The front line of free speech: Beyond *parrhêsia* in Finland's migrant debate

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Abstract

A contrast between the "fearless speech" of *parrhêsia* and the professional ethics among Finland's public-service broadcasters reveals some of the diverse forms by which free speech is pursued in contemporary liberal polities. When the so-called migrant crisis dominated its discussions in 2015, the popular "people's radio" (*Kansanradio*) became a site for fresh controversies over free speech. Caught up between the *parrhêsia* of both public intellectuals and bigoted listeners, *Kansanradio*'s editors pursued a dialogical approach to truth telling. Where *parrhêsia* risks the very relationship between interlocutors, this modality of free speech rests on a carefully cultivated multivocality of viewpoints. It challenges the assumption about voice as the person's private property in both the scholarship on *parrhêsia* and some (but not all) liberal orientations.

(*free speech, parrhêsia, truth telling, migrant crisis, radio, voice, multivocality, Finland*)

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In August 2015, "Censorship in Finland" was the heading of a contribution to *Suomi24*, Finland's largest internet chatroom.[1] Its author complained about the way her speech had been edited on *Kansanradio* (The People's Radio), a weekly radio program of listeners' phone calls, emails, and letters on Yleisradio, Finland's public-service broadcaster. "Last summer," she wrote, "I got through to *Kansanradio* and talked, among other things, about the pension guarantee. I dared to bring out into the open that elderly immigrants are granted a pension guarantee of €750 automatically, but not original Finns, if you have taken or have been pushed to early retirement. This point in my speech was removed. SO YOU GET CENSORED IF YOU ONLY MENTION THE WORD IMMIGRANT."

It would be tempting to place this evidently earnest outburst in the ironic register. How else to read it in a country that achieved for seven consecutive years until 2016 the top ranking in the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders? Such a reading would be aided by a host of recent anthropological studies. Already before Donald Trump entered a high political office, anthropologists had begun to emphasize irony, parody, and satire as epoch-defining features in polities in which public confidence in conventional authorities and institutions appeared to be on the wane. Whether it is in late-Soviet "parodic overidentification" (Boyer and Yurchak 2010, 191), satirical ridicule in the United States (Day 2011; Haugerud 2013), an "anarcho-surrealist" political movement in Iceland (Boyer 2013), or digital parody among young cosmopolitan Ghanaians (Shipley 2017), a set of common themes emerge. The key one is the sense of crisis that the anthropologist often finds once the laughter provoked by parody and satire subsides. "Parody as subversion," Jesse Weaver Shipley (2017, 260) observes, "seems to grow in moments of crises of political identity," which, for Dominic Boyer, suffuses the crisis of liberalism of the contemporary

crisis of liberalism, whose "promised plurality of competing viewpoints and platforms within 'normal politics' seems more form than substance" (2013, 283; see also Boyer 2016).

The Finnish word *kriisi* was certainly in common use by the summer of 2015, when Finland, along with the rest of Europe, had to contend with a surge of newcomers at its borders (Holmes and Castaňeda 2016). Historically a far less hospitable destination for labor migrants and asylum seekers than its Nordic neighbors, Finland nevertheless received over 30,000 newcomers in 2015, most of whom were Iraqis and Syrians seeking asylum. The figure contrasted with previous years, when the annual tally of asylum seekers had been between 3000 and 4000.[2] "Migration crisis" (*maahanmuuttokriisi*) was inextricably associated with a perceived crisis of truth telling. The elderly woman calling *Kansanradio* about the pension guarantee rode the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment that was to engulf the program as the summer wore on. It was the crisis of free speech that *Kansanradio*'s editors wanted to avert when faced with the "firing" (*tykitys*) of such contributions upon their return from summer vacation. It had been their holiday cover who had taken and edited the call. An experienced editor herself, the holiday cover had sought to avoid the topic of immigration in order to leave decisions on it to those who edited the program on a regular basis. When she realized my interest in the online afterlife of the call she had edited, she grew increasingly concerned that I might concur with the caller that censorship had taken place. "It was embarrassing (*noloa*) for me to leave it out, but the discussion [about immigration] had not really started then," she explained, asking me not to write in my own work that anything had been censored.

Finland was in the throes of an intensifying debate about free speech when this complaint appeared on *Suomi24*. Across the press and various social media sites, the debate was framed

as being about *how* differences in opinion should be expressed. By 2016, the Chief Inspector of Police, echoing some politicians, was calling for new legislation to criminalize "hate speech" (*vihapuhe*), which had thus far been prosecuted in terms of existing laws on libel and incitement against a population group (*Uusi Suomi*, September 21, 2016).[3] Many established media outlets, some of which suspended their online fora for the public's comments, bemoaned the degeneration of debate into "shouting" under the cover of pseudonyms.[4] "I cannot think of a population group that has not been insulted," an editor wrote to justify the decision to suspend his paper's online forum, adding that anonymity as such had to be defended as a way of protecting "the downtrodden, minorities, or perhaps simply someone fearful of revenge by their boss" (*Nyt*, September 1, 2015). For those "shouting" on social media, the failure to mention *what* much of the debate was a symptom of the hypocrisy of the mainstream media. The justification to suspend the online forum made no mention of the word to which the above complaint had drawn attention: the immigrant.[5]

While pitting the "old" media against the "new," the debate in this battle for the truth about immigration arose from existing "intermediality between online forums and the mainstream media" (Horsti and Nikunen 2013, 496). Both drew on increasingly outspoken truth-tellers. While the newspaper editor was measured in his criticism of social media, Jari Tervo – a best-selling novelist, newspaper columnist, and TV personality – felt no need for such subtleties. In 2015, he used his blog essays on the national broadcaster's website to launch a series of scathing attacks on what he called the majority views on immigration (www.yle.fi/uutiset/blogi). He fired a broadside at "net Finns" (*nettisuomalaiset*), specifying the *Suomi24* chatroom as "the gutter of Finnish edification" (*suomalaisen hengenviljelyn viemäri*). Ridiculing the truths of internet discussions – "Niggers are stupid. Swedes are gay. Russians are smelly" – he affirmed that "Finland is a country of high education and low

civilization." As if to leave no room for ambiguity, he titled one essay "White Trash" (*Valkoinen roskaväki*). Protests against immigrants had spilled over from the internet to the vicinity of asylum seekers' reception centers. Isolated incidents of petrol bombs had been publicized in the mainstream media, as was the young man who had appeared wearing a Ku Klux Klan–style outfit while brandishing the Finnish flag. Tervo admonished those who had sought to understand such acts by referring to marginalization, unemployment, substance abuse, and Finnish society's other ills. "These racists are no marginalized people. Finnish has a precise term for people who want to burn and stone other people. They are trash."

Such plain speaking might compel scholars to resist moving from the observable crisis of truth telling to the notion of a wholesale crisis of liberalism, in which parody and satire seem the most plausible registers for public debate. While parodic and satirical registers could be used by both sides in the polarizing debate, it would be a mistake to miss the earnest telling of truth that both Tervo's broadsides and the complaint about censorship indicated. In the so-called post-truth moment, anthropologists must redouble their efforts to investigate truth-making from within (Mair 2017). Recent studies of parody and satire in political debates tell us as much, such as when they insist that "some satirists are more sincerely committed to truth telling than the political actors that our liberal democratic institutions authorize to act and speak on our behalf" (Boyer 2013, 282). It is "laughter as a refuge of sincerity" (Boyer 2013, 282) that makes satire a modality of truth telling. What these outspoken modalities have in common is *parrhêsia* or "fearless speech," a concept developed in ancient Greece but defined for our times by Michel Foucault as involving "the risk of breaking or ending the relationship to the other person which was precisely what made…discourse possible" (Foucault 2011, 11; see also Foucault 2001; 2010). Yet *parrhêsia*, as Foucault defines it,

makes assumptions about voice and the speaking subject that should caution us against framing the anthropological studies of free speech solely in its terms.

Foucault had in mind a particular kind of speaking subject when he defined *parrhêsia* as fearless speech. The speaking subject is, in fact, independent of other speaking subjects, even though they need one another for their discourse to be possible. The *parrhêsiast* covenant binds the person to his or her statement and to nothing or no one else: "I am the person who has spoken this truth. I therefore bind myself to the act of stating it and take on the risk of all its consequences" (Foucault 2010, 65). He identified "a fundamental bond between the truth spoken and the thought of the person who spoke it" (2011, 11). In this regard, Dominic Boyer extends the concept when he describes *parrhêsia* in a political movement in which "one is never really certain what its 'message' is supposed to be" (2013, 284). In point of fact, the Foucauldian *parrhêsiast* "leaves nothing to interpretation" (Foucault 2011, 16).

Although the concept of *parrhêsia* can help illuminate truth telling as practiced in polarized European debates on migration, Foucault's use of the concept is underlain with a particular ideology of voice (Weidman 2014). It is an ideology of the singular voice, related to what critics often regard as liberalism's foundational assumption dating back to the Enlightenment: "The subject's body, affections, and speech are regarded as *personal property* because they constitute the person" (Asad 2009, 30; emphasis original). In contrast, in another ideology of voice, one whose intellectual pedigree runs from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) work on polyphony to anthropological perspectives (Barber 1991; Englund 2015a; Hill 1995; Irvine 1990; Keane 2010), the subject can be constituted by a plurality of voices. Multivocality shifts attention from voice as an index of the person's interiority to the intersubjective constitution of truth.

This alternative approach to voice can uncover *parrhêsia*'s counterpoint in Finland's migration debate. Precisely because the genre is not satire or parody but *vox populi* on the people's radio, it is less a counterpoint to liberalism per se than to common anthropological critiques of liberalism. Editorial dilemmas and decisions throw into relief the practice of free speech as a carefully cultivated multivocality of viewpoints. Rather than being reducible to individual subjects, viewpoints are constituted in dialogue between editors and participants. *Kansanradio* is a mosaic of multiple viewpoints whose continuing viability in polarizing times depends on the editors' skill to maintain – not to break or end – the debate with the participants. Such skill is based on the editors' understandings of the sonic intimacies afforded by the radio as a medium and on the conscious distancing of their work from those modalities of truth telling that scholars might describe as *parrhêsia*. The relationship between the editor and his or her interlocutor on air is not symmetrical, but it rests on the intersubjective constitution of voice and truth (compare Cabot 2013). A hierarchy in which it is the editor who has the last word on what gets included on the program orders multivocality. The challenge for anthropology is to describe how it does so without turning the viewpoints into a monologic statement of truth.

These contentions come to life with a focus on the learning process by which a relatively new editor came to appreciate *Kansanradio's* specific approach to the value of free speech. He was haunted by personal qualms about failing to sustain dialogue on air when interlocutors' views sounded outrageous to him. His gradual realization that a need to be heard, rather than bigotry, drove many of the contributions to *Kansanradio* reaffirmed the figure of free speech as hierarchically ordered dialogue. In the conclusion, I will extend these observations into a reconsideration of the modalities by which truth telling takes place in historically specific

circumstances. Against generalizations about the crisis of liberalism stands the urgency of attending to its specific instances, such as the value of free speech in debating immigration on a popular radio program.

The pursuit of public service

Since its inception in 1979, *Kansanradio* has been broadcast continuously as a weekly program, currently as a 30-minute pre-recorded show at mid-day on Sundays. Its weekly audience can be as many as 400,000 listeners in a country of five-and-half million people. While 93 percent of Finns aged 9 and above listen to the radio at least once a week, *Kansanradio* is particularly popular among the elderly, as about 50 percent of Finns aged 65 and above regularly listen to Radio Suomi, the channel that broadcasts it, while under 10 percent of young adults and teenagers do so.[6] *Kansanradio*'s format has changed over the decades from in-depth interviews with experts and members of the public to the current format of assembled short contributions from listeners, mostly in their own voices in the form of recorded phone calls as well as the letters and emails that the editors read out on their behalf. For three hours after the show on Sundays, one of the editors answers phone calls, while for the rest of the week listeners can phone any time they like and leave their contribution in voice mail. The phone calls broadcast on the program range from monologues to exchanges between the caller and the editor answering the call. Two editors had assumed the main responsibility for the program during fieldwork in 2015-16: Jaana Selin, a middle-aged woman who had edited the program for over ten years, and Olli Haapakangas, a man in his thirties who had worked on short-term contracts for three years (see Figure 1).

[Please insert Figure 1 here]

Selin and Haapakangas allowed me to follow all aspects of their editorial work, from observing them as they took phone calls on Sundays to listening to various unedited calls to reading emails and letters the program received to discussing with them their views and choices as decisions had to be made on what to include on the program and how to edit contributions. The analysis presented in this article is also based on observations and conversations among a number of other individuals working at Yleisradio, including *Kansanradio's* other editors and its producer.

Selin and Haapakangas readily offered their reflections on their respective editorial styles, both separately and when we were all together in the same room. Selin, whom her colleagues and regular callers regarded as the program's stalwart, emphasized the need to cultivate "warmth and intimacy" (*lämpöä ja läheisyyttä*) with the callers. She explained that she wants to create an ambience (*tunnelma*) as though she and her interlocutor were roasting sausages over a fire in the wilderness, or perched on the benches of a sauna (*saunan lauteilla*). The intimacy that the latter image summons is particularly stark, because people in saunas are completely nude in Finland. She alluded to the "communicative prostheses" that serve as "compensations for lost presences" (Peters 1999, 214) in mass mediation, which in radio broadcasting have typically involved the sonic affordances of human voice and intimate speech registers.[7] Selin contrasted the medium of phone with that of the camera in making this sort of intimacy possible. The familiarity of one's own phone, used to contact the radio station from one's home, made the conversation flow, while the presence of a camera would "paralyze" (*mennä kipsiin*) many callers. A corollary of intimacy was the regularity with which some listeners called the program. Some of them would call only when they knew that it was Selin's turn to take calls, exchanging news about the weather and everyday events. In

contrast, Haapakangas regularly received a call sharing a listener's betting success that week, with no prospect of the call being included in the program. Such calls were innocuous examples of the varied contributions the editors received, some of which tested their patience and commitment to intimate exchange.

While Selin described her approach as non-interventionist, even preventing herself from using fillers such as "mm" when a caller was telling her a story, Haapakangas advocated and practiced a more engaged approach. As a newcomer, he evoked the style pursued by a recently retired male editor, who, in Haapakangas's view, would challenge those who called the program. Especially for the first two years of his work for *Kansanradio* until the migrant debate taught him to be more cautious, Haapakangas could be heard to speak on air virtually as much as his interlocutors did, offering his views on matters under discussion and sometimes begging to differ with the callers. He would express to me his surprise at the ease with which Selin admitted her ignorance on many of the issues they were confronted with in the listeners' contributions. She sounded much like the elderly, modestly educated members of the public who called in, while Haapakangas often made some attempt to confirm or disprove the facts callers asserted, if only through a quick Google search while on the phone, as I observed him doing. A graduate in accountancy with recent training in radio and TV broadcasting at a community college, Haapakangas would remark on Selin's lack of academic background, the latter having worked for Yleisradio for most of her adult life.

What united the two editors was their pride in the program's remit to put ordinary people's voices on air. When the migrant debate began to engulf even *Kansanradio*, they found themselves reflecting on the discrepancy between their personal conciliatory views and the approach taken by some of Finland's public intellectuals against bigotry and hate speech,

such as Jari Tervo mentioned above. While Tervo's comments did not win universal approval among Finland's public intellectuals, the editors of *Kansanradio* deplored them without my prompting as pitting "Finns against Finns."[8] One of them contrasted the comments with the conciliatory line taken by Pekka Haavisto, the Green Party runner-up in the 2012 presidential elections. This acknowledgement of preference also betrayed the editor's political sympathies, lending some credence to the criticism, often seen on social media, that Yleisradio operated in the "red-green bubble" (*punavihreä kupla*). This is a derogatory term for progressive politics, seen by its critics to represent the views of a young, urban, and highly educated electorate out of touch with the rest of the country. It appeared to have influenced governmental policy until 2015, when a center-right coalition replaced a coalition made up of Finland's conservative party, the Green Party, and two leftist parties. 2015 was also the first time the right-wing populist party The Finns entered government, despite having become the parliament's third largest party already in the 2011 elections. Yet the editors of *Kansanradio* abhorred expressing their own political views, whether on air or off, and emphasized to me both the pleasure and pain of working with *kansa*, the people.

Caught between the *parrhêsia* of public intellectuals such as Tervo and the contributors to their program, Selin and Haapakangas's dialogical approach to truth telling owed a great deal to the classic liberal commitment to public-service broadcasting. Although the Centre Party's continuing popularity in rural areas and small towns prevented Finland's Social Democratic Party from growing into quite as dominant a force as its sister party did in neighboring Sweden, social democracy in the form of a welfarist liberalism became entrenched in the post-war decades in Finland as elsewhere in the Nordic countries. Its grip on public policy had begun to diminish in the early 1990s, when Finland descended into a recession, followed by years of opposition politics for the Social Democrats. With or without them in

government, cuts to public spending came to preoccupy politicians across the party divides, and when the official status as a country in recession came back to haunt Finland in the 2000s, one result was a fifteen-percent reduction of Yleisradio's staff between 2005 and 2011 (Ala-Fossi 2015, 164-165).

The ideological suspicion, if not hostility, toward Yleisradio expressed on social media coincided with this widespread sense that the institution was too large and expensive. Working on the front line of public-service broadcasting, the editors of *Kansanradio* often felt they were under siege, not only from social media and the government, but also from their own management. It responded to new pressures by seeking younger audiences through multimedia projects, including an effort to harness the enthusiasm of Finland's YouTube video-makers.[9] The editors and their producer felt that, despite its popularity, *Kansanradio* was not appreciated enough by the broadcaster's top management, who seemed to think that its editing was an easy task. The producer found it unfortunate that she had to lobby the management to allocate two editors to it, instead of one.

Sananvapaus, "the freedom of the word," was a challenging value to uphold under these circumstances, but it also had more direct enemies in Finland's historical and contemporary experience. Despite its elevated status in the international rankings on press freedom, Finland has a history of self-censorship that *Kansanradio*'s elderly public was especially likely to remember. During the era of the Soviet Union, Finnish press, politicians, and intellectuals had been complicit in safeguarding the country's neutrality by avoiding topics and opinions that could have jeopardized its geopolitical location (Salminen 1999). "Finlandization" became a term in international relations for a position of compromise that Westerners might adopt toward the Soviet Union. Those who stepped out of line could feel the full wrath of

Finland's strongman president of nearly 30 years, Urho Kekkonen. In 2016, prime minister Juha Sipilä indulged in somewhat similar practices when Yleisradio started to report on his business interests" (*Helsingin Sanomat*, March 24, 2017). Finland's watchdog of journalistic standards found Yleisradio guilty of succumbing to pressure by the prime minister, whose many emails to news editors had been followed by modifications to already published stories and had led to the cancellation of further coverage. As a result, journalists resigned from Yleisradio while Finland moved down from first to third position in the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders.

Long before, and independently of, the so-called migrant crisis or the prime minister's emails to Yleisradio, the pursuit of free speech had been a contentious issue in Finland. Appeals to national consensus – from the contracts between employer organizations and trade unions to the unsayables of Finland's geopolitics – became a routinized way of regulating public speech. Both the editors and participants of *Kansanradio* carried traces of this past with them into the migrant debate. The program's *kansa* consisted of predominantly elderly men and women, often living well beyond the growth zones of the capital city region, many of whom called the program out of anger, desperation, or sheer loneliness. Although humorous and outright quirky contributions were encouraged by the editors, most calls, emails, and letters addressed somber topics. Before the migrant debate of 2015, stories and complaints about deprivation in Finland's sparsely populated regions dominated *Kansanradio's* airwaves. They often revolved around a lack of care for the elderly, exclusion from the country's celebrated internet connectivity, and inadequate pensions. Listening to these complaints could be painful for the editors, but their commitment to public-service broadcasting was set to substitute dialogue for their interlocutors' *parrhêsiast* diatribes. The migrant debate tested this commitment in particularly dramatic ways.

Regulating free speech

The challenges of editing *Kansanradio* were thus more specific than the general problem of providing the communicative prostheses mentioned above. How to regulate speech without seeming to do so was at the heart of the editors' daily struggles with the contributions they received. If all mass media involve an effort to mask their work of mediation (Mazzarella 2004), *Kansanradio* had to sound like it really did emanate from *kansa*. At the same time, its public had long been exposed to discourses that entailed awareness of the mediated nature of all mass media. A recent example is the way in which social media raised suspicions about the program's location within the "red-green bubble" mentioned above. The migrant debate of 2015 also carried traces of Finns' historical experiences of self-regulation in public speech. One contribution, made in vernacular Finnish that defies easy translation, came from a man who in an agitated tone of voice first described asylum seekers as *partajetsut*, a derogative term derived from "bearded Jesuses," and a little later checked himself, "I won't say what, because nowadays you don't really dare to speak out lest you have shackles on your feet, damn it, if you call them names."[10]

Selin, Haapakangas, and their producer had frequent off-air discussions on how to regulate speech. When a phone call reported an offense that had been committed by an "African-born" (*afrikkalaissyntyinen*) woman, they debated whether to allow the term to go on air (broadcast on November 22, 2015). A regular caller from Helsinki, known as Martti, described how the woman had boarded a bus and offered the driver a banknote of 50 Euros for a ticket worth less than two Euros. As Martti pointed out, bus drivers were obliged to give change for banknotes only up to 20 Euros. The woman was allowed to make the journey without paying

the fare, but Martti defined the incident as travelling without permission (*pummilla*), adding later that Finland already had enough freeriders (*siivellä eläjiä*). He also described his subsequent futile efforts to seek clarification from various officers on the proper procedure in such cases. Selin had taken the call and, uncharacteristically, challenged Martti on two counts. She firstly corrected Martti by saying that the passenger had not travelled "officially" (*virallisesti*) without a permission, because she had offered money. Selin also pointed out that it surely did not matter whether the passenger was "of African background" (*afrikkalaistaustainen*). "It could have been anyone" (*olisihan se voinut olla kuka tahansa*), she offered, followed by Martti's quick response that he had only wanted to mention that the passenger was a foreigner and the driver Finnish. "I don't know if she is able to read or if she knows" (*en mä tiedä, osaako hän lukea tai onko hänellä tiedossa*), but what had been violated, Martti stressed, was his sense of justice (*oikeustaju*).

Selin and *Kansanradio*'s producer had initially wanted to edit out the mention of the passenger's ethnic origin, but Haapakangas had insisted that it was crucial to the intervention Martti had made. Precisely by mentioning the ethnic origin, he reasoned, *Kansanradio* could show that it did not censor itself. Selin's conversation with Martti was aired on a Sunday when it was Haapakangas's turn to take phone calls, and he assembled for broadcast on the following Sunday a selection of the feedback Martti's intervention had received (broadcast on November 29, 2015). With ten separate comments coming on air, mixing female and male voices in equal measure, the feedback was exceptionally extensive for a single intervention. It was also exceptionally uniform in its condemnation of Martti's point of view. The comments ranged from a woman's sarcastic laughter to accusations of envy, from the observation that Martti had with his inquiries wasted officials' time worth of at least five bus fares to a male caller's description of how he had once paid the bus fare for a schoolboy who had lost his

money. Interesting was also the call that asserted buses as a public good, their main purpose being to transport people and not to make money. The feedback was overwhelmingly critical of Martti's complaint. It was striking, however, that Haapakangas did not in this instance seek to balance the views he put on air.

It was Martti's subsequent phone call that made Haapakangas reflect on what he had done by airing such an extensive – and consistent – barrage of critical feedback. Martti called *Kansanradio* on the same Sunday when the feedback was broadcast, with Haapakangas again taking the calls. The two men greeted each other like old acquaintances, but I noticed more tension in Haapakangas's voice than in Martti's. The latter began by saying that his previous call had received plenty of feedback but proceeded to his new topic without waiting for Haapakangas to speak. The call did not end up on air, but before it was over, Haapakangas expressed his wish that Martti had not been offended by the feedback. Martti assured him that he had not, but wanted to clarify something. Firstly, he said, he was neither envious nor a racist. He also assumed that most of the feedback had come from "the other side of the ring road" (*kehä kolmosen tuolta puolen*), a common phrase to refer to Finland beyond the capital city region, populated by people who did not know the extent of fraud in the capital's transport system. "Bygones are bygones" (*menneet menneitä*), Martti stated as the men finished the call amicably.

Afterward, Haapakangas expressed to me his regret that the feedback had sounded as though the intent was to attack and humiliate Martti. Haapakangas repeated his conviction, formed during the incidents described below, that *Kansanradio*'s hosts should never present themselves as more clever than their listeners. He reflected on the challenge of editing *Kansanradio* beyond the production of communicative prostheses for widely scattered,

mutually unknown listeners. The challenge was precisely how to communicate not with strangers but with the program's regular followers whose rapport with the program was critical to its success. The "stranger sociality" of mass-mediated publics (Warner 2002) was tempered here by such personal ties between the presenters and their listeners (compare Kunreuther 2014, 141).

The *parrhêsiast* prerogative for fearless speech was likewise far from Haapakangas's mind as he tried to make amends with Martti. Hailing from the north of Finland himself, with a penchant for speaking on air in his native dialect, Haapakangas had earlier described to me Martti as *kyylä* (snoop), an apparently typical autochthon of Helsinki keen to judge newcomers with thinly veiled envy. Coupled with the potentially racist undertone in Martti's intervention, this divide between Finns from Helsinki and from elsewhere further tested Haapakangas's commitment to *Kansanradio* as public service. He saw it as his duty to face the challenges not through confrontation but through dialogue. Dialogue, not *parrhêsia*, underpinned free speech in this modality of communication, whether on air or off.

The need to be heard

The figure of free speech that informed the editing of *Kansanradio* bore resemblance to classic liberal themes, such as John Stuart Mill's (1998) argument about the necessity to be able to compare and evaluate a range of information. The emphasis is not simply on the freedom to express opinions but on the importance of *listening* to various views (O'Rourke 2001). Liberalism's critics would do well to recognize the complex relationship between speaking and listening. Instead, as Marianne Constable has noted, they "tend to dwell on the liberal construction of autonomous rights-bearing subjects rather than on liberalism's

constitution of speaking subjects" (2005, 57). To her point anthropologists might add the constitution of listening subjects in order to interrogate what James Slotta has called "the association of self-determination with speaking and the association of submission with listening" in some theories of liberal democracy (2017, 330).

In Mill's idea of truth as a matter of "reconciling and combining oppositions" (1998, 54), speaking and listening are entwined in ways that go beyond the *parrhêsiast* prerogative for fearless speech. Free speech and press freedom in liberal Northern countries have certainly struck anthropologists as worthy subjects, but their focus on satire may have left them ill-equipped to explore the liberal mainstream. Whether it is "good" satire in the form of an experiment in politics (Boyer 2013) or "bad" satire in the form of cartoons that have offended many Muslims (Asad 2009; Keane 2009; Mahmood 2009), underlying these studies has been the tendency to expose the liberal mainstream's pathologies. The approach pursued in this article is to pose fresh questions about speaking and listening in the liberal imaginaries of free speech. In this approach, dialogue and multivocality must be addressed in their own right before subjecting them to an extraneous critique.

All public-service broadcasting, as the quintessential liberal institution, may have carefully apportioned opportunities to be heard as its *modus operandi*. At Yleisradio, Finland's official Finnish-Swedish bilingualism, and more recently the air time given to Sami and Russian, have given pluralism a noticeable presence (Horsti 2014). Yet a close ethnographic look at a specific instance of contested truth telling, such as *Kansanradio*, reveals the actual struggles involved in "reconciling and combining oppositions" (Mill 1998, 54). Just as the program had its traces of Finland's history of regulated speech, so too did its editors' quest for dialogue allude to consensus as a national virtue. For Haapakangas, the struggle was also a matter of

personal growth as he tried to inhabit the largely unwritten professional ethics bequeathed by other editors. Yleisradio's written ethical guidelines, which emphasize impartiality and pluralism among other values, gave editors such as Haapakangas few clues as to how professional practices were, in Liisa Malkki's words, "negotiated in real time in the messy, often chaotic realities of specific circumstances usually only partially understood" (2015, 37). His regret at having subjected Martti to a potentially humiliating barrage of criticism was all the more acute when he realized that he had violated the very principle he thought he had learnt through bitter experience in the preceding weeks. The migrant debate had initially provoked him to carry on with the interventionist style he had adopted when he had joined *Kansanradio* two years earlier. So vitriolic, and so ill-informed, were some of the contributions to the debate that he found himself disagreeing with his interlocutors to an unprecedented extent.

A combination of factors made him aware of the need to change tack. One was the personal feedback he received from strangers, friends, and colleagues in email messages and phone calls. The other was his reflections on the limits of *parrhêsia*, as seen above in his and Selin's dismay at a popular writer's attacks on Finns. The consequence of these factors was his gradual realization that his elderly interlocutors were compelled to call *Kansanradio* out of a need to be heard. Rather than confronting them with the *parrhêsiast* prerogative for fearless speech, the truth as consensus was more likely to emerge when he engaged in dialogue on other matters than those that had ostensibly made them call *Kansanradio*.

Two phone calls in the fall of 2015 illustrate the evolution of Haapakangas's approach. Both were explicit in their attack on immigration, but between them, Haapakangas had moved from confrontation to reconciliation, from speaking back to listening. Reflecting on the first

of these phone calls with me when we discussed them later in the year, Haapakangas pointed out how the entire episode of *Kansanradio* had created an ambiance in which his exchange with an elderly female caller was bound to be heard as confrontational (broadcast on October 4, 2015). Edited by Selin, it began with an agitated male voice bidding farewell to *Kansanradio*, describing it as a "shit program" (*paskaohjelma*) bent on "gratifying" (*mielistellä*) refugees. It was followed by another male voice that urged Finns to accept migrants and refugees with "open arms" (*avosylin*). The ensuing conversation between Haapakangas and the elderly woman was then the first time when the program's host was heard to speak to a listener during the episode. Haapakangas described to me the somewhat fraught discussions that had preceded the broadcast, with Haapakangas doubting whether the exchange should be aired at all and Selin and the high-level controller they consulted insisting that it should go on air. For Haapakangas, a further disappointment, in addition to the ambiance in which it appeared, was that Selin had cut it even shorter than what Haapakangas had intended because of time constraints. As a result, many who gave him feedback afterward commented that it sounded as though Haapakangas had slammed the phone on the elderly woman's ear.

The woman did not give her name or place of residence but introduced herself as "a retired over 80-year old granny" (*eläkkeellä oleva yli 80-vuotias mummo*). She started by asserting that the predominantly young and male persons among the asylum seekers arriving in Finland were coming as cheap labor force. She then asked where the women and children were. Haapakangas was quick to offer an explanation: "It surely is now a bit difficult situation there in the Middle East. It just happens to be the thing that is taking place in the world at the moment, and it has been coming for many years. Now the situation is bad in that people are on the move and would have to put somewhere." The granny did not respond to Haapakangas

but stated that she had twice been a refugee herself, but she used the historically loaded term *evakko* rather than the general term for a refugee, *pakolainen*. *Evakko* refers to a person who had to leave the Karelia region when the Soviet Union took over a part of it during the Second World War. She described how she and her family had been forced to stay "under a birch a whole week" (*koivun alla kokonainen viikko*). The current migrants and asylum seekers in Finland compared unfavourably with this predicament, entitled as they were to mattresses and other comforts. She bypassed Haapakangas's effort to engage her about her life history and proceeded to assert that "we Finns have been more resilient" (*me suomalaiset ollaan oltu sitkeempiä*). The rest of the broadcast exchange conveyed an increasingly tense mood between her and Haapakangas.

Granny: I hope it will be a proper frosty winter. [Haapakangas chuckles.] Let them go and plunge in their fine gear into the piles of snow.

Haapakangas: Why are you so angry? It's not those men's fault that they come here.

Granny: Whose fault is it then?

Haapakangas: It is this world that has gone awry=[11]

Granny: =Why aren't they there fighting? What would have happened to Finland, if Finns had done the same?

Haapakangas: Well, if Finland had been in that sort of a situation where there are several battling troops, one supported by the USA, another by China, and another by the Arab countries, and it had become that sort of a battle field where civilians can't live. In the Winter War [of 1939-40] and elsewhere people were fighting on the front lines, here it's a bit different. You can't be in a place like that, you can't just stay there to fight, you don't know whom you are fighting for. It is my view that there aren't good and bad there, so that you fight for someone good against the bad. They are all bad. It's like a chaos.

Granny: Men run away. It is as I said, they beat feet (*käpälämäkeen*).

Haapakangas: One thing I say is that no one wants to leave their home. Someone from Tornio [a town in Finnish Lapland] doesn't want to go to Iraq, and an Iraqi doesn't want to go to Tornio. Everybody wants to be at their home, but sometimes it is necessary to go.

Granny: Well, who lied to them then that you can live in Finland without working?

Haapakangas: Well, it must not be like that here, it must not be possible to get by without working. If you're a strong young man, you must be given work. You must be taught the language and you must be put to work.

Granny: So, it is my view that these must not be pampered (*lelliä*). When the winter and snow come, let's just put them to live in tents.

Haapakangas: Anyway (*no niin*).

Granny: These are the retired granny's greetings.

Haapakangas: Bye to you (*Hei vaan sulle*).

In a conversation with me, Haapakangas observed, somewhat ruefully, that the exchange as it was broadcast did not include the humorous banter that the granny and he had exchanged. Listening to the unedited call, the only humor I heard was sarcastic, as when the granny responded to Haapakangas's closing best wishes for the coming winter with the comment that she was hoping for "proper skiing conditions" (*kunnon hiihtokelejä*). The allusion was to the frosty and snowy winter she had mentioned earlier, and in another evocation of this theme, edited out from the program, she had urged "all Finns to throw snowballs at these" (*kaikkia suomalaisia heittämään näitä lumipalloilla*). Haapakangas admonished her that it was not appropriate to ask anyone to throw snowballs at adults, to which she responded sardonically, "They would get a feel for snow" (*tulisi tuntuma lumeen*). Other phrases that had been edited out included her reference to asylum seekers with *lässykät*, a highly derogative term

translating approximately as “lazybones.” Edited out was also her declaration that she would no longer give “a single Euro or Cent to the Red Cross campaigns.”

In his post-production reflections, Haapakangas sought to identify the issues that he could have pursued more profitably with the angry granny. He could not muster much support for her use of the term *evakko*, describing it to me as a “Nazi term,” not because its users were necessarily far-right fanatics, but because its high moral ground in the Finnish debate foreclosed any objections or alternative points of view.[12] The granny’s use of this key term in Finnish nationalism sat in interesting ways with her opening point that the young Middle Eastern men were coming to Finland as cheap labor force. In another deleted phrase, she had laid the blame on “bourgeois political parties” (*porvaripuolueet*) for bringing such people to Finland. Within her apparent bigotry was thus rhetoric associated with leftist politics. Yet it was another comment left out of the program that caught Haapakangas’s attention. “This was the actual issue,” he remarked when the granny mentioned deteriorating health services and added, “especially if you are losing your eye sight” (*varsinkin jos on menettämässä näkönsä*). Haapakangas regretted that he had not facilitated meaningful dialogue by seizing on what sounded like the granny’s most personal current concern.

Haapakangas found an opportunity to put his new approach to practice when an elderly man, introducing himself as Oskari from Southern Lapland, called *Kansanradio* (broadcast on November 8, 2015). Haapakangas later admitted to me that his exchange with the granny had been in the back of his mind (*takaraivossa*) when Oskari began his call by warning Finns against the country’s imminent Islamization. He stated early on that “the color will change in parliament when these Islamists will get their candidates through, even the majority of seats.” He predicted that “churches will be burnt and white Christian people will be taken to serve oil

states.” Haapakangas allowed these remarks to make it to the broadcast version, commenting only, “What a vision” (*aikamoinen visio*). He deleted Oskari’s subsequent comment that the world had over one billion Islamists, having in vain tried to make him distinguish between Muslims and Islamists, and also Oskari’s claim that Finland’s foreign minister, who was the leader of the populist The Finns party, had declared the asylum seekers as unwanted in the country. What Haapakangas used was the jovial conversation that ensued once he had remarked, “Who lives will see” (*ken elää niin näkee*). This led Oskari to mention that he was born in 1947 – “a man at his best” (*mies parhaassa iässä*), Haapakangas quipped – and had participated in building railways as a migrant worker. Haapakangas later admitted to me that he had neither knowledge of nor interest in the railways, but seized on this detail with enthusiasm in his voice. He encouraged Oskari to share his memories from this period, which he did with their conversation acquiring an increasingly warm tone. Without referring back to what Oskari had said in his opening remarks, Haapakangas finished the call by asking Oskari to hold his head up (*pää pystyyn*).

“One must strive for harmony whenever possible,” Haapakangas summed up his lesson to me. When I suggested that he had steered the direction of his conversation with Oskari, he reluctantly accepted it but pointed out that Oskari “had not resisted it” (*ei hän vastustellut*). My suggestion cast some doubt over the editors’ claim to broadcast people’s voices virtually without mediation; in fact, they appeared at times to deflect, if not mute, views that they found unpalatable. Yet it is important to attend to what Haapakangas himself thought he was learning during the migrant debate. “The need to be heard” (*tarve tulla kuulluksi*) was the realization that came to inform his approach. He and Selin often reflected on the conditions producing neediness in contemporary Finland, such as widespread loneliness and isolation (see also Malkki 2015). Where Malkki discovered “domestic neediness [as] one source of

international generosity" (2015, 164), the editors understood neediness to generate a range of responses to humanitarian issues. Although many of the contributions to *Kansanradio* did advocate generosity and compassion – and were not simply selected by the editors to counterbalance other views – Haapakangas's understanding of neediness reinforced his sense of professional ethics when encountering the depths of bigotry that callers expressed on *Kansanradio*. For dialogue to be possible when polarization seemed to have taken over both social and mainstream media, Haapakangas felt that he had to listen more carefully than ever to what his needy interlocutors really wanted to say.

Another liberal imaginary of truth telling

The editors of *Kansanradio* pursued the value of free speech against considerable odds. Bigoted callers, hostile social media, and their management's lack of enthusiasm all tested their commitment to public-service broadcasting. Free speech as a carefully cultivated multivocality of viewpoints contrasted, in the editors' understanding, with certain high-profile, confrontational interventions by public intellectuals, such as the writer Jari Tervo. The *parrhêsiasts* they encountered while editing the program were not public intellectuals but elderly Finns calling the public broadcaster often from remote or deprived parts of the country. Whatever their own convictions about immigration, the editors abhorred the polarization that had gripped the Finnish migrant debate. The editors' quest for harmony and dialogue was paved with what they considered to be their personal failings, as Haapakangas intimated in his self-criticism. The general imperative to mask the work of mediation in public-service broadcasting met with the specific, at times personal, qualms about how to handle an explosive debate on immigration.

The editors' quest to go beyond *parrhêsia* can inspire a similar move in anthropology. What is required is attention to other modalities of truth telling than fearless speech in which the speaker takes the risk of "offending the other person, of irritating him [sic], of making him angry and provoking him to conduct which may even be extremely violent" (Foucault 2011, 11). Paradoxically, as one particular modality of truth telling, *parrhêsia* may be closer to the kinds of liberal, if not libertarian, assumptions that anthropologists are keen to expose for their ethnocentrism than to the dialogical and multivocal truth telling described in this article.

Insofar as possessive individualism has rendered the liberal notions of individual rights and freedoms anthropologically suspect, we might pause on its afterlives in seemingly radical ideas such as Foucault's *parrhêsia*. It issues "a challenge to the bond between the two interlocutors (the person who speaks the truth and the person to whom this truth is addressed)" (Foucault, 2011, 11). Bonds connect interlocutors, whose capacity for disconnection through *parrhêsia* Foucault calls "courage" (2011, 11). Whether his view on personhood here conveys *intellectual courage* to think beyond possessive individualism is a moot point. The idea that persons exist as individuals prior to the bonds or relationships that connect them has been exhaustively interrogated by anthropological critiques of socialization (Strathern 1988). Possessive individualism inheres in this notion of subjectivity that appears to assume the singularity and equality of voice. As fearless speech, *parrhêsia* "is articulated by people who are free and equal" (Dyrberg 2014, 87).

While critical scholars celebrate *parrhêsia* as Foucault's effort to "reintroduce politics in relation to ethics" (Fassin 2014, 433; see also Folkers 2016), we might ask what another liberal imaginary of truth telling would look like if it did not begin from the assumption of possessive individualism. One could begin from where *parrhêsia* was first coined: ancient

Athens. By making *parrhêsia* a matter of discursive politics between interlocutors, Foucault dissociates it from "*parrhêsia* at Athens [which] does not allow for the individual self-expression or autonomy so important in contemporary discourse. It rests on serving a regime that depends on the open expression of its citizens' views" (Saxonhouse 2006, 96). If liberalism in its Lockean guise came to posit a contract between the individual and an external government, the freemen of Athens lived in a city where there was no such external body with the potential to oppress them. "Freedom of speech," therefore, "was the tool of self-government, not a bulwark" (Saxonhouse 2006, 30). In their quest to describe alternative modalities of truth telling, anthropologists, in contrast, could start from the contemporary Global South so as to confront stereotypes about liberalism's "Western" provenance (Englund 2017). Or they can, as in this article, attend to the liberal mainstream in the Global North with an interest in multivocality. Either way, they could recover truth as an assemblage of multiple voices in which dialogue binds interlocutors to one another rather than to a monologic act of stating the truth.

Even when Foucault considered how one might respond to the *parrhêsiast* truth, he described it in terms of acceptance rather than dialogue: "The person to whom *parrhêsia* is addressed will have to demonstrate his [sic] greatness of soul by accepting being told the truth" (2011, 13). In Mill's (1998) defense of the liberty of thought and discussion, the emphasis placed on listening, and not just speaking, brings out better the intersubjective dimension in truth telling. Much has been made of the alleged complicity of this defence with "an ideological form of the capitalist state" (Roberts 2004, 75). Without doubting it as one of the possible (ab)uses of Mill's thought, it can also be ethnographically rewarding to see the principles associated with his thought from the perspective of those who actually pursue free speech in a contemporary liberal institution, such as Finland's public broadcaster. As the exchanges

described above have shown, voice was neither singular nor equally distributed on *Kansanradio*. Voice – from its sonic affordances to the messages it conveyed – was constituted in dialogue. It was irreducible to the singular bodies from which it emanated. Finding out what a caller really wanted to say was a matter of finding a voice for both the editor and the caller through dialogue.

A key difference between the dialogical and *parrhêsiast* pursuit of free speech revolves around the extent to which successful dialogue, as it was practiced over *Kansanradio*'s airwaves, depended on the hierarchy so inimical to *parrhêsia* (see e.g. Dyrberg 2014, 97-100; Saxonhouse 2006: 30). Contributors to *Kansanradio* submitted themselves to the editors who had the authority to decide on what went on air. Their authority was neither infallible nor shielded from criticism, but it was based on the largely unarticulated professional ethics underpinning their commitment to public service. As the ones charged with "reconciling and combining oppositions" (Mill 1998, 54), the editors carried the burdens of Finland's histories of regulated speech and a public culture based on consensus – to the point of changing the subject from immigration to something else that could generate consensus. Just as there is "no single liberal conception of freedom" (Laidlaw 2014, 142), so too must the anthropology of free speech and truth telling explore how the value of free speech is pursued through historically specific and often hierarchical relationships. Only with such openness can we discern an alternative to the condition in which everyone speaks and no one listens, or, in the era of social media, the more there are opportunities to say something in public, the less many people feel they are being heard.

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Notes

[1] *Suomi* is the Finnish word for "Finland." *24* refers to the round-the-clock availability of this social medium.

[2] As per the official statistics available at http://tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto.html

[3] As elsewhere in Europe (Asad 2009), another piece of legislation was based on blasphemy, but legal experts considered it "old-fashioned" (Keskinen 2012, 270).

[4] *Nyt*, the weekend supplement of *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's biggest daily, and *MTV*, the oldest and largest commercial television channel, were the most prominent media to suspend the online comment fora.

[5] *Maahanmuuttaja* in Finnish. Its literal translation is a "someone who moves into a country." As elsewhere in Europe, terms such as asylum seeker (*turvapaikanhakija*), refugee (*pakolainen*), and immigrant were often used interchangeably in everyday speech.

[6] The National Radio Research conducted by the private company Finnpanel monitors listening on a regular basis. See https://www.finnpanel.fi/tulokset/radio/krt/2017/22/tavoittavuus.html and https://www.finnpanel.fi/tulokset/radio/krt/2017/22/kanavaosuusikaryhma.html

[7] In the anthropology of the radio, intimacy has emerged as a major theme, whether in the study of psychotherapeutic talk shows (Matza 2009), of new senses of the self in a democratizing public culture (Kunreuther 2014), or of kinship mediated over the airwaves (Englund 2015b; Fisher 2016). For further themes in the anthropology of the radio, see Bessire and Fisher (2012).

[8] Another popular writer, Jyrki Lehtola, accused Tervo of racism and "arrogant generalization on the basis of a few individuals" (*ylimielistä yleistämistä muutamien yksilöiden avulla*). "Tervon kirjoitus on mainio esimerkki siitä , mitä rasismi on" [Tervo's Text is a Fine Example of What Racism Is], *Ilta-Sanomat*, October 3, 2015.

[9] The project addressing YouTube enthusiasts interestingly also drew upon the concept of *kansa*. Branded as YLE FOLK, it carried the word "folk" to signal inclusiveness, with a view to "making the citizens' voice [sic] heard" (*antaa kansalaisten tulla kuulluksi*). In practice, the contributors were overwhelmingly under 30 years of age. See http://folk.yle.fi/

[10] *En viitti sanoa miksä, no nykyään kun ei oikein uskalla sanoa mitään ääneen kun on kohta hilut kintuissa, hitto, jos menet vähän niitä nimittelemään.* Broadcast on September 13, 2015. The Finnish word for Jesus is *Jeesus*, but *jetsut* in *partajetsut* had pluralized it and rendered it humorous, evoking bearded Muslims rather than the Christ. *Hilut kintuissa,* "shackles on one's feet," is a humorous idiom for imprisonment.

[11] *Se on tää maailma on päin honkia*= "=" denotes overlapping speech. I provide the Finnish vernacular only for the most idiomatic expressions in this exchange.

[12] A week after the granny's contribution was broadcast, *Kansanradio* carried comments that rejected the use of *evakko* in the current migrant debate. The refugees this term depicts, it was pointed out, moved within a familiar cultural and linguistic landscape unlike the current asylum seekers coming from afar.