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Moral panic, moral regulation and essentialization of identities: discursive struggle over unethical business practices in the Finnish national media

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ABSTRACT

The study sheds light on the language of moral panic and moral regulation in the Finnish news media over a nine-year period on the subject of cartels and cartel agreements. What makes the case particularly interesting is that the object of the most explicit moral panic was the introduction of new laws (leniency programmes) designed to regulate illegal cartel behaviour. The main argument is that the construction of both moral regulation and moral panic in news media takes place through essentializing discursive claims that contribute to national identity construction. The study contributes to current literature on moral panics as ideologico-discursive phenomena and throws some light on the power-laden discursive processes that work to reconstruct, essentialize and stabilize identities. In addition, there are some suggestions as to why some moral panics fail to develop.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; discursive strategies; essentializing; Finland; moral regulation; moral panic; national identity; news media

Introduction

In recent years we have witnessed a growing number of corporate scandals worldwide. These scandals have been discussed exhaustively by various media sources and have thus raised public concern about blurred moral boundaries in business life. However, what happens when news about illegal or unethical business practices goes beyond the form of news reporting and media sensationalism and reaches the point of a short-lived moral panic? Moral panics are ostensibly about new forms of troubling behaviour that society appears unable to control, and the persons responsible for such behaviour are often identified, categorized and given social identities (Cohen, 2002). As a process moral panics can come about through a complex chain of social interactions involving claims makers, moral guardians and the media, set in the context of sociopolitical change and a consequent climate of cultural ambiguity (Cohen 2002; Hier 2002, 313). The role of the media has been considered crucial in the creation of moral panics. The media are an important site of participation in moral regulation and the construction of 'moral order' (Cohen 2002) because the media have an important impact on the values and norms of a society and thus on the identity and moral boundaries of different nations (Bishop and Jaworski 2003; Fairclough 1995).

The present study sheds light on the significance of moral panics and moral regulation in Finnish news media on the subject of cartels and cartel agreements between 2000 and 2008. What makes the case unusual is that often the most frequent outcome of moral panics is a significant change in the law or its application. Since that has often been the objective of the panic, agitation falls away once it has been achieved (Critcher 2005, 12). However, in this specific case, the peak of the panic was reached during the introduction of new laws, which were leniency programmes designed to

regulate illegal cartel behaviour. However, before the introduction of leniency programmes cartels had already been illegal in Finland for over a decade. Following Hier's (2002) conceptualization of moral panics as ideologico-discursive formations that may vary according to the context and contents, the study applies critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) to examine how linguistic (micro-) processes contribute to the construction of a macro-level phenomenon.

The main argument in this study is that the construction of both moral regulation and moral panic in news media takes place through essentializing discursive claims that contribute to Finnish national identity construction. Previous research has called for the identification of the critical incidents with which identity struggles are associated (Alvesson et al. 2008). In the case in question, texts about cartel agreements provided such a framework for national identity (de)construction and led to essentializing discursive claims about 'who we are' and 'who we are not'.

The study contributes to research on moral panics as ideologico-discursive phenomena and shows how moral panic contributes to legitimating a certain picture of what the social problem is about and why. The most significant feature of the moral panic construction was threatening scenarios in which the stigmatization of leniency programmes (global law) took place vis-à-vis a totalitarian society. I suggest that such discursive moves highlight the social anxieties and tensions around the norms and rules of globalization. I also discuss some of the reasons why some moral panics may fail to develop. What I find is that the essentialization of identities and understanding of the target audience seem to be crucial elements. I further provide some insight into the power-laden discursive processes that work to reconstruct, essentialize and stabilize identities, making them more controllable and easily evaluated.

This article is organized as follows. First, I provide a framework for the study and integrate the literature on moral panics into a critical discursive approach. The next section provides a discursive perspective on national identity. I then go on to present the research setting and the analysis. Finally, I discuss the contributions and limitations of this study.

Theoretico-methodological framework for studying moral panics and identity construction

In this section, I first link the moral panic literature and critical discourse analysis and then examine the discursive literature on identity more closely.

The concept of a moral panic

The term 'moral panic' has provided interesting insights into how the media construct social problems. AIDS, child abuse, drugs, immigration, media violence, street crime and youth deviance are the most common topics of moral panic (Critcher 2009). Moral panic is related to an experienced or imagined crisis. The crisis occurs when a condition, group of people or episode emerges to become a threat to societal values and interests. The nature of the crisis is further presented in a stereotypical fashion by the mass media (Cohen 1972). More specifically, moral panics are considered to be reactions to social changes, and the changes involve troubling and problematic behaviour. According to Critcher (2003, 140), a feeling of social crisis can be set off by a single key experience that is widely interpreted as a symptom of a more severe problem. Whatever the relationship between a particular moral panic and its social context, all moral panics are ultimately about conforming to moral values (Critcher 2005). Moral panics can thus

work to legitimize a state of crisis and claims for a certain course of action. The important question then is what moral panics (de)legitimate with reference to business practices.

Cohen (1972) is often cited as the scholar who opened the discussion about moral panics. He used a symbolic-interactionist theory of identity to examine the moral panic phenomenon around Mods and Rockers in Britain. Several of his theses have been influential, for example, the argument that moral panics are generated by the media and the idea that every moral panic has its scapegoat, *the folk devil*, personified as unfavourable symbols that serve as the ideological embodiment of deeper societal anxieties. However, though the panic must be about something, it is not about the folk devil. Rather, moral panic is the folk devil (Hunt 1997).

The theorization of moral panics later received much interest, and research has been divided into several streams (see, e.g., Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). However, previous approaches have been found to be partly inadequate to explain some panics, and criticism has led to the association of moral panics with other related concepts such as social control, moral order and moral regulation (see Critcher 2009; Hier 2002). Research has further suggested that the field of moral panic research would benefit from some input from the field of discourse analysis (Critcher 2005, 2009; Thompson 1998). I shall thus move on to link the literature on moral panics and the discourse analysis approach.

Understanding moral panics as discursive formations

Social problems are discursively and socially constructed, and so moral panics are discursive constructions. The conceptualization of moral panics from a discursive perspective has not, however, been common. Important theoretical discussions have

been offered by Hier (2002) and Critcher (2009). Hier (2002) understands moral panics as ideologico-discursive formations: as volatile episodes within long-term projects of moral regulation. In his view, it is through a dialectic process of signification (a discursively articulated us versus them) that moral panics produce social subjectivities and identities for the Other(s) and selves (ibid). The regulation of others and confirmation of one's own identity are crucial to both moral panics and moral regulation. However, though the analysis of panics/regulation involves considering which groups are identified as the source of the harm, the crucial difference is that moral regulation does not necessarily need a folk devil. From a conceptual perspective, moral panic is a temporary rupture in the routine process of moral regulation occurring at the point when moral regulation is perceived to be in a state of failure or dislocation (Hier 2002, 329). Moral panics are thus understood to reinforce the processes of moral regulation. Critcher (2009) has further elaborated the view of moral panics as a form of moral regulation and as discursive formations based on dimensional categorization around moral order, social control and self-regulation.

However, the conceptualization of moral panic has been controversial. It has therefore been suggested that moral panics can be conceptualized as a heuristic device (Critcher 2003; Rohloff and Wright 2010), offering researchers a means to look beyond the panic. I consider the discursive nature of moral panics to offer a fruitful basis for critical discourse analysis. Indeed, moral panics are often associated with the examination of power asymmetries for constructing a distorted picture of the problem (Cohen 2002; Hier 2002). In a similar vein, CDA is often used as an approach to particularly examine the constructions of social problems and challenge the assumptions about social phenomena so often taken for granted (Wodak 2001). It can thus be assumed that CDA could help to unveil some of the discursive processes that contribute

not only to the construction of a moral panic but also to its ideological aspects. Ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members, and expressed through discourse**.** According to Van Dijk (2006, 116): 'Ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group, that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction.'

I see the following two benefits in combining moral panic and CDA literature. First, CDA can help to unveil the discursive processes of how the confirmation of one's own identity and regulation of others in cases of moral panic are constructed. Second, it helps to unravel the assumed ideologies and worldviews that the constructions over the object of moral panic either reproduce or maintain. By combining the ideas from the discourse-historical approach (Wodak 2001) and Fairclough's (2003) view of discourse as a form of social practice, I am able to pay attention both to the discursive practices and to the institutional context and look beyond the panic in order to understand the contextual processes that have led to the phenomenon under study.

I shall now move on to have a closer look at the concept of (national) identity and the discursive strategies used to construct the sense of a collective self that is distant from the Other.

A discursive perspective on national identity construction

Nations provide the context for identities and identity construction by creating meanings for 'the nation' with which we can identify through collective stories about who we are (Hall 1994, 200–201). I approach the concept of nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), achieved though the telling and retelling of shared history, that addresses an inside-out position towards the constitution of national identity. I further

understand national identity to be a discursive product and emphasize the multiple identities that depend on the framework examined, for example, cultural, religious or geographical (DeCillia et al. 1999).

The discursively created nature of national identity enables us to make distinctions between 'us' and 'them', which is a common and vital part of identity constructions. The successful construction of national identity appeals to certain cultural chords and conceptual tropes, to narrative plots and discursive frames (Stråth 2008). A sense of belonging to a collective thus takes hold by discursively reconstructing stereotypes, similar views, values and behavioural patterns that distinguish its members from other collectives, and specifically from the folk devils that are constructed in cases of moral panics. The articulation of 'who we are' always involves the displacement and undermining of alternative identity constructions: 'who we are not'. (DeCillia et al.1999). The question of sameness is also a question of difference.

Though discursive approaches do not treat identity as a fixed and abiding characteristic, identity construction can draw on essentializing elements. Essentializing suggests that people who have the same cultural and ethnic background tend to think, act and communicate in similar ways, and this emphasizes the differences between groups and the similarities within them (Edley 2000). Though discursive approaches have provided a counterview to traditional essentializing examinations of identity and draw on the idea of multiple identities, essentializing and homogenization can, as discursively produced, provide an approach to understanding how the moral and normative boundaries of membership in a group are constructed and controlled (Bishop and Jaworski 2003). According to Ybema et al. (2009, 306), essentialist identity talk can be interpreted 'as a deceptively mundane form of truth claim' facilitating, for example, the creation of an acceptable and respectable self. In morally sensitive situations,

identity talk can aim to re-author people as moral beings (ibid.). Essentializing can thus be used strategically to achieve desired outcomes (Fuss 1989). For example, the construction of folk devils in cases of moral panic essentializes the Others in order to separate them from the self/inclusive community (Fordham 2001).

Processes of identity construction can further be understood as discursive struggles both reflecting and constructing sociopolitical conditions and changes (Livesey 2001). Gould (1994) suggests how moral panic in a Swedish case was related to the sense that Swedish national identity was under threat. The focus can thus be on how discourse, objectified as 'truth', both sustains and forms collective definitions, social arrangements and hierarchies of power (Cerulo 1997). How power operates to construct and stabilize identities is thus an important question (Thomas 2009, 170). In the present study the question takes the form of an examination of media representations of cartels and cartel agreements, intertwined with the discursive essentialization of 'who we are and are not'.

In their studies of national identity, De Cillia et al. (1999; see also Wodak et al. 1999) distinguished four types of discursive macro-strategies that are used to construct national sameness: constructive, perpetuating, transformational and destructive/deconstructive. Discursive strategies are here understood as the mobilization of specific discursive (textual, argumentative and metaphorical) resources in order to produce and (re)construct national sameness and difference. I focus particularly on constructive and deconstructive strategies and understand them to feature also perpetuating and transformative means. According to De Cillia et al. (1999), *constructive strategies* aim to establish a particular identity through discursive procedures that constitute a national 'we group', being most persuasive in supporting identification and solidarity but also in establishing distance from 'others'.

Destructive/deconstructive strategies tend to demolish existing identities or elements in them. *Perpetuation* and *justification strategies* attempt to maintain and reproduce a threatened identity, defending a self-perception, whereas *transformative strategies* aim to transform a relatively well-established identity into another (see also Wodak et al. 1999).

These macro-strategies further feature certain micro-strategies, for example, argumentative techniques and communicative tactics in the texts. My particular interest in these micro-strategies is to use them to examine the argumentation constructed and used; the construction of ideological discourse structures draws on many features, including, for instance, metaphors, irony and arguments (Van Dijk 1992). I shall now turn my focus to the research setting of this study.

The research setting and methods of analysis

Selection and analysis of the data

The data consist of news articles dealing with cartels and cartel agreements in Finland from the leading Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), and two business magazines, *Talouselämä* (TE) and *Taloussanomat* (TS), between January 2000 and December 2008. The business magazines belong to different publishing companies. *Talouselämä* is over 70 years old, the biggest Scandinavian weekly business magazine; its circulation in 2009 was 79,684. *Taloussanomat* was founded in 1997 and since 2008 has been published only online; in 2009 it had some 400,000 readers a week. *Taloussanomat* belongs to the same publishing company as *Helsingin Sanomat*, which is the biggest daily subscription-based newspaper in Scandinavia. The paper was founded in 1889 and has a readership of around 1 million. I chose these three different news

publications to see how news media differ when handling unethical business issues (Hunter et al. 2008).

The data were gathered by first going through TE manually and additionally performed an online search using the truncated word search *kartelli* (the Finnish word for cartel) in the magazine's online database. I performed online searches for TS and HS using the same truncated word search, but with *Helsingin Sanomat* I included only certain sections of the newspaper: domestic and international news, business news, opinion columns and editorials. After performing the searches I had over 600 articles as the word search threw up all the texts in which the words cartel(s) and Finland were mentioned.

I selected for closer inspection only those texts in which Finland or Finns were explicitly mentioned and discussed in relation to cartels. In this way the number of articles was reduced to 93. Most of the articles from the business magazines were comments on the day's news, editorials or articles of perhaps several pages in length dealing with the topic of cartels. From the newspaper (HS), editorials and the business section furnished the majority of articles. The articles were remarkably similar in both business magazines regarding the topics, content and points of view, and in both magazines they were more provocative than the HS articles.

The most fruitful year for articles was 2004, the year when leniency programmes were adopted and also the peak of the moral panic. Table 1 shows how the chosen articles are distributed between journals and years. Cartel cases that provoked the most media interest were related to (1) the elevator company KONE (fined 142 million euros in 2007 for cartel membership), (2) the UPM whistleblowing case in 2004 and (3) Finnish asphalt companies from 2002 onwards. The members in the first cartel case included the KONE, Otis, Schindler and ThyssenKrupp groups, and the fines

totalled nearly one billion euros. The second case dealt with forestry company UPM's whistleblowing in 2004, just after new leniency programmes were adopted in Finland. UPM announced that it suspected its former Finnish partners – including Stora Enso, M-real, Metsäliitto, Ahlstrom and Norske Skog – of being involved in a cartel. The original accusation was later declared to be a false alarm, although some Finns were fined for having a timber-buying cartel. The third case concerned Finnish asphalt companies. In 2009, the Supreme Administrative Court decided on fines totalling 68 million euros for Lemminkäinen; the company was considered the main player in a country-wide cartel that was in operation from 1994 to 2002.

Insert table 1 about here

I chose this particular time span of 2000 to 2008 because there were three major cases mostly dealt with between 2002 and 2006 as well as some smaller cases, and I wanted to examine how the discourse changed as a result of these major cases.

I started inductively analyzing the themes that constructed Finland or Finns in connection with cartels or cartel activity and called these main themes (1) *culture and values*, meaning stereotypes that Finland or Finnish businesses would or should uphold as a community, (2) *legal issues*, (3) *history* (meaning here the narrative of the Finnish economy of regulation) and (4) *global business* and Finland as a part of this community. After I had looked at what was said in the data I turned my attention towards the discursive processes used in identity construction and applied the previously developed frameworks of De Cillia et al. (1999), Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and Kjaer and Palsbro (2008) about discursively constructed national identity. I first focused explicitly on those extracts in which a sense of 'who we are' (constructive) or 'who we have become'

(deconstructive) was provided. I focused on sentences and short paragraphs and paid attention to the use of particular words and argumentative tactics. Most articles tended to focus on either a constructive or deconstructive macro-strategy. It was interesting that if in any year there were a lot of articles using mostly constructive strategies, an almost similar number of articles using deconstructive strategies emerged.

After recognizing the two macro-strategies from the data, I identified the five constituent micro-strategies on the basis of their frequency and textual and argumentative similarity. I paid attention to the construction of an argument by focusing on the claim made and the use of stereotypes and other textual tactics in constructing the claim (Van Dijk 1992; Kjaer and Palsbro 2008). I examined the texts produced in the media in relation to the time in which they were written and to the macro-cultural features of Finnish society. Deconstructive strategies often combined with transformative means to support the argument that negative identity attributes were possessed by certain groups. When transformative means appeared in constructive strategies, they established some cultural claims as a part of 'who we are' rather creatively (e.g., by using learning as a discursive move). In the process of analysis I noticed how essentializing the claims were in the data, which then led me to focus more explicitly on discursive essentializing and theoretical literature on moral panics. The whole process was clearly open to interpretation and was a constant process of iteration (Wodak 2001), going back and forth between the data, the analysis and the theoretical framework. I shall discuss some limitations of this approach at the end of this article.

The national context and the stereotypical discourse in the news media

Finland, a member of the EU, is a Nordic country with a population of 5.3 million. The country gained its independence in 1917. Finland was once a part of the Kingdom of Sweden, and from 1809 to 1917 it was a part of Russia. The native language of most of the population is Finnish; the other official language, Swedish, is used as a first language by less than 6% of the population. At the beginning of the 1980s there were fewer than 20,000 people with a foreign background living in Finland. In 2009 there were more than 30 nationalities represented by at least 1,000 persons (Statistics Finland, 2009). The idea of Finland as a nationally and culturally homogenous society has continuously been stressed in the media, not only in Finland itself but also worldwide, as illustrated by the *Washington Post*:

"*Finland is Europe's most homogenous society. … In its 88-year history as an independent country, Finland has become remarkably homogenous*." (Kaiser 2005, #1;18).

National stereotypes play a major role in constructing in-group/out-group distinctions, and in media texts national stereotypes may present a group with which the reader feels a sense of unity (see Bishop and Jaworski 2003). In order to construct a collective identity, certain stereotypes and shared past and present experiences are articulated through discourse. To offer some background to the discursive essentializing in the research material, I will give a brief account of the stereotypical discursive elements and claims used to describe Finns and Finland, and show how they relate to wider societal discourses. Here and throughout, where a quotation is used and the author remained unknown, HS refers to *Helsingin Sanomat*, TS to *Taloussanomat* and TE to *Talouselämä*. I have also numbered these media extracts from 1 to 26 and references can be found from the appendix 1.

Essentializing 'who we are' – stereotypical claims in the research material

Transparency International research has presented Finland as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The results of such global rankings were used as a discursive resource in several texts. According to my view, references to such rankings not only position Finns as a part of a global collective, but as a highly significant and respectable member of this collective. In my first extract from the articles, through (positive) stereotypification and we-group construction, the (implied) reader is positioned as being a member of this nation. When the texts construct a group of honest and conscientious citizens, they simultaneously draw a contrast to those (Others) in the global arena who are not:

> (1) "We Finns have taken pride – and often for good reason – in being at the top of success rankings between different societies. International corruption ratings show that Finland is a high-quality society. Comparative surveys find Finns to be honest and conscientious citizens who mind their own business and don't unnecessarily get involved in global arenas. "(HS 2003, #1).

As social capital, high trust has been used as an explanation for Finland's competitiveness, and Finns are said to value qualities such as honesty, trust and responsibility (Puohiniemi 2002; see also Helkama and Seppälä 2006). Such generalizations are emphasized in the next example. The article began by presenting cases in which Finnish businesses had been accused of cartel membership due to the activities of branches or subsidiaries located in other European countries. According to the claim made, the Finnish businesses were duped into trusting their foreign partners. Indeed, global partnerships represent a possible danger for Finns: cartels are constructed as an unethical activity, but Finns on their own would never have gotten into such a situation. In other words, it is the other global actors who are unethical.

(2) "Trust is the strength of Finnish companies and Finnish society. In Finland, people's trust in one another and their promises makes things simpler, accelerates decision making and improves efficiency: in a word, trust is a competitive advantage. "(Luotonen 2007, 3).

A cartel can be understood as a horizontal arrangement in which business enterprises deliberately, and by mutual understanding, restrict competition among themselves and prevent new companies from entering the market. In Finland, stricter legislation on cartel activity was introduced in 1988 and 1992. However, the fines imposed in Finland were for several years noticeably lower than in many other countries despite changes in the legislation. From 2004 onwards so-called leniency programmes were introduced, granting a partial or full amnesty to those who first passed on to the authorities information about actual or suspected cartel membership. Contrary to what happens in most moral panics, the introduction of this new law was what created the panic in this case. The former director general of the Finnish competition authority, Purasjoki, was often quoted as saying that cartels, despite being illegal nowadays, were an important part of the past of 'honest Finnish people'. Historical reference thus provides justification for the existence of cartels that is arguably stronger than the claim of (new) global laws to determine a nation's morality.

(3) "Despite the fact that Purasjoki considers Finnish executives to be more honest than most people in the business world, Finland is the promised land of cartels. This is due to the fact that cartels are part of a long tradition in Finland." (TS 2004, #3).

Fellman (2010) points out that cartels as a feature of collaborative capitalism in Finland were firmly incorporated into the national business system and thus cannot be examined

as a separate phenomenon. In the 1980s, the Finnish business sector basically consisted of banks, the forest industry and the government (Tainio 2006). This dependence on the forest sector shaped the pattern of national business life for a long time, and collaborative capitalism as a business system continued until the 1990s. At that time Finland faced one of its worst economic crises ever, which led to increasing unemployment, a banking crisis, bankruptcies and recession. Since then the business sector has developed from controlled to more liberal, though traditional elements such as the strong position of the forest clusters and the labour unions, co-operation and government ownership in business are still rather strong (Tainio 2006). In the quotation below, collaborative capitalism is defended and is claimed to be important to the country's – labelled 'poor' – success. The quotation implies that Finland is different from other countries and that global changes have been difficult for Finns. The quotation thus challenges the assumption of global competition rules being morally right and beneficial.

> (4) "Even the structure of the Finnish economy is not suitable for a competitive economy. The few economic success stories of this poor country have been generated under the protection of customs barriers, a monopolistic position, or government funding." (Ristimäki 2004, #9).

The examples presented here draw on constructive strategies, being persuasive and essentializing in order to reinforce identification and solidarity, but also being distancing and differentiating Finland from 'others' (see De Cillia et al. 1999) by producing some resistance towards rules and norms of a global community.

Let us now look more closely at the constructive and deconstructive strategies that were analyzed.

Discursive strategies

The macro-strategies called constructive and deconstructive strategies are enacted textually through a variety of micro-strategies (De Cillia et al. 1999) examined more thoroughly below.

Constructive strategies

Constructive strategies are applied in the texts by promoting a sense of a group that is 'us', by implication different from 'them', and they are more about desirable attributes in identity construction (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Van Dijk 1992). Constructive strategies essentialize a claim to being a homogenous and morally strong community and consist of a total of three micro-strategies. Two of the micro-strategies are more generally understood as forms of moral regulation construction, but the third is quite different from the other two; it contributes to the construction of a moral panic. All the strategies are examined more closely below.

Invoking a common past and future

Recent Finnish success stories have included Finland's being one of the most competitive economies in the world (Global Competitiveness Reports 2004–2011) and being highly placed in the OECD's PISA education surveys. This strategy acknowledges Finland's cartelized past but draws on the ideas of *a learning society and transformation*: Finland is a competent and successful country able to learn and change its policies. In case of an illegal practice, *change* can be used as a positive discursive resource in order to redefine the community and its people as moral. More specifically,

change could here make Finns conform to global demands. Indeed, the strategy shows how change offers the opportunity for reassessment over a controversial topic and thus restricts future debate about it as the problem is constructed as having been solved.

Example 5 points out how the (strict) European policy of competition has necessitated adaptation, in terms of learning and understanding a new culture of practices. However, it is claimed that suspicions of cartel operations do not stem from the fact that there are many cartels. It is just that Finnish authorities have tackled the issue seriously and efficiently.

> (5) "Finns have managed to adapt to the strict European policy on competition. The cartel suspicions that have been investigated are a demonstration of the efficiency of Finland's competition policy." (Mäkinen 2007, #12).

In the next example a representative of the Finnish Central Chamber of Commerce shows that the cartel exposures can also be considered to be healthy. The text began by considering the negative publicity that the suspicion of a cartel can give companies. Using health as an analogy, the quotation implies that while cartels have been considered unhealthy, Finnish businesses are currently recovering from an 'illness' that was formerly procedure. Change can thus be posited as a 'healing' element.

> (6) "On the other hand, Jalas thinks that the cartel exposures can also be regarded as a healthy phenomenon. 'It shows that people are starting to better understand the value of fair and open competition.' " (Simola 2004, #7-8).

In the next two examples, arguments against cartel activity are used to construct a claim to improved policies, and the 'superior learning culture' of Finland is extended to the business world. Transformative means are used in the texts in order to establish a

changed and improved form of collaboration: learning new policies *together*. Although cartels as a collaborative practice are now forbidden, the collaboration has taken new (legal) forms. In example 7, Finland is described as a 'straight-A student'. The term further reflects the power asymmetries of the global community: how nations are students in a larger global framework. Citation 8 implies that these cartel cases reflect only a small proportion of changes that must be undertaken due to globalization. There are future learning challenges ahead.

(7) "Finland is a straight A-student in the cartel hunt. "(Porttinen 2004, headline).

(8) "The decision shows clearly how attitudes in Finnish business and commerce have changed. No one wants to darken their public image too much. But these kinds of solutions also have wider effects. It will certainly become even more important to follow rules of any sort and on all levels. However, dishonesty has not been too much of a problem in Finnish business life so far." (TS 2003, #3).

In example 9, a representative of the Finnish Competition Authority is quoted in the article. Although the person is rather cautious about the cartel situation, the expression 'the general law-abidingness of Finns' is used, which makes it a cultural stereotype and a built-in attribute. The 'silent understanding' also undermines cartels as a mere cooperative, consensual activity. In the article, the quote is followed by speculation about whether tightening the rules of competition had any significant impact:

(9) "'There are probably comparatively few widely organized cartels operating in Finland. It's more about a mutual silent understanding here. Now that there has been more talk about cartels, it looks as if the general law-abidingness of Finns is beginning to show.' " (Lilius 2007, #2-3).

To conclude, a discourse of collaboration is employed in a different form from the earlier discourse of collaborative capitalism in order to legitimate a picture of businesses' development and national unity. The strategy brings forth the challenges of globalization: changes to social practices are a necessity in order for Finland to be part of global business. Transformation is thus necessary. The change in 'who we are' is also used as a discursive resource to provide legitimacy for the businesses: cartels are unethical, but moral regulation works through the construction of moral subjects.

Constructing national uniqueness and difference

Constructing national uniqueness and emphasizing difference from other nations was one of the most common micro-strategies. This strategy is an important form of moral regulation, not contributing to moral panic. It extends positive self-presentation to negative other-presentation most frequently by applying two argumentative tactics: self-glorification and mitigation strategies. Where mitigation is used, the existence of the cartel problem is admitted but the positive self-presentation of Finnish companies and Finland downplays the problem. As social comparison is likely to be used when a group's moral identity is threatened (Ashforth and Anand 2003), some texts imply that Finns are not that bad and compare Finland to other countries and the (inferior) moral characteristics produced for them.

> (10) "Finns have not escaped fines either, but if measured by the size of the fines then our sins are minor. The Competition Authority is currently investigating Lemminkäinen's suspected involvement in an asphalt cartel. 'Finnish businesses are basically like the nation, and we Finns are a law-abiding people.'" (Rantanen 2003, 36).

Example 10 above quotes a person who had held high positions in public life for a long time. Cartels as a problem are first argumentatively mitigated by using the size of fines as a measure of immorality, as something that indicates whether the transgressions have been severe or not. However, at that time the OECD was constantly calling on Finland to apply the international fines system on the grounds that the nation's own system was far too lenient. This was often left unsaid in the texts.

The 'them versus us' constructions include strategies to turn attention away from Finland, either excusing its activities by referring to the fact that other nations are also suspected of cartels (example 11) or suggesting that many other nations are less moral than Finns (example 12). When comparison was made, Finns were praised by claiming that things were much worse elsewhere. However, it is left unsaid that cartels occur because of lack of commitment to global laws. When Finns' commitment to the rules of the external environment fail, the texts simply claim that the internal environment is immoral in many other countries, but not in Finland.

(11) "Yes, there are things in Finland that need to be improved, but many things are better here than elsewhere. And oh yes, it is cold and expensive here, but companies operate in a decent environment, not the Wild West, as in Italy." (Hyytiäinen 2004, #12-13).

(12) "'On a European scale, Finnish companies are way out in front in their ethics'." (Sajari 2004, #7).

One common discursive tactic that was used was positive self-presentation and reference to Transparency International's ranking of Finland (see also quote 3). Mention of such global organizations is used to provide authoritative support for the Finns' claim to a good reputation internationally. Corruption was brought up in

example 13, where it is claimed that the authorities in other countries may be corrupt, but not the Finnish authorities. But if corruption does somehow exist, it is suspected that its quality is different, due to a tradition of co-operation between people. Thus, the scope of the problem is narrowed down so that it excludes the state, which is claimed to be the problem in many other countries.

> (13) "In Finland it is mostly a question of the nature of corruption. We all probably agree that grassroots-level corruption hardly exists; in other words, there are no bribes involved in interactions between citizens and the authorities. Slipping the traffic police a banknote with your driving licence would be ineffective. But apparently there is some corruption from the sort of old-school-tie network." (HS 2006, #6).

To conclude, essentializing discursive means are used to defend the problematic narrative of cartels and work as a form of moral regulation; they limit the scope of the problem. The strategy presents Finnish people as being more moral than many other nations by using comparison and constructing claims and stereotypes of Finns' strong ethical norms.

Invoking an external threat

Invoking an external threat means suggesting that global legislation or practices could harm Finns and Finnish businesses. Such a threat is here presented in terms of whistleblowing procedures, meaning the leniency programmes, which are presented as illegitimate. What the texts do is construct hostility towards the new law (the leniency act). In my view, this strategy helps to construct the moral panic in the media over leniency programmes. In order to personalize the object they associate the leniency programmes with the procedures and policies of the former Soviet Union, an old folk devil for Finns. Whistleblowing is thus used as a warning sign of a much deeper social

problem: global policies are not only a threat to national trust but are incompatible with features of our cultural collaboration. More specifically, global policies are problematic because they conflict with national policies that have created the success of Finland. Indeed, the moral panic serves to question the assumption of globalization and free competition being for the general good.

One of the main ideas in this strategy is the creation of threatening scenarios that not only de-legitimate leniency programmes but may even provide legitimacy for the existence of cartels. It is mutual yet illegal cartel contracts that bind, and it is not legitimate to inform the authorities about questionable practices or business partners. In examples 14 and 15, it is claimed that the new practice does not suit the Finnish legal system. Thus, Finns and the Finnish system are constructed as different from those systems that can be understood as immoral and totalitarian.

> (14) "Although there is a practice of denouncing cartels in many Western countries, it does not suit the Finnish legal system. The practice resembles the system of denunciation that was used in many former Eastern European countries, with citizens prying and reporting on each others' activities to the authorities. Such practices are nowadays severely criticized." (TS 2003, #3).

> (15) "Finns are getting cold feet. Informing and whistleblowing used to be the policies of the former Soviet Union. … Now society is rewarding whistleblowing; this is acceptable behaviour. The value change is escaping people's notice." (Vihma 2004, 3).

The legislative changes are described as foreign to the Finnish legal system, and leniency programmes are condemned as comparable to ratting on somebody, emphasized in headlines such as 'UPM's snitching costs millions' (Vaalisto 2006). In the UPM case, the texts more or less openly say that UPM was a traitor. Though

whistleblowing is the risk cartel members take when carrying out illegal activities, this is left unsaid in the texts. Indeed, the arguments often problematized whistleblowing despite the fact that whistleblowing procedures (leniency programmes) would not be needed if cartels did not exist.

> (16) "UPM hurried to admit what it had done, because the first informer may escape being fined. In Finland, economic organizations have frowned upon this new policy, which rewards whistleblowing like this." (Mikkonen 2004, #52).

I see examples like number 16 specifically reflecting the social anxieties and the struggle over global and legitimate business practices. In the past, the success story of Finland was constructed around the forestry sector (Tainio 2006), and one company (UPM) acting according to new (global) norms is understood to be detrimental to the social bonds that contributed to the success of Finland. Global policies are constructed as a risk to Finland because it is a small country with tight social networks that often depend on high trust. Texts thus raise an unspoken question of whether UPM, based on its action, is still *a Finnish company*? National identity can indeed emerge in processes of resistance to globalization (Ailon-Soyday and Kunda 2003).

In example 17, discursive means are used to mobilize public opinion against the evil ('hopefully a revolution will take place'), and the text produces leniency programmes as an illegitimate part of business life. The expression 'Big Brother is watching you' constructs a threatening scenario of a totalitarian state and citizens under surveillance and brings the threat closer to the reader, though leniency programmes are limited to controlling activities in business life.

(17) "(…) a widespread system of denunciation where people act as an arm of the judiciary would create a society like the one in George Orwell's *1984* with 'Big Brother is watching you'. Hopefully a revolution will take place in Finland before we start approaching the kind of society described by Orwell." (Ravelin 2005, #16).

To conclude, the whistleblowing case is an example of a moral panic in which attention is diverted away from another problem: the cartel itself. The panic was strengthened through threatening scenarios in which the stigmatization of leniency programmes took place vis-à-vis a totalitarian state. A totalitarian state is not, however, the real folk devil in this case; it is in fact globalization and the ideology it brings. Moral panic thus discursively draws on sentiments society depends on in order to emphasize the severity of the threat.

Deconstructive strategies

Deconstructive strategies draw on a discontinuity between the present and the past and as a consequence of cartel speculations and cartel judgments pose the question 'who have we become?' which leads to the further question 'who among us are different?' Deconstructive strategies draw on dissimilarities and seek to communicate negative self-presentation. In-group and out-group separation is used to distinguish Finnish people from Finnish businesses (DeCillia et al. 1999), as the latter are constructed as acting immorally. Group categorizations serve to label groups as being outside the values of a consensual society (Cohen 2002). The deconstructive strategies employed in the texts were divided into two micro-strategies, namely *undermining the moral image and reputation of Finland* and *constructing an internal threat.*

Undermining the moral image and reputation of Finland

The most common deconstructive micro-strategy in the data was labelled *undermining the moral image and reputation of Finland*, constructed on a consequentialist view. Reputation and image are used as discursive resources to emphasize the magnitude and severity of the damage done by cartels. In terms of textual tactics, irony is employed most commonly as an argumentative and a metaphorical element. According to Oswick et al. (2002), irony proceeds through focusing on dissimilarity; it privileges scepticism and involves a playful but assertive rejection of conventional assumptions. This strategy emerged in connection with the UPM whistleblowing case in 2004. One particular company was thus blamed for tarnishing Finland's standards of morality and national reputation by whistleblowing, although the other suspected cartel members included Finns. Thus Finland's pride, its forest sector, overnight became a matter of national shame.

Example 18 shows how the news media can de-legitimate business practices by associating them with cases that are well known to be nationally 'shameful'. The image of 'moral Finns' was dismantled in the national media after the Lahti doping scandal in the 2001 cross-country skiing world championships. The case received wide media coverage and produced many expressions of shame and guilt in the Finnish press (Laine 2006; Tervo 2001). Shame is used as a discursive resource in next examples and provides an insight into power relations: the act is not so much shaming in Finland but it does generate bad publicity in front of the global community. Example 18 contains an interesting discursive move, since the Lahti case did not cast a shadow over Finnish business life but rather over Finnish sport and Finland as a nation. Yet here it has been associated merely with businesses, 'the small-scale folk devils'. Thus, through the use of

in-group/out-group separation, the problem is presented as a severe one but as a problem of only a part of the nation (Bishop and Jaworski 2003).

(18) "However, it is clear that this is the kind of publicity Finnish business life did not need. It throws a shadow over business and commerce, similar to the one of the doping scandal we had in the Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti. (Pekkala 2004, #7).

(19) "One of the effects of cartel exposures is clearly shame – or at least embarrassment." (Lilius 2007, #4).

In the next examples, irony works to presents Finnish businesses as different from Finns. Irony dismantles moral features to involve only some groups in the community. It trades dissimilarity between object and target domains, thus reversing the meaning of conventional imagery (Oswick et al. 2002). Examples are from different journals but they are very similar, moving from a claimed good reputation of the past to the current tarnished reputation.

(20) "Finnish companies used to like to present themselves abroad as pure as the driven snow, able to look down their noses at the corrupt and cartelized companies of other countries. The past few months have shattered Finland's reputation completely, as EU cartel investigators had already set their sights on Outokumpu and KONE before the forest companies." (Malin 2004, #5).

(21) For a long time, Finland has been able to boast about its reputation as the least corrupt country in the world. This has been justified with Transparency International placing Finland and other Nordic countries right at the top of the list. If cartels keep being exposed at the current rate, in the future even in this particular list our ranking will resemble the one we have in the Eurovision song contest. (Hurmeranta 2004, #1).

The examples further illustrate power relations: how the reputation of Finns and Finnish companies are dependent on the evaluations made by larger global parties. Here the scenarios involve parties to whom Finland or Finns might be seen as subordinates. In quotation 21 the scenario is ironic, but it demonstrates how problematic the cartel cases are because someone else will use the power and make unfavourable evaluations.

In example 22, a threatening scenario is brought into the discussion to provide what in the data is a very rare legitimacy for whistleblowing procedures. The scenario of a former CEO of Nokia and a former president of Finland losing their reputation and moral status due to the cartel charges provides a strong enough cause for whistleblowing to be considered a legitimate act. The moralization works by presenting Ollila and Ahtisaari as people who would uphold 'Finnish values', being members of the in-group and also part of the Finnish elite.

> (22) "Apparently, the committee of a Finnish company was shocked by its own procedures and chose 'the path of least resistance' aka the role of denouncer. Blowing the whistle saved the reputation of Jorma Ollila and Nokia. What would the result be if UPM had not co-operated and had been subjected to a vast cartel investigation? The American business press would have printed on Finnish paper far too regrettable headlines associating Ollila, the cartels and Nokia. The reputation of Ollila and the mobile giant would have been shattered, even if they were acquitted years later. The diplomatic career of another committee member, Martti Ahtisaari, would have gotten a nasty subplot." (Lähteenmäki 2006, #11).

To conclude, using reputation as a signifier of the harmful consequences of cartels was an attempt to point out how costly sanctions are also beyond the industry's boundaries.

There are thus risks cartels incur for society. Drawing on reputation is a discursive move, used to gain societal support for making the existence of cartels illegal.

Constructing an internal threat

In deconstructive strategies, *constructing an internal threat* refers to various discursive threats or problems cartel cases raised in terms of the morality and ethics of Finns. The attributes of Finnish identity are not seen as unifying resources constructing the 'we group' but as undermining national unity and 'who we have become' in morally questionable ways. On the textual level, the past and the present are often compared, as was the case in examples 23 and 24.

> (23) "If the Market Court's conclusion is the same as that of the Finnish Competition Authority, it is a very distasteful case. … The state has constantly been forced to cut back on road maintenance – along with safety. If it now turns out that for the last eight years a significant amount of the little money spent on roads has been pouring into the contractors' pockets on the wrong grounds, it is a serious offence. There are no excuses for such behaviour." (TS 2004, #4).

> (24) "The recent corporate scandals emphasize more than ever the importance of ethics in business. Why did this happen in Finland? Are Finnish corporate leaders dishonest, after all, or are they not up to their duties?" (Mustanoja 2004, #4).

In cases of moral panic, a feeling of social crisis becomes a symptom of a more severe problem, as example 24 implies. However, that particular article then calmed such generalization. Example 23 points out how people's safety has probably suffered due to the national asphalt cartel, and the cartel is constructed as a very immoral case. In this

case, the cartel is not legitimate practice because it operates against the welfare of the nation's citizens. It has therefore become an internal threat to the nation.

Cartel activity was most commonly associated with large, business-to-business companies, and it is therefore often suggested that it is markets and investors that should pay more attention to such activity. Thus, a claim is made that morality is becoming constructed around the markets; this further shifts responsibility towards the stakeholders in the businesses, who should be more moral and better able to judge what is right and what is wrong.

> (25) "Within the consumer goods business any suspicion of unethical activity easily stains a company's reputation, which will be felt in both its cash balance and its stock price. But neither customers nor investors have abandoned the constructor-installer Lemminkäinen. And it is unlikely that they would, even if evidence of infringements were found." (Malin 2003, 55).

When moral panic was linked to internal problems, cartels were indeed considered to threaten the continuity of society. The next quotation claims that Finns have been unable to adapt to the demands of changing legislation and that this inability constructs an internal threat to the functioning of society. The example contributes to the description of ideology struggles: Finns have not adapted the fundamental global values and systems of practices but instead are still bound to their own nationalist ideology. These constructs are very different from those that claimed that Finns have learned the rules of the game. The past is not a unifying attribute in this strategy but rather a burden.

> (26) "Following this pious value discussion to some extent I cannot but wonder now and then how viable the good old 'cartel good – monopoly best' thinking still is." (Hurmeranta 2003, #8).

To conclude, the strategy indicates that the threat of a loss of trust exists by virtue of the conflict of values that cartels have created. From the perspective of moral panic literature, some texts created a feeling of social crisis, interpreted as a symptom of a more severe problem. Indeed, the texts that featured deconstructive strategies had several references to moral panic construction. However, in my view, the general cartel discussion failed to become a recognized, large-scale panic. I discuss the reasons for that in the next section.

Discussion and conclusions

This study took as its starting point the little knowledge that we have about the relationship between national identity construction and moralization over unethical and controversial business practices in the news media. I employed a critical discursive perspective and provided a view of the discursive processes of national identity construction during a short-lived moral panic. As a result, the study contributes to current literature on moral panics as ideologico-discursive phenomena and highlights the discursive struggle over the legitimate description of what the social problem is about and why. Though the panics described here cannot be said to have been very serious public concerns, they support the claim made by Hier (2003, 19), who predicted that 'We should expect a proliferation of moral panics as an ordering practice in late modernity'. Thus, the study also contributes to the discussion of whether all panics need to be widely mediatized in order to be understood as moral panics and why some potential moral panics fail to develop or to become larger ones.

As I see it, the years 2000 through 2008 can be understood as a period of moral regulation that included one explicit moral panic around 2004 through 2006. The panic was more apparent in the business magazines (TE and TS) than in the newspaper (HS). The panic was associated with the whistleblowing case and was about the introduction of new laws, leniency programmes. The case is particularly interesting because cartels had already been illegal for over a decade in Finland. Nevertheless, global policies and norms that were represented by the new laws were considered to pose a serious threat to national values and social practices.

So why would leniency programmes arouse criticism in an environment where being a member of a cartel is already a criminalized act? Why threatening scenarios in which the whistleblowing acts were stigmatized emerged? I suggest that the answer lies in the ideology struggles. More specifically, the criticism of the leniency programmes (objects) aimed to construct a folk devil that was something foreign but simultaneously familiar, like the Soviet Union and its political system. In order to provide stigma and illegitimacy for leniency programmes, they were claimed to represent a totalitarian state and reduced citizens' rights. Neither the totalitarian state nor its system was an actual devil to be feared, but a discursive move of this kind reveals a lot about other kinds of social anxieties. These anxieties were more about globalization and the future of Finland. An implicit question was whether globalization contributes to the end of an era: Finnish businesses not having ties to support striving for collective national good in the global arena. I would suggest that this is why the whistleblowing act was stigmatized. Another issue was perhaps doubts about the extent of the problem: how many cartels there are, especially among Finnish businesses operating and 'cooperating' globally.

Yet the whistleblowing panic disappeared quite quickly, perhaps because no major new cases appeared. More important, neither the Soviet Union nor its political

system existed any longer by the 21st century, so the object of the explicit moralization was not credible. Leniency programmes originate in the United States and are designed to control the activities of companies, not citizens. Cartels may cause consumers, meaning the citizens themselves, to suffer higher prices. According to my view, the construction of the 'folk devil' was insufficiently credible, and that was one of the reasons the panic subsided.

The more general cartel discussion also featured signals of potential panic. I would suggest, though, that it failed to develop because the texts featured limitations similar to the whistleblowing panic: a coherent, identifiable and more importantly, a credible folk devil was not identified. In this case, the problem was that although company managers or businesses were often being blamed, they in fact constituted the majority of the business magazines' readership. The study supports the suggestions of Critcher (2009) that issues that are most likely to become moral panics not only have identified folk devils for society to act against, but have folk devils that are not too respectable. Nor can they represent the majority of society (see Cohen 2002). I further suggest that these limitations concerning the construction of a folk devil should be extended to the audience of a specific media: most of the readers (and customers) of specific media should not be constructed as folk devils. This highlights future research avenues to examine moral panics and the relationships with audiences.

By looking at the construction of both national identity and moral panics, this study has revealed the discursive processes through which identity construction and moral panics become intertwined. Despite unethical and illegal business speculations, a nation and its people can be reauthored as moral through essentializing 'truth claims' concerning 'who we are and are not' (see Ybema et al. 2009). Essentializing can be understood as a discursive move aiming to stabilize and simplify identities

caused by a ‘critical incident’, also making them more controllable, separable and thus more easily evaluated morally. Such essentialization and stabilization provide the necessary ‘factity’ for an identity script (Ybema et al. 2009) that can offer readers a hegemonic view to which they can relate and of which they can be convinced. In addition, the connection between micro-level discursive strategies and macro-level phenomena shows how the various discursive strategies participate in the moral reauthoring and how particularly the ability to learn and change seems to be an important discursive resource for identity construction in cases where the hegemonic construction poses a threat. This was particularly evident in the narratives that promoted either change or improved practices (constructive strategies), or used stories of tarnished morality to describe the identity transformation that had taken place (deconstructive strategies).

There are naturally other possible lines of future study. Though not explicitly examined here, this study might also offer some ways of examining deinstitutionalization from the discursive perspective. Discursive struggles serve to reproduce or deconstruct institutions when particular discourses are supported and strengthened by other legitimate discourses vital for the existence of institutions (Phillips et al. 2004). Future studies could take a longitudinal perspective on deinstitutionalization processes and the struggles they contain, so as to shed more light on how changes in the national business system can – despite the current speed of globalization – be a long, internal discursive struggle over preferred values and norms. The significance of short-term and/or long-term panics or moral regulation in deinstitutionalization processes would be particularly interesting.

Limitations

Though this study makes some potentially interesting contributions, it inevitably has limitations. There is no doubt that my own background as a Finn was a significant factor, because it affected how I both read and translated the cultural scripts. Probably it allowed me to recognize in the texts certain cultural stereotypes that might be more obscure to non-Finns, but equally it may have prevented me from making other, novel interpretations. This is therefore a question of the stereotypical elements of my own analysis, of how being a Finn has led me to focus more explicitly on only certain perspectives, texts and ways of reading 'the essentializing discourse'.

The research method (CDA) chosen for the study is also ideological in itself. In applying it, I have not been a neutral observer of the phenomenon. Instead, I have provided a particular way of reading the texts and thus of constructing a particular picture of a phenomenon. I thus participated in the production of a certain picture of identity struggles in an atmosphere of moral panic. However, what really is the difference between moral panic and sensational journalism? How wide should the media attention be in order to be labelled a moral panic? Because there is no one right answer to these questions, I have clarified the positions taken and tried to provide a credible narrative about how the reaction to perceived threat (new law) might have been labelled disproportionate (Critcher 2005). However, other interpretations are possible depending on the literature and method chosen. The analysis of discursive strategies could also be seen as limited: it was possible to discuss the micro-strategies only selectively, and I did not examine individually all the four strategies presented by De Cillia et al. (1999). Future research could investigate more specifically the discursive tactics that feature all of those four strategies in controversial identity-related topics.

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Tables (1)

Journal/ Year	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**Number of articles**
Taloussanomat (TS)	1	3	2	9	22	0	1	2	1	**41**
Talouselämä	0	0	1	1	10	0	3	6	5	**26**

(TE)										
Helsingin sanomat (HS)	0	2	1	2	10	1	4	6	0	**26**
Total number of articles:										**93**

Table 1. The number of articles