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Affective Institutional Work and Ordoliberal Governance: Gender Equality in Parliamentary Debates on the Competitiveness Pact in Finland

Miikaeli Kylä-Laaso and Paula Koskinen Sandberg

Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

ABSTRACT

The 2008 economic crisis and its aftermath have created opportunities for institutional actors to formulate and implement neoliberal reforms and policies. In this article, we analyse a recent ordoliberal policy measure of the Finnish government—namely, the Competitiveness Pact—and related legislative measures. Ordoliberalism, a variant of neoliberalism, entails a strong state which aims to protect the economy from interfering influences. The government's main objective was to increase the competitiveness of the Finnish economy by lowering labour costs. However, the competitiveness measures caused a conflict between the government and labour market parties. As the measures mainly targeted the feminized public sector, they had clear gendered impacts that became central to the struggle between the government and trade unions. We utilize critical discourse analysis as a methodology to study affective institutional work and ordoliberal governance in parliamentary discussions on these measures. Our results show that gender equality was marginalized and considered a threatening issue for the ordoliberal regime. The Pact was also the government's attempt to make institutional changes to the norms and relations of the corporatist system, as the government assumed the leading role by setting demands for the labour market parties to fulfil.

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Introduction

Responses to the economic crisis of 2008 have seen intensifying neoliberal policies in combination with a more authoritarian approach to governance, demanding and even forcing sacrifices from the people. Since the crisis, the Finnish economy has struggled with stagnation and growing public debt, with no clear-cut solutions. Between 2008 and 2015, the Finnish government introduced various austerity measures, which did not greatly impact this progress (Harjuniemi & Ampuja, 2019). By 2015, when parliamentary elections were looming in Finland, the political discourse was filled with a sense of impending doom. Lack of competitiveness resulting from high wages and growing public debt were defined as key problems, to which the right-wing parties proposed the solution of even more severe austerity. A key measure for this was the Competitiveness Pact, which forms the case study of this paper.

The crisis and its aftermath also enabled institutional actors to formulate and implement neoliberal and ordoliberal reforms and policies. The Competitiveness Pact was an attempt to decrease labour costs and increase the competitiveness of the Finnish economy. It was initiated in 2015 by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's centre-right-populist government (e.g. Elomäki, 2019) and negotiated with the labour market parties. Along with the government's austerity policies, the Pact had drastic gender

implications for the labour market. The Pact was also an attempt by the government to implement institutional changes to the norms and relations of the corporatist system. The government took a leading role, setting demands for the labour market parties to fulfil with labour cost reductions as the main goal. The government threatened to make further cuts of up to €10 billion and implement an alternative competitiveness package—the so-called obligatory laws—which would bypass the labour market parties' agreements. Thus, the government had a great deal of weight behind its demands. In this power struggle, gendered impacts of the competitiveness measures became a central issue of debate.

Our main interest in this article lies in analysing how the government tried to change a central institution—the corporatist system—and how it reacted to resistance and criticism of the gender inequality that its policies would cause. The austerity and competitiveness measures can be understood in the context of ordoliberal ideology, which entails the state's active agency in promoting a competitive national economy by protecting the markets from interfering influences (Bonefeld, 2012). In the case of the Pact, however, strong politicization came in the form of a critical focus on gender equality. The gendered impacts of laws and the Pact were raised as a central issue by trade unions, the opposition and scholars (Elomäki, Kantola, Koivunen, & Ylöstalo, 2016; Harjunemi & Ampuja, 2019; Jokinen, 2017).

For our analysis, we develop the concept of *affective institutional work*. Institutional work represents action directed towards “creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011). Our focus is on the affective meaning-making and affective economies (Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2013) in which this institutional work is embedded: the circulation and use of emotions and their attachment to different signs and objects, which played a central role in the debates over the obligatory laws and the Pact. As the government endeavoured to secure the legitimacy of its policies and take extraordinary actions in the labour markets, it also had to manage the affective economies of gendered issues, such as the tension between the female-dominated public sector and male-dominated private sector, in the context of competitiveness. The concept of affective institutional work enables us to analyse how affects were used to maintain and disrupt institutions.

We have chosen to analyse the Finnish parliamentary discussions held during the years 2015–2017, covering the formation of the Pact. We employ critical discourse analysis of the affective institutional work and discourses employed by the government to defend its competitiveness-promoting measures and the obligatory laws against gender equality-related criticism in particular. Our research questions are as follows: (1) What kind of affective institutional work did the government do when defending and seeking to legitimize its competitiveness measures and their gendered consequences? (2) How was the government's affective and discursive meaning-making embedded in the changing corporatist system and ordoliberal governance?

Our research contributes to previous scholarship by presenting a sociological analysis of the state as an active agent in the present-day Finnish ordoliberal competition state (e.g. Kantola & Kananen, 2013) as well as the status of gender equality in the state's reforms. We seek to contribute to the study of ordoliberal governance in the context of gender equality and corporatism by analysing the discourse and affects used to obtain consent for ordoliberal policies—that is, the affective institutional work. We also contribute to feminist studies of the economy by highlighting how economic ideas of governance are embedded in affective meaning-making and how affects, in turn, influence institutional change and economic governance.

Ordoliberal competition state, corporatism and the gendered labour market

Neoliberalism and its variant, ordoliberalism, are viewed as dominant ideologies in contemporary Finnish society. These ideologies have challenged the more traditional social-democratic ideas often linked to Nordic societies and welfare states. The general tendencies and features of neoliberalism include deregulation, privatization and the state's withdrawal from areas of social protection

(Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 2002). While the absence of state intervention in the market is central to neoliberalism, in *ordoliberalism*, the state is an active agent enhancing market efficiency by protecting the markets from political strife and the undue influence of the people (e.g. Miettinen, 2017).

Therefore, the context of this article is the *ordoliberal competition state*. Finland has experienced two severe economic crises in recent decades: one in the 1990s (the national banking crisis) and the other in 2008 (the global financial crisis). In the aftermath of these crises, the global neoliberal project gained legitimacy, thus facilitating the paradigm shift from the welfare state to the competition state (Kantola & Kananen, 2013; see also Elomäki et al., 2016). The Sipilä government in particular moved the state towards ordoliberal governance (Adkins, Kortesoja, Mannevu, & Ylöstalo, 2019; Kantola & Kananen, 2013). As showcased in the formulation of the obligatory laws of the Competitiveness Pact, the state tried to bypass the labour market parties and restrict their freedom to negotiate—or force them to agree to the Pact—by implementing legislation.

To fully understand the Competitiveness Pact's impact on gender equality, it is important to closely examine the gendered structures and institutions of the Finnish labour market—namely, the ordoliberal competition state and corporatism. Finland shares many features with other Nordic countries, which are typically acknowledged as relatively gender-equal societies (e.g. World Economic Forum, 2018). This characteristic is commonly attributed to the Nordic women-friendly welfare state model (e.g. Borchorst & Siim, 2002; Hernes, 1987). However, the dismantling of the social-democratic welfare state and adoption of the ordoliberal competition state has had gendered consequences. Public sector services, which are at the core of the welfare state and mainly employ women, have been subjected to strict budgetary control. Emphasis on the competitiveness of the export industry has strengthened, and the public sector has been portrayed as a burden, thus justifying the cutting of expenses (Kantola & Kananen, 2013). This kind of rhetoric has been particularly pronounced since nurses managed to negotiate relatively high wage increases in 2007, with most industries then following this example. The result was a significant rise in Finland's labour costs, with unfortunate timing, just before the 2008 financial crisis (e.g. Saari, Kantola, & Koskinen Sandberg, *in press*). The nurses' wage increases in particular and the 2007 collective bargaining round in general have been blamed for the loss of national competitiveness.

All Nordic countries have high levels of gender segregation in the labour market, with Finland having the highest level (Grönlund, Halldén, & Magnusson, 2016). Women in Finland tend to work in the public sector, mainly the local government sector, while men typically work in the private sector, specifically in the construction and export industries. The local government sector employs approximately 420,000 people, which is a large number in a nation of only 5 million people. In the local government sector, women comprise 80% of the labour force. Employees in feminized occupations, such as nurses, early education personnel and teachers, all work for the local government for relatively low pay (e.g. Koskinen Sandberg, Törnroos, & Kohvakka, 2018). The Competitiveness Pact hit these people especially hard because it cut from their already modest salaries.

Finland ranks as strongly corporatist according to various economic and political criteria, such as high union density, interest groups' active involvement in policy formation and centralized wage bargaining (e.g. Bergqvist, 2004; Kauppinen, 2005; Vesa, Kantola, & Binderkrantz, 2018). Corporatism is central to how the Finnish labour market and political decision-making are organized. The labour market parties work in active collaboration with the Finnish governments and exercise significant decision-making power. This powerful position was the main reason why Sipilä's government aimed to change or at least dismantle the power of corporatism in Finland. Typically, the government would have to gain acceptance from the labour market parties to implement a labour market reform or policy, which would then be negotiated with the labour market parties. For a policy measure to come into force, reaching consensus in the tripartite framework is crucial. While this was also the case with the Competitiveness Pact, here, the

government took on an exceptional leadership role and tried to dictate the formulation and implementation of this labour market policy (see also Adkins et al., 2019).

The Competitiveness Pact and the obligatory laws

The Competitiveness Pact, initially called the Social Pact, was largely framed by the 2008 economic crisis, which has had a lengthy aftermath. Research shows an unwillingness in Finnish media to provide alternative viewpoints to the narrative offered by hegemonic institutions, although there were conflicting views on the state of Finnish labour's competitiveness (Harjuniemi & Ampuja, 2019; Kaitila, 2019). While debate on austerity measures peaked in 2015, before the parliamentary elections (e.g. Adkins et al., 2019), Finland had already adopted austerity measures some years earlier, and the previous government had raised awareness of the crisis. The Ministry of Finance set the terms of this debate and all major political parties accepted, rather uncritically, the Ministry's view that austerity was necessary to survive the crisis (Elomäki, 2019). According to Juha Sipilä of the Centre Party, who became the Prime Minister, something needed to be done to "save the country", and Finland would face economic difficulties similar to those of Greece unless the reforms were implemented (see also Adkins et al., 2019). Austerity measures and national competitiveness were central to the strategic government programme, *Finland—Land of Solutions* (Prime Minister's Office, 2015).

The newly formed government consisted of the conservative Centre Party, the right-wing National Coalition Party and the right-wing populist Finns Party, which later split into two parties, with only roughly half of their representatives remaining in the government. As a solution to economic challenges, the government came up with the Competitiveness Pact. The Pact was to be negotiated between the state and the labour market parties, who were meant to determine the practical implementation of the policy measures. The Pact's central aim was to increase the competitiveness of the Finnish economy (Prime Minister's Office, 2015). This aim would be achieved by either lowering labour costs by 5% or increasing work hours by 100 hours a year (without pay increases)—demands that were difficult for trade unions to accept. When the negotiations did not produce results, the government began planning an alternative competitiveness package—also mentioned in the government programme—to enforce its goals. The package would have prevented the labour market parties from negotiating some terms normally agreed upon in collective agreements, which resulted in the adoption of the term "obligatory laws".

To decrease labour costs and other expenses for employers, cuts would be made in several areas. Increasing competitiveness was presented as a solution to the rising public debt and increasing state expenditure for the sake of private business competitiveness was considered acceptable. The government decided to reduce the social security contributions of employers by 1.72% and transfer these costs to the state, changing some public holidays into unpaid ones and reducing payments for employees on sick leave. Originally, the package also included cutting extra pay for overtime and working on Sundays, but as these measures would have affected the female-dominated sectors harshly, they faced heavy criticism and were eventually replaced with the aforementioned holiday pay cuts. This received less criticism despite its similar targeting of the public sector. Although the public sector and the state were key in paying for this "productivity leap", according to the government, this was all done to "provide a sustainable basis for the funding of the welfare society" (Finnish Government, 2015). The government also proposed measures which it framed as favouring employers and gender equality, such as giving €2,500 in compensation to employers whose employees took parental leave, which can be seen as a mostly symbolic act for the sake of gender equality. These competitiveness measures were discussed often in the parliament during the Sipilä government's term.

Ultimately, the labour market parties reached a consensus on the Pact in spring 2016. The Pact would involve cuts to certain pay components, such as cutting the holiday pay of public sector employees for three years (approximately half a month's extra salary that is paid annually), shifting

social insurance contributions from employers to employees by 1.20%, shifting social security payments from employers to the state by at least 0.58% and adding 24 extra unpaid annual working hours (Competitiveness Pact, 2016). The Competitiveness Pact and the state's role in enforcing it were also connected to a discourse of the waning role of the corporatist system and centralized collective bargaining, which were portrayed as historical remnants. According to Brown (2015) and Adkins et al. (2019), this was an inversion of the traditional social contract: the government demanded sacrifices from Finnish citizens in order to protect the Finnish economy and competitiveness instead of protecting the citizens' rights.

Methodology and data: affective institutional work, discourse analysis and parliamentary discussions

In this article, our methodological approach is situated within critical discourse analysis and the research on affects, grounded in the works of, for example, Ahmed (2004) and Wetherell (2013). We combine these approaches with research on institutional work to analyse how affects are used and is present in discursive meaning-making and how this, in turn, appears as part of the institutional work of government in changing the corporatist system in Finland.

The starting point for analysing affects is asking what affects do in interaction and how these interactions organize the social order (Ahmed, 2004). Utilizing the concept of affective economy, Ahmed discusses how affects gain stickiness towards various objects, which come to be considered as sources of these affects. In her use, affect refers to the circulation of emotions and their attachment to objects and signs, which then shapes and organizes action and people. According to Wetherell (2013), affects, emotions and discourse are, in many ways, entangled as emotions are negotiated, evaluated and performed as part of affective/discursive meaning-making (on emotions in discursive institutional work, see also Moisander, Hirsto, & Fahy, 2016). Therefore, we utilize critical discourse analysis as our methodology, where the relationship between knowledge and power is central—how knowledge is produced and with it both possibilities and limitations, in terms of action and subjectivity (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017).

Institutions can be defined as historical accumulations of practices (e.g. Scott, 2013). Institutions set the conditions for future action. Feminist scholars have noted that institutions are gendered and they reflect, reinforce and structure unequal power relations in society (e.g. Chappell & Waylen, 2013). For the purposes of our study, we coin the term *affective institutional work*, which merges concepts around institutional work (e.g. Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011) and affect theory (e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2013). Institutional work represents action directed towards “creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2011). The literature on institutional work has produced concepts such as disruptive institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), defensive institutional work (Maguire & Hardy, 2009) and temporal institutional work (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). We contribute to this literature by bringing in elements of affect theory. The concept of affective institutional work allows for analysing how institutional work is conducted via mobilizing affects to create, maintain or disrupt institutions.

Our research data consist of plenary sessions of the Finnish parliament in 2015–2017, totalling 27 different documents and approximately 400–450 pages. The discussions used are taken from various stages of the process leading to the Competitiveness Pact. The data are available online and were gathered from the Finnish parliament's website (Finnish Government, n.d.), where the material is stored. All plenary sessions are recorded and published online and referenced in the analysis as PTK (abbreviation for minutes of the meeting). These data were chosen because our interests are in the government's affective institutional work and ways of legitimizing its exceptional actions and gendered policies. Although the views of the labour market parties are missing from the data, they provide ample opportunities for analysing the government's discourse, which is central to our research questions. We selected the quotations according to their relevance to the subject: although law or the Pact have been discussed often, the discussions where they were central and

provoked dialogue were the most fruitful ones. We also aim to illuminate the issues that became central in these discussions.

We begin our analysis by focusing on the obligatory laws and then move to the agreement over the Pact. We pay attention to the affective institutional work done by the government in the context of ordoliberalism. What kinds of affects relating to the obligatory laws and the Competitiveness Pact are produced, ignored or elaborated, and what are their implications for gender equality?

Legitimizing ordoliberalism via affective institutional work

The planning of the obligatory laws began in autumn 2015, when Prime Minister Sipilä ended negotiations on the Competitiveness Pact with the labour market parties for the second time due to the trade unions' disagreement with the government's goals. Both times, the negotiations were rather short, and the tight time limits set by the government made reaching any agreement challenging (Hirvola, 2017). These cuts would have had the most severe effects on the female-dominated occupations in the public and service sectors. Facing resistance and criticism from trade unions, the opposition and several academics (Elomäki et al., 2016; Hirvola, 2017), the government needed to create legitimacy for both its exceptional actions in the corporatist system and the gendered effects of its policies.

After the laws were announced, Prime Minister Sipilä took the unusual decision to deliver a public speech on national television targeting all Finnish citizens and workers in the Finnish labour market (YLE News, 2015). In his speech, he pleaded with the labour market parties to find a solution, while expressing his understanding that part of the planned competitiveness package would adversely affect certain groups of employees, but that these cuts in wages and benefits were necessary for the common good.

When asked in the parliament about the gendered impacts of the laws and proposed cuts to extra wages for overtime and working on Sundays, the government representatives mostly ignored the issue and focused on the "big picture" of the economy. We will begin our analysis with talk about this "big picture" and the affective institutional work of the government regarding the gendered impacts of the laws. According to Ahmed (2004), affects are oriented towards different objects through encounters. The following quotations reveal the centrality of reorienting affects from one object to another to the government's affective institutional work. Opposition MP Aino-Kaisa Pekonen (Left Alliance) had the following to say about the laws:

This is an unforeseen attack on the freedom of contract. The government's cuts are directed towards low-wage women, care sector and store workers ... How does disciplining low-wage women increase the competitiveness of Finnish export industries? (PTK 31/2015)

In Pekonen's comment, there is a clear focus on the intersection of class and gender. This is used to evoke feelings of injustice, as the well-being of low-wage women in various sectors is largely perceived to be sacrificed for the Finnish export industries. Low-wage women, and nurses in particular, were a strong rhetorical device and figures used often to argue against the government's policies (Elomäki et al., 2016). This criticism is tied to the logic of the obligatory laws: not only are low-wage women targeted unfairly, the government's policy is also based on illegitimate goals and means, as they would limit the labour market parties' freedom of contract. Affects relating to injustice regarding gender equality and class are at the core here. However, Prime Minister Sipilä's response does not address these issues:

This entire package saves around 1.4 billion euros from the public sector. Part of this will be used to balance the economy of the public sector and part will be used to decrease the social security payments of the private sector, which increases the competitiveness of the private sector—this is the part that those with a job can do for the unemployed. (PTK 31/2015)

Although Pekonen connects the laws to gender and the functioning of the corporatist system, Sipilä mostly ignores both of these in favour of discussing the economy in general. This represents

a common strategy in the government's responses, which allowed it to focus on its ordoliberal agenda. The first part of Sipilä's answer is rather technical, focused on describing the government's logic, while the second part focuses on the general category of employees without a gender perspective. Despite the degree of technicality, a great deal of affective institutional work is done here.

Sipilä replaces the category of low-wage women by speaking about the public sector, which is a considerably more abstract category with a different range of affects attached to it. The comment relies on a discourse of a bloated or unhealthy public sector, which creates public debt and, in turn, creating problems for competitiveness. The need for balance clearly indicates that the public sector already has more than enough resources. Interest in better wages in the public sector is also delegitimised because it would threaten increased employment. Despite being heavily underpaid, the low-wage women are implicitly positioned as at least better off than the unemployed. Discussing the demands of neoliberal policy, Brown (2015) indicates that rhetoric about the public sector tends to be particularly accusatory and, following this, greater sacrifices are asked of it. The affective economy (Ahmed, 2004) of the public sector is somewhat different from that of a low-wage woman. As the public debt had been rising ever since the economic crisis began, blame was directed at the public sector, despite the numerous layoffs during the crisis (Jonker-Hoffrén, 2019).

Sipilä's response consists mostly of not answering the key issues raised in the criticism, diverting the related affects elsewhere. Sipilä still had the following to say on the effects of laws regarding the distribution of wealth: "It is repulsive for me to think in the way that there is someone in this that benefits and someone who loses" (PTK 39/2015). For Sipilä, considering the conflicts, benefits and interests vested in the obligatory laws was "repulsive". The use of this word implies a strong moral and affective stance; the consequences of the laws were ignored for the sake of evaluating the government's moral integrity. This, however, also positions other actors under the microscope. This discourse suggests that labour market parties that are unwilling to accept the competitiveness measures or other parties that are critical of the laws are acting unethically for the sake of group interests. Disruptive institutional work can happen by undermining the moral foundations of the institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), which is central to the discourse shown above, as the trade unions and other actors showing resistance are implicitly regarded as questionable in their criticism.

Labour market parties were to blame for gendered impacts of the competitiveness package, according to the government. Facing questions about whether the government actually had a right to make the obligatory laws, Sipilä said the following: "Of course we would have wanted to agree about it together—then we would have been able to better take into account different economic sectors. But no will was found for this" (PTK 31/2015). This indirectly justifies the government's gendered policies while accusing the trade unions of preventing the government from designing better policies. Thus, the government is claiming to have no alternatives to its position and positioning itself simultaneously as a victim of unwilling trade unions and a saviour doing what needs to be done regardless.

This latter discourse is apparent in the following words of Sampo Terho of the populist Finns Party: "None of the means the government has proposed for increasing competitiveness are ideological. The only ideology the government has is saving Finland" (PTK 42/2015)—requiring the participation of all Finns. The discourse of competitiveness is rather nationalistic, where the sacrifices required from the people are also constructed as being for the greater good. This constitutes a form of affective institutional work similar to that above by questioning the moral foundations of other actors. Yet it also provides a hopeful future. It is possible to save Finland, but Finland now needs everyone to do their part. This discourse relies strongly on a nationalistic affective economy and, therefore, love and fear—the implication being that if nothing is done to "save Finland", there will be severe and incalculable consequences. Indeed, the "way of Greece" is central to this discourse, and it entails fear of a failed economy and loss of national autonomy to the

EU. This is used to generate emotional and moral uncertainty about the future (e.g. Brown, 2015) and, largely, also positions everyone as equally responsible for the future.

The quotations above are deeply embedded in ordoliberal ideology. Most of the affective institutional work is directed towards establishing the legitimacy of the government's actions and delegitimising the corporatist system or other actors, portraying them as representing illegitimate group interests. The government, meanwhile, is looking after the economy as a whole and, thus, after Finland itself. Affective economies (Ahmed, 2004) used rely on the stickiness of fears, doubts and suspicions regarding the public sector or the corporatist system: the discourse of an excessively large public sector causing debt or the corporatist system being outdated and unable to do anything but work for group interests. Responses to the policies' gendered effects are then reoriented and re-categorized, resulting in very different affective economies being evoked from those relating to low-wage women. According to Ahmed (2004), emotion and affects might be valued differently depending on what they are orientated towards. At the core is the illegitimacy of the affects and emotions of low-wage women because they are not directed towards what is constructed as the common interest of "saving Finland" but, instead, are even portrayed and evaluated as harmful.

Government as a proponent of gender equality: values and affects

Despite these attempts to shift the conversation away from gender, gender equality became increasingly focal issues in the debates about the obligatory laws, perhaps partly because the affects and interests of low-wage women and other targets of the cuts were not recognized. The government showed resilience in defending the obligatory laws and austerity policies, but admitted to issues relating to gender equality in the proposed cuts to extra pay for overtime and working on Sundays. The government eventually replaced this proposal with cuts to holiday pay, although these were also gendered to some degree, disproportionately targeting the public sector. With these changes, the government started to position itself as a proponent of gender equality, in contrast to the labour market parties. The €2,500 compensation for employers whose employees took parental leave also became central to the government's discourse. As affective institutional work, the government's values became central to managing and creating its legitimacy, constructing an image of a righteous actor.

The eventually withdrawn cuts to overtime and Sunday pay had faced substantial criticism from the opposition, trade unions and researchers, but the government had remained unresponsive (e.g. Elomäki et al., 2016; Hirvola, 2017). What ultimately changed the government's position was a televised interview with two midwives, who discussed how the cuts impacted their personal lives. Sipilä then claimed that their arguments had convinced him of the negative consequences of the planned cuts. Sipilä went on to portray the replacement cuts in holiday pay as an achievement of the government, saying that the government had "truly searched for alternative options. We turned every stone until we found a better way" (PTK 42/2015). This discourse emphasized that it would not be the government's fault if policies caused gender inequalities. Instead, Petri Honkonen of the Centre Party referred to the history of corporatism, where labour market parties had been unable to make progress regarding gender equality:

From the perspective of equality, I'm grateful in particular for this equality leap, where the expenses of parental leave are compensated by €2,500, levelling the inequalities faced by young women in the labour markets—despite that the male-dominated labour market parties have tried to prevent this for years. (PTK 42/2015)

Thus, the values and goals of the labour market parties were directly questioned, casting suspicion on their interest in gender equality. Instead, there was an "equality leap" made by the government, associated with the "competitiveness leap" that was also the government's goal. Our data reveal that this compensation became a central part of the government's discourse, showcasing its capacity for considering gender equality. The affective economy of disappointment related to the failures of the corporatist system was utilized to delegitimise the labour market parties' actions. This worked to

disrupt the moral foundations of the labour market parties, as they were constructed as having no real interest in gender equality.

The government was portrayed as determined in its task, but the limitations set by the labour market parties still determined its possibilities. Hanna-Maja Henriksson of the Swedish People's Party of Finland demanded better gender impact assessments for the obligatory laws, and Timo Heinonen of the National Coalition Party responded that they must be done carefully, but hoped that “a solution would still be found together with the labour market parties” (PTK 42/2015), as there would be more tools for taking equality into account.

A fundamental difference was also constructed in the issue of representation, where the government claimed to be the only actor with the interests of the people in mind, unlike the trade unions, who represented mere group interests. This can be seen in the case of midwives: while the midwives' views were taken seriously, the other actors' (e.g. the opposition, trade unions and academics) criticisms of the cuts were ignored. The following comment demonstrates Laura Huhtasaari of the Finns Party justifying the fastidiousness of the government:

The opposition has so many things it says “no” to. If you say “no” to everything, it leads to Finland becoming a periphery, and the country withers. We do not ask the opposition or the professors whether we are allowed to lead this country or not. We lead this country. A good leader listens to the people, and even that seemed to be a problem for you. The government listened to a midwife, who gave a reasonable argument. (PTK 42/2015)

The criticism of the government's choices was perceived as an unwillingness to accept the need to make changes. While attacking the opposition is not extraordinary, interestingly, academic actors, such as professors, were likened to the opposition, making their knowledge political and ideological. The government and Prime Minister Sipilä had already demonstrated hostility towards academics opining on the government's policies (Vuorelma, 2017), and Huhtasaari's comment above follows this line. As depoliticizing political issues is a central aspect of ordoliberal policymaking (Miettinen, 2017), politicizing criticism can be a useful tool for portraying others as ideological actors.

The central elements of this affective institutional work derive from struggles over authenticity and values: which actors can actually be true to their word? The emphasis on the government's ability to make tough but fair decisions shifted the discourse from the actual consequences of these policies to the government's moral integrity and values—a phenomenon apparent in the government's equality policies too (Elomäki et al., 2016). Utilizing the affects attached to midwives, the government sought to present itself as aligned with the will of the “people”. The goal was for negative affects to be associated with trade unions instead of the government and, thus, for the actions and knowledge of the former to be delegitimised.

After the obligatory laws: consensus trumping gender equality

While gender equality was, for a while, a prominent feature of the arguments of both the government and labour market parties, the issue quickly disappeared once both sides finally found common ground regarding the contents of the Competitiveness Pact. However, the results were even more gendered than the initial plans had been. Having achieved its goals, the government began to distance itself from the Pact. Indeed, in our data, there is markedly less discussion about the Pact and even less about its gendered effects. This is understandable to a degree, as the content of the Pact was mostly left to the labour market parties to resolve. Yet the distancing is still somewhat surprising because the government was a central actor demanding the Pact.

At the beginning of 2016, an agreement on the Pact was made, and it was later signed in the spring and summer (The Competitiveness Pact, 2016). Pressure to reach this agreement had grown as the government continued working on the obligatory laws, and the ongoing struggle was starting to harm the labour market parties as well as the government (Hirvola, 2017). Additionally, according to the labour market parties, President Sauli Niinistö had invited key leaders among them to a meeting, indicating that he thought the negotiations should continue (YLE News, 2018).

President Niinistö was, and remains, highly popular in Finland, with a particularly positive image of a humble yet sharp and sensible centrist statesman, who is just like any other Finn. This meeting presumably affected the trade unions' willingness to negotiate. Normally, presidents do not intervene in domestic or labour market politics, making the move exceptional.

Despite including many different means for increasing competitiveness, the Pact targeted the female-dominated public sector in particular with a temporary 30% cut in holiday pay. The labour market parties also agreed on the "Finnish model", according to which wage increases in other sectors would follow those in the export industries, freezing the wage gap between female- and male-dominated sectors (Jonker-Hoffrén, 2019). This was a demand of the government because the male-dominated export sector was presented as key to increasing competitiveness. The government mostly celebrated the Pact as a great achievement, which the trade unions and the opposition saw as insensitive to those affected by the cuts. In response to criticism, Sipilä expressed his "humblest gratitude" to the trade unions and the people for their sacrifices, while distancing the government from the Pact:

If I say a word about this detail, I think it [the holiday pay cut] should have affected everybody. But the labour market parties have come to this outcome, and I respect that, and we have accepted it from our side. (PTK 18/2016)

Rather than positioning itself as an actor with power or influence, the government constructed the role of spectator for itself. Even if there were gendered effects, any criticism against the government was ultimately aimed in the wrong direction. Removing itself from the position of responsibility was a key strategy for the government after the Pact was agreed on. At the same time, the significance of the gendered cuts was referred to as a "detail" and was, thus, downplayed. This essentially meant that the labour market parties agreeing to the Pact should take higher priority than gender equality. Now that the corporatist system was tied to the Pact, the government began focusing on defensive institutional work (e.g. Maguire & Hardy, 2009). The inequalities were recognized, but in a way that sought silent submission and resignation for the sake of the Pact and peace among the corporatist actors. Negative affects became something to be simply accepted, even if the criticism had a legitimate basis.

Later on, the labour market parties actually claimed that the government had outright demanded the cuts to holiday pay (YLE News, 2017), which reignited the issue. This produced no changes in the government's stance, though, with Minister of Finance Petteri Orpo (National Coalition Party) having the following to say: "If the labour market parties and those who they represent had not accepted this, then they would not have accepted [the Pact]. They agreed on this and their representatives signed the Pact" (PTK 99/2017). The power of the government was limited to simply setting the agenda. In an ordoliberal fashion, what was agreed, and thus binding, was considered to be more important than dissenting voices, which were ignored owing to their presumed acceptance of the Pact.

Conclusion

In this article, we aimed to analyse the recent Finnish ordoliberal policy measure, the Competitiveness Pact, initiated by Prime Minister Sipilä's centre-right-populist government. Our main interest lay in analysing how the government tried to change an institution (the Finnish corporatist system and its dynamics) and how it reacted to the resistance to, and criticism of, the gender inequalities that its policies would cause when implemented. We utilized critical discourse analysis as a methodology to study affects, gender equality and ordoliberal governance in parliamentary discussions on the government's competitiveness measures.

We contribute to the literature on institutional work (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2011) by bringing in elements of affect theory (e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2013) to develop the concept of affective institutional work, which allows for analysing how institutional work is conducted via mobilizing affects to create, maintain or disrupt institutions. We also contribute to feminist studies of the

economy by showcasing how economic ideas of governance are embedded in affective meaning-making and how affects, in turn, influences economic governance and, ultimately, gender equality.

Although the government's road to the Competitiveness Pact was not straightforward, Adkins et al. (2019) argue that the approach was nonetheless successful. The threat of bypassing the corporatist system ended up bending the labour market parties to the government's will. Our findings show that in the case of the Competitiveness Pact, affective institutional work played a central role in downplaying the issue of gender equality. When negative gender impacts came up in parliamentary discussions, affective institutional work was used to reorient negative affects relating to gender equality. Thus, the government used affective institutional work to evade criticism and delegitimise the labour market parties and their agendas. Gender equality became mostly a symbolic issue. This is perhaps reflected in the lack of discussion about the Finnish model—an export industry-led wage bargaining model which essentially works as a brake on public sector wages and which has almost gained acceptance among central actors, although some trade unions representing feminized occupations continue to protest (Jonker-Hoffrén, 2019).

The legacy of the Competitiveness Pact is controversial. Its impact on the feminized public sector, which manifested in the statistics soon after the Pact's implementation, was severe. Wages stagnated, especially in the already low-paid local government sector, and the 30% cuts to public sector employees' holiday pay also affected annual earnings (Statistics Finland, 2017). Austerity measures have been found to have gendered impacts in several national contexts (e.g. Elomäki, 2019; Kantola & Lombardo, 2017; Karamessini & Rubery, 2014), and Finland is no exception. The overall gender impacts of the Sipilä government's economic policy have been negative, with men benefiting more from the implemented economic reforms and women more often suffering negative consequences (Elomäki et al., 2018).

Despite the negative gender impacts, some, including several economists and politicians, consider the Competitiveness Pact a success. It might be partly the result of lucky timing, but some positive developments have been observable in the Finnish labour market; for example, the employment rate rose significantly (e.g. Economic Policy Council, 2019; Talouselämä, 2017). Nonetheless, the Pact was very unpopular among the Finnish people, and it took a toll on Sipilä's political career and the popularity of his Centre Party, which suffered a rather dramatic defeat in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

The case of the Competitiveness Pact clearly indicates that in the Finnish ordoliberal competition state, the economic and competitiveness agenda is viewed as a primary objective, while gender equality is but a secondary objective—if at all. This has been the trend for quite some time, but it certainly has been intensified by the combination of ordoliberal governance and an entrepreneurial leadership style, characteristic of the Sipilä government's term. Since the strong competitiveness agenda has also provoked negative affects, it will be interesting to witness what kind of stance the current government, in office since spring 2019, will take on the relationship between gender equality and national competitiveness.

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Notes on contributors

Miikaeli Kylä-Laaso is a Doctoral Researcher in Gender Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Tampere University. His research focuses on the gendered aspects of public sector employment and funding in welfare states in the context of corporatist politics and neoliberal state regimes.

Paula Koskinen Sandberg is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Gender Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Tampere University. She has published on topics such as gender relations within the Finnish corporatist regime, gender inequalities in pay systems, the institutionalized undervaluation of women's work, and the social partners' role in drafting gender equality policy and legislation. Her current research interests include gender relations within the changing Nordic welfare state, activism around equal pay, gender impacts of neoliberal economic and labour policies, and corporatist politics.

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