, nor is she forced into it by poverty and social inequality. She, thus, appears to come to the field of commercial sex from a position of power, which is drawn from social and gender equality in Finland. Furthermore, there is little room for the possibility that this position of power may not be uniform and constant. The "Lady Domina" is not imagined as having a position of power in some aspects of her life, while not in others, and the risk of losing this position of power is not acknowledged.

Nevertheless, the voluntary commercial sex is said to be rare and only the prerogative of the powerful. The sexual behaviour of the less powerful, described alternatively as "clients", "customers" and "victims", is not voluntary and so involvement of law in their sex life is justifiable since it is done for their own protection. This line drawn between powerful and powerless sex workers allows the

conflict between Finnish values and the existence of commercial sex to be resolved. Through the discourse of social and gender equality, Finnish women are either positioned outside of the field of commercial sex or are imagined as powerful actors within this field. As such, their involvement in commercial sex does not require the involvement of the law. On the other hand, foreign women are positioned as less powerful and their involvement in commercial sex needs to be regulated. Moreover, these regulations are justified by the Finnish values of social and gender equality.

In this way, the community of value is discursively constructed around the idea of social and gender equality. Finnish sex workers, and Finnish women in general, are then imagined as benefiting from them as members of community of value. Migrant sex workers, on the other hand, are imagined as lacking access to these values, since they come from countries where equity is supposedly not a strong national value. This positions Finnish sex workers outside the discourse of risks and protections, while making the intervention in the lives of migrant sex workers a matter of national identity.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show how the Finnish nationhood is discursively constructed in relation to commercial sex in Finland. For this purpose, interview data with a number of actors was examined. These actors all come in contact with the field of commercial sex in their professional capacity and to various degrees affect this field in Finland.

By drawing on specific discourses, the interviewees attempted to reconcile the existence of commercial sex with the value of social equality in Finland. While some interviewees were more explicit about this than others, many felt that

commercial sex threatened the perceived equality of the Finnish nation. Despite their different professional and personal positions in relation to commercial sex, the interviewees tended to use similar discourses focussing upon social equality to rationalise their position on commercial sex. They proposed very different management strategies of commercial sex, yet they tended to appeal to very similar values of social justice and equality to justify their positions. These values were not presented as universal, but rather as uniquely embedded in the Finnish national context. Notably, while the discourse of gender equality was used by the interviewees, it was employed narrowly to discuss only some forms of commercial sex management and was often subsumed by the social equality discourse. This could be attributed to the fact that gender equality has been often perceived as too divisive and has not been seen as a goal in itself in the Finnish context. Rather, it has been valued as a contribution to social equality (Bucken-Knapp, Schaffer & Levin 2014).

Since Finland is imagined as a country of social equality, Finnish women do not fit comfortably in the discourse of commercial sex, at least not as ones in need of protection or intervention. Finnish women are either excluded from the category of women engaged in commercial sex, or when they are imagined as sex workers, they are imagined to possess a position of power. Migrant women, on the other hand, are constructed as being outside the Finnish community of values with its envisaged social and gender equality. And it is seen as the duty of the community to extend to them these values through different forms of social mechanisms and legislation. Finland is, therefore, imagined by the interviewees as a nation possessing the values of social and gender equality at its core. In addition to this, it is also imagined as an exporter of these values to the migrant sex workers, who are constructed as lacking access to them as a result of their foreign origins.

The discourses of nation and equality were not prompted by any specific questions, but rather they were articulated within the larger interview context. The interviews were conducted in English by a foreigner, and the interviewees were aware that the overall study focused on Russian-speaking sex workers. Therefore their frequent references to the nation could be understood as attempts to contextualise commercial sex for an outsider. However, their use of gender and social equality discourses in relation to this national context did not seem to stem from any particular questions.

The goal of the study was not to evaluate the legitimacy of different forms of regulation of issues associated with commercial sex, nor to minimise the issues faced by sex workers. It sought to draw attention to the fact that actors who hold very different positions in relation to commercial sex use very similar discourses to make sense of their opinions and practices. These discourses are related to how Finland is imagined as a nation, and consequently how sex workers, both foreign and Finnish, are imagined within the nation. As it has been shown by previous research (Keskinen 2011; 2012; Tuori 2007), it is important to be cautious about how certain national discourses of freedom and equality could be used to exclude some people from the community or to justify certain forms of intervention. Constructing Finland through these discourses could leave little room for discussion of structural inequalities and gender discrimination which may affect Finnish women, both in the field of commercial sex and outside of it. It could also obscure the problematic forms of migration and social controls exerted over non-Finnish women engaged in commercial sex purportedly for their own benefit.

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