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Driving through neoliberalism: Finnish truck drivers constructing respectable male worker subjectivities

Introduction

This chapter analyzes how Finnish male truck drivers (re)produce themselves as respectable male workers in the face of the recent economic, technological and institutional transformations touching the European haulage sector. Departing from the economic deregulation and neo-taylorist work process control that characterizes truck drivers' working conditions within the modern hauling industry, the chapter examines how these neoliberal tendencies challenge truckers' autonomy, occupational image, practical knowledge, and ability to earn, which have all traditionally been essential for truck drivers' occupational identity and its class-based, gendered construction in the US, Sweden and also in Finland (Bergholm 1999; Ouellet 1994; Nehls 2003; Pettersson 2006; Levy 2016). In the context of neoliberal restructuring of work and organizational settings (Crowley & Hodson 2014), this study asks to what extent trucking in Finland can be perceived as a particular kind of blue-collar occupation offering resources for gender construction not available in manufacturing or (other) service sector work, as Lawrence Ouellet (1994) has described male truckers' work in the US.

While Finland has traditionally had a relatively strong consent towards the Nordic welfare state model, neoliberal doctrines such as deregulation of financial markets, global competition, new public management (NPM) procedures and competitiveness policy began to influence the Finnish economy and working life back in the 1980s (Patomäki 2007: 55-68). In regard to the development of Finnish working life during the past 30 years (Lehto & Sutela 2009), different work organization models aimed at increasing flexibility as well as leadership methods emphasizing local arrangements and competition were introduced across various occupational sectors. Performance in the workplace and organizations became assessed more by their productivity and profitability, which intensified the competition between employees, work groups and departments. While technological advancements have created new jobs, requirements and competencies, uncertainty among workers has increased and many fear losing their jobs (Lehto & Sutela 2009: 141-2).

The trucking industry, as a link between complex manufacturing and global distribution chains, provides a powerful case through which to investigate how an intensified neoliberal economy

fashions the experiences of men working in a male-dominated blue-collar occupation in Finland. Drawing on ethnographic data, the study argues that unlike Ouellet (1994) who has portrayed trucking as work that allows men to demonstrate heroic working-class masculinity based on independence, mobility and motorists' admiration, Finnish truckers experience that their independence and value in the work process has become challenged and they are being occupationally stigmatized. In the face of neoliberal degradation, however, Finnish truckers are able to mobilise a narrative of respectable working-class masculinity that is based on valorizing their practical experience, manual skills, professional capacities and a role as a hard-working wage-earner. It seems that unlike working-class women who strive away from the stigmatized working-class femininity into recognized middle-class qualities (Skeggs 1997), Finnish male truckers are able to draw from archetypal blue-collar masculinity in order to construct their own sense of respect.

The haulage sector in the context of neoliberal tendencies

At the beginning of the 20th Century the transportation system in Europe and the US rested mainly on horses and trains, but due to improvements in infrastructure and automobile technology as well as the expansion of mass consumption, road freight transportation developed rapidly in both regions after World War II (Belzer 2000: 22-3; Vahrenkamp 2011). In Europe, purchasing a truck and entering into the road haulage industry was an opportunity for employment, and investment capital remained low as army lorries could be used to begin business (OECD 1997: 16). While the haulage business was subjected to the need for permits and driving licenses from the beginning, more extensive regulation and supervision practices were needed to prevent the unintended effects of fierce competition, such as conspiring between hauliers, bankruptcies, unreliable service, road damages, accidents and disturbance to residents (OECD 1997: 16-7; Blomberg 1996: 94-108).

Until the last quarter of the 20th century trucking in Europe and the US remained an institutionally regulated business directed by the public trust (OECD 1997; Belzer 2000:77; 2002: 375). Competition in the haulage sector, however, was intensified by the global expansion of markets and by systematic economic deregulation (Gentry et. al. 1997; OECD 1997; Belzer 2000; Hilal 2008), which started to gain favour in the US and Europe as a part of broader worldwide liberalization processes from the 1970s onwards (Harvey 2005). The pursuit of economic growth, cost-efficiency and flexible services by reducing entry barriers, collective rate-making and

abandoning quotas and fixed tariffs worsened the hauliers' and truckers' conditions in both regions: the great numbers of subcontracted, self-employed and unskilled hauliers who entered the market decreased hauling rates and forced haulage companies and their employees to operate on more squeezed time margins set by large-scale shipping and consignment companies. As a consequence, traffic safety worsened, hauliers received lower profits, hundreds went bankrupt, turnover rates increased while drivers' unpaid work increased, their work-life balance suffered, and earnings declined by nearly 30 per cent (Belzer 2000; 2002; Hilal 2008; also Belman & Monaco 2001). These undesired effects of the competition and impaired image of the sector, in turn, led to the enactment of a patchwork of social and safety regulations concerning drivers' formal qualifications, working and driving time, as well as equipment standards and certifications (Belzer 2000; Salanne & Rantala 2008; EC 2014).

Another effect of the intensified global capitalism is that industries and companies now operate in an extremely hectic and competitive global environment, which has pushed them to rationalize their businesses by enacting neo-taylorist principles and methods: logistic services have been outsourced and many companies have moved into a lean manufacturing process accompanied with Just-In-Time management (JIT) in order to optimize their effectiveness and save inventory and storage costs (Sewell & Wilkinson 1992; Belzer 2002: 380-2; Vidal 2007). The logistic process where goods are delivered at the moment a company needs them requires a precise coordination of information flows and tasks between actors within a supply chain, which is conducted by the extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT) (Belzer 2002; Kallberg et. al. 2005). As a result of ICT, the interconnection of trucking companies to large-scale forwarding agencies, manufacturing, sales and supply chains is becoming more transparent, which increases their receptiveness to the pressures of the various business domains, as well as the influences of the whole distribution chain (Belzer 2002). While ICT –assisted real time delivery process has improved the collaboration and productivity of the supply chain (Hubbard 2003; Rishel et. al 2003), it has pushed truckers to drive more hours without receiving additional compensation (Belman & Monaco 2001) and made truckers' work more heavily pressurised, service orientated and controlled (Belzer 2002; de Groon 2004; Salanne & Rantala, 2008; OSH 2011: 19-20). Levy (2015), for instance, has shown how the abstracted and aggregated data streams of the electronic fleet management systems allow dispatchers to quantitatively assess truck drivers work performances across new metrics and to challenge truckers' accounts of local and biophysical conditions.

The intensification of truckers' labour is not solely caused by economic pressure, but the difficulty of synchronizing economically-driven logistic rhythms with institutionally-driven juridical rhythm (driving time regulation[1]) (Aho 2015). Juridical rhythm, in particular, has become an extra burden for truckers because its rigidity contradicts the logic of highly receptive logistic rhythm that calls for constant adaptation and readiness for quick temporal changes. Juridical rhythm not only hinders truckers' ability to get their work done, but also stigmatizes them, as has happened in Sweden where the police's and the state's constant gazing has generated 'an underdog identity' for truckers (Nehls 2003; Pettersson 2009). In this regard, Lotta Pettersson (2009) claims that truckers are governed more by the state and associated control apparatus today than by their employers. Belzer (2000; 2002), in contrast, asserts that unprecedented growth of institutional control over hauliers and truckers is a paradoxical result of the replacement of institutional regulation with market regulation.

Work, class and respectable masculinity

The fact that 90 per cent of Finnish truckers are male (Olkkonen et. al. 2003), means that observing truckers' occupational performances is very much about observing 'men's practices' (Hearn 2004). Working as a male trucker is not just doing the work *per se*, it is also a conduct where gendered meanings, practices and expectations are created, reproduced and challenged (West & Zimmerman 1987). But the way gender works cannot be fully understood without considering class, and *vice versa* (see Connell 2005: 75-6). In the modern industrial era, as David Morgan (2005: 172) points out, relations between work, masculinities and class were recognizable, because class was conceptualized through occupations and a (male) person's position in the production process. A respectable working-class masculinity, in this respect, was performed traditionally through (paid) work, breadwinning and by such occupational characteristics as manual skills, physical strength, enduring hardships, the ability to control machinery and tools, independence and resistance against authorities (Tolson 1977; Willis 1977; Cockburn 1983; Collinson 1992; Morgan 1992; Collinson & Hearn 1996). While trucking has shared these qualities, it has also provided a sense of exclusivity, stemming from the mobility, variegated rhythm and freedom afforded by maneuvering a valuable

[1] Regulation (EC) 561/2006 set the maximum driving hours and minimum rest periods for truckers and makes the onboard digital tachograph compulsory for all new vehicles registered in the EU from May 2006. The regulation restricts the truckers' driving time within a 24-hour period to a maximum of nine hours while the daily rest period shall be at least 11 hours. Breaks should be taken after four and a half hours at the latest and they must be at least 45 minutes long (Europa 2013: 26-7).

vehicle and cargo away from an employer's direct supervision, which, as Ouellet (1994) argues, has distinguished truckers from their peers and the average wage-earner.

In the post-industrial era, however, the identification of class-based masculinities is becoming more complicated, as economic re-structuring blurs the clear-cut boundaries of production relations and occupations (Morgan 2005: 173-4). Recent studies suggest that men, especially in blue-collar occupations, face clashes between their gendered selves and their surroundings, as market transformations, global competition, technological innovations, environmental concerns and new regulative practices change labour markets and re-organise work and its embodied requirements (McDowell 2003; Dolby et. al 2004; Nixon 2009; Filteau 2014). While some men are more reluctant to adopt new occupational practices and skills, others begin to redefine their masculinity through these new practices and requirements. In the Nordic agricultural industry, for example, technological innovations and new regulations have unsettled the picture of a 'tough man' who controls the nature by his brute bodily strength to a more 'business-like masculinity', favouring rational economic decision-making (Brandth & Haugen 2000).

Instead of perceiving class merely as a pregiven objective category derived causally from society's economic or occupational structure, class in this study is understood also as a mode of cultural differentiation (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 1997). Class, as Bourdieu (1984) and Skeggs (1997) perceive it, refers to a person's position in an economic process, but it is also a culturally formed classifying process, lived experience, and constellation of capitals accumulated in different overlapped societal fields during a person's lifetime. The notion that class is manifested in and through a person's embodied *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) is important for this study, because the concept of habitus enables us to see, in Darren Nixon's (2009: 319) words, 'how classed and gendered dispositions to act or think in particular ways are internalized in the unconscious and manifest themselves in embodied social practices'. Nixon (2009) thus explains that low-educated unemployed men in northern England are reluctant to apply for entry-level jobs in the service sector because such work requires (emotional) skills, dispositions and demeanours which are antitethical to these men's working-class masculine habitus.

In line with Nixon, gender and class are understood as culturally and materially formed structures, intertwined together in a person's habitus, which unconsciously generate the practices, routines and dispositions of an actor within a given social field (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 1997). The 'field' in

which truckers engage in this study is perceived as an occupational site within the haulage sector influenced by the broader intersecting field of the economy. By the gendered and classed structure of the occupational site itself (see Adkins & Skeggs 2004) certain occupational resources, performances and competencies are regarded as more valuable than others for constructing oneself as a recognized worker and as a man. Within the limits of one's gendered habitus, a truck driver tries to apply his resources to the degree that feels natural to him and valued in the occupational site in which he participates. In the face of economic, legislational and technological transformations, however, skills and practices once regarded as valuable may lose their potential as a gendered resource, which may cause dissonance and conflict between a truck drivers' habitus and the field he operates in (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 95-140). Truckers can resist changes, adapt to them, or try to change the relative weight of the valued capitals and resources of the 'game' in order to maintain their positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 98-100). By using the concept of habitus I try to map out if truck driving still invites men to reproduce practices, skills and dispositions favourable to their working-class habitus.

Research design and analysis

This study is based on ethnographic methodology, which is understood as an intense participation in the life of the informants in order to produce a plausible cultural description of the phenomenon (Hammersley & Atkinson 2008). The data was gathered during the years between 2012 and 2016 by riding along on assignments with 10 Finnish male truck drivers who work in different fields of operation in Finland. On the whole, I conducted eighteen different trips with the truckers, varying from six hours to four days and the total time spent on the road with the drivers was around 350 hours. The informants in this study are highly experienced male truckers, having been involved in trucking for periods of fifteen to thirty-five years. They all have spouses and (grown) children, and are aged between 45 and 62 years. Two of the drivers were classified as owner-operators, but the rest carried an employee's status. None of the informants had acquired any other formal education for driving a heavy truck besides the appropriate driving licence, because their enrollment into the sector took place in an era when other formal qualifications were not required in Finland.

The analysis is based on two intertwined data sets. The first data set was produced by taking notes at different work-related arenas such as loading sites, terminals, harbours, gas stations and especially in the truck cabin. I observed and wrote down how driving and other work practices were

performed, what was involved in these practices, how the informants reacted to the events occuring in traffic and how they commented on their actions in relation to other truckers and motorists. The second data set consists of open-ended field discussions conducted whilst driving, which were also tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The tapes are relatively long, five to eight hours each, because the recorder was kept on constantly while in the cabin. This enabled me to recall events and discussions and situate them while reading my notes. In practice, the field discussions and observations were produced and utilized together. I was, for example, able to experience how technological surveillance worked in practice, but also discuss these observations with the drivers on the spot and take the conversations as my 'interview frame' for the next field trip.

The objective in the analysis was to identify how a respectable male worker was constructed by the truckers, and what might challenge this construction. While the informants were not purposively picked for their experience or age, their relatively 'old' age and long-term experience on the road directed my attention to the historical (temporal) dimension in their accounts. By applying the concept of habitus as my theoretical-methodological lens, I found that a significant contrast between the accounts describing present work practices and the accounts describing work practices in the past emerged quite systematically while discussing regulations and digital tachographs, or when the drivers were using work-related ICT applications. By evaluating these accounts further against work process theory and masculinity studies, I figured that respectability as a male worker was structured by the question of how he could maintain himself as valuable in the work process. These findings are presented in the first section of the analysis.

In the second section of the analysis, I extended my reading outside the work process as such to examine accounts where the truckers expressed their concerns about the haulage sector's professional image. The idea of paying attention to these accounts was directed by the contradictory picture made by Ouellet (1994) and Nehls (2003) in previous studies. While Ouellet's truckers appear to see themselves as iconic working-class heroes whose self-image is constitued partly by the admiration of motorists' and thus a sense of highway superiority, Nehls' truckers see themselves more as providers as well as 'criminals' and 'underdogs' who are constantly gazed by the police. I found that Finnish truckers' experience of being in the middle of negative attention and unprofessional practices, generated a counter-narrative that not only valorizes their practical knowledge, but also their role as a man who has earned his wage by extremely hard work. The

second section of the analysis describes how truckers defend themselves and their respectability by exploiting and valorizing the occupational resources they have.

Maintaining one's occupational value in the work process

In industrial capitalism, timekeeping has been a central way to discipline workers' performances and rationalize human value upon time in the taylorist work process (Braverman 1974; Blyton et. al. 1989; Thompson 1969; Hassard 1989). While the time and space control of 'traditional' factory work has typically been used as a point of comparison with truckers to highlight the autonomous and mobile nature of trucking (Ouellet 1994; Nehls 2003: 68-9), extension of technological monitoring systems and devices into trucking industry challenge this experience. Being 'unreachable' is no longer possible, because hauliers have pushed to have technological tracking systems, on-board computers, telematics and cell phones in constant daily use in order to enhance logistic efficiency, productivity, flexibility and responsiveness to their customers' demands, as described in previous studies (Belzer 2002; Hubbard 2003; Levy 2015; Kallberg et. al. 2005).

My own material provides further confirmation of these developments. Signals of driving computers, laptops and cell phones in the truck cabin activated the informants' habitus (Bourdieu 1990: 54) and many started to recall 'the old times' in the 1980s and 1990s by explaining how the instructions for the assignments were given face to face at the transport coordinator's office. In a time before the advent of Global Positioning System (GPS) and when cell phones and other electronic receivers were scarce, employers, shippers, consignees and transport coordinators were unable to monitor the truckers' progress on the road and additional instructions for the next assignment were typically received after the delivery by using a phone booth or the unloading site's landline telephone (see also Ouellet 1994: 29). Comparing to the past, the truckers explained how their location could now be tracked by GPS, and the driving computers in their trucks enabled the employers and management to monitor practices concerning driving behaviour, such as fuel consumption, steady driving, breaking and routing. Updated information from loadings and unloadings was received in real time via cell phones and laptops while in many companies the drivers were also obliged to mark the starting and ending times of the loadings and unloadings into the product management system so that shippers, consignees and transport coordinators could follow how quickly goods proceeded within the supply chain. Despite the fact that technology-

driven monitoring has enhanced the truckers' possibilities to communicate with other actors in the supply chain (de Croon et.al. 2004; Kallberg et.al. 2005), this neoliberal rationale of optimizing economic performance by applying ICT-based JIT-management made the truckers' work more transparent and controlled, which is distinct from former occupational practices:

> […] I mean, well, companies do not have stocks as they had before, the stocks are on the wheels today. That's the reason for the insane rush […] At the beginning of the 90's, when I started to drive heavy vehicles…well, it was totally different, from a different world. Oh, it was so relaxed and peaceful and a nice way to work. [T.A: at the beginning of the 90's?] Yeah. You could drive in peace and there were no phones, not this kind of e-mails (tapping a laptop). When you got an assignment, well, of course you knew at the same moment where you were going to be empty. And if there were any changes you were asked to call from the last unloading place after unloading. Then we phoned and asked what next? (laughing) You could just drive and whistle in peace and nobody knew where you where. (Kari, 49, field discussion)

The frictional relationship between the neoliberal shift in the haulage sector's operational environment and truckers (gendered) habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 39, 95-140) was structured by the question of how to maintain one's value and autonomy in the work process (see also Levy 2015: 167-8; cf. Burawoy 1985). Nehls (2003) argues that a trucker who is being entrusted on the road alone with a valuable cargo and an expensive truck signals the employer's trust, which he defines as a hegemonic ideal in Swedish male truckers' gendered working culture. Pettersson (2006: 116) similarly asserts that the capability to overcome challenges and solve practical problems on the road is an essential part of the construction of hegemonic masculinity among Swedish truckers. In this respect, my informants' experience of being valued at work was fostered by the idea of being unreachable because it emphasized the ideals and qualities presented by Nehls and Pettersson. It seems, as Levy (2015: 167) also points out, that the non-existence of technological monitoring and tracking systems allowed truckers to feel that they had almost exclusive possession and control of the information concerning the delivery proceeding, shipment location, speed and the rhythm of driving. Drivers, for instance, could sit on information, lie about locations and explain delays by referring to traffic jams and changing weather conditions. While ICT-based surveillance has not managed to invalidate truckers' 'hidden' knowledge, discretion and autonomy completely as expected in traditional taylorist deskilling processes (Braverman 1974; cf.

Burawoy 1985), the adoption of neo-taylorist principles has generated the feeling that formerly truckers had more power over their work than today and felt less accountable for their time and actions, because the shipping and consigment companies, employers and dispatchers had to rely upon truckers and their word.

In truck drivers' gendered working culture(s), there has traditionally been a particular salience around one's ability to drive and endure fatigue (Blomberg 1996; Levy 2016; Ouellet 1994: 134-6). Ouellet (1994), for instance, claims that truckers in the US brag about how many kilometres and hours they have driven without pauses, how little they have slept and how quickly they have accomplished assignments because hard effort not only increases their (economic) worth in the eyes of their employers but also among their counterparts. I found similar practices in my data, but they were attached either to assignments 'in the past', in the 1980s and in the 1990s when regulations were looser and supervised by the old-fashioned paper disc tachograph, or they were sustained by truckers whose company had not yet adopted digital tachographs. Despite the fact that the rules in principle were the same regardless of the tachograph one was using, paper disc tachograph provided more leeway to rhythm driving under pre-given un/loading schedules because the machine cannot recognize overruns of several minutes and it enables the covering of one's tracks by forging and hiding discs. While the informants rarely profit directly themselves from giving up their statutory breaks, the ability to respond to rapidly changing logistic rhythms affirmed the truckers' feeling that their embodied potential has an indispensable role not only for their employers' economic success, but also for the functioning of the whole trade and industry which is dependent on quick and flexible hauling services (see also Eastman et. al. 2013).

> A year ago, I did one pretty tough assignment and broke the law…well, because I understand that there are certain shipments which are in a real hurry. I was heading to Helsinki for loading when I received a call telling me to forget that loading and go to 'City' [a town in Finland, name changed], there is a company which manufacturers rollers for the paper industry. I had to pick up a roller and deliver it to 'Lake' [Northern Sweden, name changed], because there was a paper machine that needed a new roller to replace a broken one. And actually we got a much better rate for that delivery, because, well, it is understandable that if a paper mill is shut down for two days, it will cause a tremendous loss. So they asked me when I would be in 'Lake'? I counted a moment and replied that 20 hours and I will surely be there. 'You won't take a break at all?', they asked. 'Didn't you say that the roller is in a hurry', I

> replied. […] I pushed myself and just got by, changing the paper discs after they filled up…without a wink of sleep. The guys (in 'Lake') where totally baffled, you can't be here yet!? I am, take it off. (Kari, 49, field discussion)

It also seems that especially the drivers using the old-fashioned tachographs felt they were 'expected' to cheat a little for the reason that they 'could'. The drivers' consent towards driving more than permitted while confronting the new tightened surveillance environment was unsurprising in a sense that they had already internalized the effects of economic deregulation that favour 'the survival of the fittest' mentality as a desirable way of conducting trucking (see Belzer 2000). Due to the paper disc tachograph, their habitus could still continue to produce some of the old familiar practices which reasserted their sense of one's usefulness compared to the truckers who had switched over to the digital tachograph. While digital tachograph users often express their relief for being restricted to no longer drive endlessly, they felt that the tightened regulations alongside the accuracy of the digital machine ignored their embodied experience and hampered their chance to use their bodily potential in full for the appropriate purposes, such as advancing a delivery. Regulations that make you interrupt driving while a delivery is in a hurry and when you still have energy, oppose the economic rationale of trucking and the practical sense of 'the game' (Bourdieu 1990) which has typically enabled truckers to control their work and bodily limits within broader temporal boundaries.

> […] It sometimes feels a bit funny…I mean, how could it be possible that the most important thing about the work is when you take your break?! [T.A: Do you mean that it is too regulated or you think that you can freely…] That's exactly the point, I mean, it is too regulated from the outside. For example, when you are hungry, when you are able to go take a crap, when you should feel tired and so on….the pause must always be in your mind, now you must take it, no matter how keen you are to continue […] It is good that the regulations exist, so that one is not driving these rigs exhausted, but it gets too regulation-based. There is no room for common sense, it's starting to work against its purposes. (Veikko, 47, field discussion)

Interestingly, truckers who had switched to digital tachographs also made numerous references to the hours driven and lack of sleep in the 1980s and 1990s similar to 'Kari' earlier, which implies that the persistence of endurance driving as a sign of a valuable and respectable worker was deeply-rooted in the truckers' habitus and occupational identity. By bringing up their past experiences and embodied effort in the present (Bourdieu 1990: 54), the truckers reproduce themselves as a hard and

valuable male worker in the context where the focus of pacing work for the sake of delivery has shifted more in the direction of pacing work for the regulations themselves (see also Pettersson 2009; Aho 2015). Criticism towards the impracticality of the law can also be seen as an attempt by drivers to distance themselves from the middle-class, 'white-collar' masculinity represented by bureaucrats who, as Pettersson (2006) argues, while designing and enacting the regulations, lack practical sense.

Defending oneself against occupational degradation

Ouellet (1994: 171) argues that truckers in the US feel that getting support from motorists means that their work is regarded as skilled and notable, because truckers tend to be 'predisposed to interpret responses by their audiences as indications of respect'. In this study Finnish truckers acknowledge that driving a massive vehicle commands attention, but unlike Ouellet's truckers, the informants feel that the size and visibility of their trucks places them under constant suspicion, as happened to their colleagues in Sweden (see Nehls 2003; Pettersson 2009). Many of the informants felt that they were an easy target for the police, motorists and media, because substantial damage resulted often when trucks were involved in accidents on the road, while some complained that the mere existence of trucks was enough to generate a hostile attitude against truckers who were always blocking motorists' and other road users' path with their enormous vehicles (cf. Moore et. al. 2005). Becoming misrecognized on their 'home turf' by people who lacked practical experience of driving big rigs was an affront to a trucker's identity as a 'professional driver' because the road was the site in which truck drivers' hard-earned (driving) competence should come into its own. Instead of taking on this occupational stigma, truckers redressed such misrecognitions by mobilising a heroic narrative in which they valorized their traffic skills as superior to those of motorists (see also Ouellet 1994: 155-179). Confronting dangers on the road and overcoming risks caused by motorists affirmed the truck drivers' sense of their skills and bravery.

> Heavy vehicles themselves have only a minor role in accidents, something always occurs before (an accident) which causes that accident. The general perception, though, is that the heavy vehicle is the guilty party […] let's say that from the Konginkangas[2] incident onwards, there has been talk about 'killer trucks'. [T.A: Hmm..] And you take it to heart, because once

[2] The collision of a truck and a bus in 2004 led to death of 23 people, which is the most disastrous road accident in Finland.

> there was the saying ‘big but well-mannered’ attached to trucks’ rear bumpers. […] That time has passed. We are being pressurised so heavily in traffic and every day we have to assess risky situations in traffic, which are caused by someone else. […] Motorists can’t recognize their behaviour while shuttling on the road. It becomes extremely visible from the bus driver’s or heavy truck driver’s viewpoint what is going on around the vehicle. (Pete, 62, field discussion)

As this example illustrates, then, turning to practical knowledge was common especially in situations where someone outside truckers occupational position questioned their performance. While truckers’ tendency to defend occupational respect by valorizing and exploiting practical knowledge is not surprising given that practical knowledge has been identified as a constitutive part of truckers’ occupational identity (Nehls 2003; Pettersson 2009; 2006) it was interesting also how the value of practical knowledge was protected. Many asserted how access to recognized trucking competence can only be achieved by years of practical involvement in trucking (see also Nehls 2003, 52-53), which typically followed a certain age-related trajectory in the drivers’ accounts: as young rookies many had begun their careers at the ‘bottom’ by driving a delivery truck before getting more responsible assignments and bigger vehicles to handle. The point here is that by presenting the achievement of their practical knowledge as an arduous, hierarchical and long-lasting process, my truckers not only valorize their competence by the fact of being a ‘trucker’, but also simultaneously distinguish themselves from those who cannot be recognized professionals (yet). The truckers’ occupational habitus uniformly positioned age as central to the acquisition of practical knowledge by classifying younger drivers as incompetent because of their presumed inexperience:

> A guy who is 20 or 25 cannot have such driving experience…he has not yet reached the point when he can feel the behaviour of the vehicle in his bones. Driving big rigs comes from the backbone. I have always said that even I have had to learn to drive on a slippery road every autumn over the past 50 years. And while there are discussions about labour shortage and many insist that you have to give youngsters a chance, the path there used to be one in which you work your way up from journeyman to driver, from a single lorry driver to a semi-trailer combination driver, and then proceed to drive heavy full-trailer combinations, but that path does not exist anymore. There is a guy around 20 who got his driving license for heavy full-trailer combinations and they give him a half million euro truck and say go and drive. Well, then what we saw in Lahti [a city in Finland] happens […] a completely inexperienced driver

> crashed his truck loaded full of sulfuric acid into an apartment building wall. (Pete, 62, field discussion)

Some of my informants complained that reducing the entry barriers had tempted incompetent amateurs and dishonest hauliers to enter the sector and experiment with trucking as a subsidiary trade without any serious intention to stay and develop their competence and business operations in a professional direction. These accounts can be seen to reflect the situation in the US after deregulation when experienced truckers exited the industry and were replaced by less experienced drivers who appeared to have weaker safety records and were more likely to make mistakes that led to accidents on the road (Belzer 2002: 392). By setting a high standard for entry and approved competence, my experienced truckers attempted to protect their occupational expertise and the sector's reputation from the deskilling engendered by the open-door policy of the neoliberal era, positioning themselves as 'true professionals' against the unskilled charlatans apparently making their way into the trade.

> Liberating the licence was the very last straw[3]. They should not have done it, it was a shock for this sector. Licenses should have remained means-tested at all times. We had a guy who operated as a subcontractor for us, and goddammit, he cannot even reverse! He was a metal worker all his life and then he gets an inheritance from his dad and decides to start a haulage company, and the poor guy can't even reverse his truck […] There has been such a motley group of people and hauliers [since deregulation] […] (Pentti, 53, field discussion)

While it was important to get symbolic approval for one's experience and hard-earned practical knowledge, many felt that is should also be recognised financially. Unsurprisingly most truckers emphasized the importance of money, and many of my informants mentioned having rejected jobs that paid below the minimum level collectively agreed by unions[4]. Truckers tend to be relatively satisfied with payment practices in their present job, but their numerous references to illegal practices in certain sub-sectors and hauling companies such as tax avoidance, price dumping and employees' exploitation, imply that getting decent compensation was not straightforward, as has been found in studies elsewhere (Belzer 2000; Belman & Monaco 2001; Hilal 2008). By insisting on their ability to avoid exploitative jobs, the informants positioned themselves as honest men who are not willing to sell their labour on the cheap and be party to illegal practices in the sector.

[3] In 1991 means-tested licence system was replaced by applicability discretion
[4] Bilateral agreement between an employees' organisation and an employer's organisation

Accounts imply, however, that taking this position would have been much more difficult without having years of experience from different assignments and without being a Finn. In this respect, the neoliberal principle that favours unrestricted movement and competition of labour, goods, services and capital (Harvey 2005), keeps haulage rates low and gives the haulage companies a constant incentive to hire the most defenceless labour, such as young, inexperienced, and foreign (Eastern European) drivers.

> [T.A: how about the pay, is the collective agreement followed here?] Yes. [T.A: I have understood that the collective agreement is not followed within semi-trailer traffic?] No. They can't pay, hauling is so low-priced there. They try to cop out at every payment…it's a totally wild segment. And that's why they often hire youngsters, they've got poor wages and they cannot fight for their rights and don't dare to insist on their rights […] [T.A:Yeah, I got the picture that they don't follow the collective agreement]. And while I have been looking through different vacancies and heard about the pay…oh phew, they are not for me [T.A: Is it that youngsters more often apply for jobs on the semi-trailer sector?] It depends on what you manage to get at the beginning of your career. If you don't have connections, you have to take what is offered and acquire experience somewhere. Without experience it's difficult to find anything. (Pentti, 53, field discussion)

> […] They operate with poor rates, the guys in semi-pulling traffic, I mean…that's the reason why the sector is mostly occupied by Russians (Antti, 51, field discussion)

It became clear, however, that many of the experienced truckers were ready to endure relatively extensive hardships as long as the compensation remained agreeable. This finding was interesting in relation to Ouellet (1994:199-224), who claims that the wage is a major motivator only for truckers he called 'workers', while the truckers he labeled 'super truckers' are primarily attracted by qualities like adventure, variety and fancy equipment. While 'the adventurous nature' of trucking had attracted my informants especially at a younger age, and some mentioned the fascinating cities and villages they had driven through, trucking as a glamorous lifestyle or 'adventure' was strongly rejected. Instead, many pointed to the rugged daily routines and rhythms of trucking: working frequently by night, enduring fatigue, waiting for hours to get loaded and unloaded, constrained social and personal facilities on the road and an inability to participate in 'normal' daily leisure pursuits and social activities (see Aho 2015; Belzer 2000). By stressing the difficulty and unconventional rhythm of trucking, informants emphasised that the earnings from the road had not

come without sacrifices and a substantial effort, which reinforced their sense of themselves as particular (male) wage-earners.

> Earning money has always been a motivator for doing this, although it means that you can barely have a life outside work. But I chose this job and I have been doing this for so long that it is difficult to think of [other] options.[…] [T.A:..not driving for fun?] No, no. The money, but it's kind of a pity that you have to work crazy hours for your wage at this job, it would be nice if you got the same money for 200 hours (a month). (Kari, 49, field discussion)

It seems that wage forms an important signal of respect for my truckers because it compensates harsh work and the men's alienating experiences within the capitalist system (see Tolson 1977; Willis 1977). In this respect, my informants are close to Ouellet's 'workers', who despise 'super truckers' for giving their time and effort to their employers without getting decent compensation (1994: 206-7). But while it seems that the truckers acknowledge their value, their accounts also remind of the situation in the US after economic deregulation, which reduced hourly wages so much that the only option to earn a living was to extend the working hours intensely (Belzer 2000: 8-9).

Conclusions

This study broadens the discussion of truckers' gendered working culture by illustrating how Finnish male truck drivers' position as a respectable male worker is constructed in the context of recent economic, technological and institutional transitions. Based on my findings, I agree with Ouellet (1994), Nehls (2003), Pettersson (2006) and Levy (2016), who all suggest that maintaining authority over one's own work is a vital basis of truck drivers' masculinity. In line with Levy (2015), however, the study shows that technology-based economic and institutional surveillance narrows truckers' autonomy, which not only hinders their ability to retain exclusive control over their work procedures, but also devalues their hard-earned practical knowledge. Restricting drivers from exploiting this embodied competence in full is experienced as a limitation on truckers' ability to perform their position as a respectable worker and as a man. This study, then, challenges and updates Ouellet's study, which sees trucking as an attractive and special kind of blue-collar work based on its autonomous nature. While the mobility of trucking ensures that truck drivers cannot easily be subjected to taylorist-fordist forms of control similar to those operating in factories, mines or construction sites, the case of Finnish truckers nevertheless concurs with Levy (2015) and Belzer

(2000, 2002) in finding that contemporary trucking in Europe, as in the US, is becoming an extremely rationalized business affected by a combination of global competition and neo-taylorist control. An unreachable trucker, whose performance has a huge impact on companies' economic success, is at odds with organizations' neoliberal rationale that pursues economic effectiveness by calculating, quantifying and measuring workers' performances.

The analysis also revealed that truckers in Finland, as in Sweden (Nehls 2003; Pettersson 2009), tend to feel themselves less celebrated and recognized than their counterparts in the US. A striking finding, however, was that despite the experience of decreasing autonomy, the intensified work pace, occupational stigma and fierce competition, Finnish truckers were able to sustain their sense of respect by creating a defense that valorized their practical experience, manual skills, embodied effort and hard-earned wage. This finding comes close to Nixon's (2009) in the sense that in both cases a male workers' habitus continues to produce quite traditional working-class practices and dispositions in order to sustain a respectable male worker subjectivity. These results of the study also carry relevance in relation to Skeggs' (1997: 74) assertion that working-class men can use class as a positive source of identity, in contrast to working-class woman, for whom class is experienced more as a source of exclusion. While working-class women in Skeggs' study have to work on themselves continually in order to live up the standards established by the middle classes (Skeggs 1997: 67; 74-95), experienced male truckers in this study were not uncertain about themselves for a moment. Unlike Skeggs' women, who seek acceptance through criteria set by someone else, male truckers rejected assessments that came from outside of their socio-economic position and, by contrast, evaluated themselves and their colleagues through the standards they set by themselves. Despite the fact that economic restructuring has undermined some components of traditional forms of working-class masculinity (e.g. McDowell 2003; Dolby et. al 2004), this study has shown that masculine codes surrounding manual skills, physical effort and a hard-earned wage, where they are available, still provide a language for making onself as a respectable male worker.

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