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## **Between the Ordinary and the Deeply Religious – Re/Negotiating the Religious and the Secular in the Finnish Parliamentary Debate on Assisted Reproduction**

### Abstract:

*In this article I analyze a recent debate preceding the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments in Finland (Act number 1237/2006, given 22.12.2006). The discussion about the government proposed act was framed as a 'value-debate', with two major discursive strands forming the basis for arguments put forth by the various members of parliament: a socially conservative discourse on gender and sexuality based on an interpretation of Christianity and a discourse on Finnish equality politics. In this article I give a reading, based on queer theoretical insights as well as recent theoretization of post-secularism, of the aforementioned discourses and their interconnectedness. I question the notion that the 'values' operating in the debate can be fully differentiated into categories of 'religious' or 'secular', and further argue that maintaining such a division might obscure connections that are fundamental to heteronormative conceptions of kinship. The aim of the article is to destabilize an understanding of Finland as secular and egalitarian.*

### **1. Introduction**

I fully understand that deeply religious people condemn that single women or lesbian couples could receive fertility treatments. But I do not understand how we ordinary, less religious people, judgmentally can say that there should be no fatherless children, when thousands of bastards are born and when there are divorce children, as many of us here have told. How do you propose to ban this with some act? MP Sirpa Asko-Seljavaara, Coalition Party, 12.10.2006, PTK 100/2006 VP) (In Finnish)

During the past decades debates regarding queer<sup>1</sup> kinship have taken center stage in organized politics in several European countries. In this article I analyze a recent debate preceding the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments in Finland.<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of this debate different understandings of gender, sexuality, family, kinship, tradition, religion, secularism and Finnishness emerge. Finland is seen as not only a model country of functioning welfare and social security systems, but also as a largely secular nation and as having a high level of gender-equality, as are the rest of the Nordic countries (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 5). In this article I question the understanding of Finland as a secular and egalitarian nation by using the debate on assisted reproduction as a case study. This is done via a deconstructive reading, based on queer theoretical insights as well as theories on post-secularism. In this article I discuss two discursive strands that emerge within the debate: a socially conservative discourse on gender and sexuality based on an interpretation of Christianity and a discourse on Finnish equality politics. I argue that the analysis of what is being said in the debate has to be done by taking into account the underlying power and interconnectedness of the aforementioned discourses.

Unless otherwise stated, all of the examples I highlight and analyze in this article are taken from the minutes of a parliamentary debate on the proposed Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments that took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2006<sup>3</sup>. The minutes from which the quotes I analyze are taken are in Finnish or Swedish and all the translations are my own. I use the term ‘assisted reproduction’ when referring to the debate that preceded the actual implementation of legislation on assisted reproduction, and ‘The Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments’ only when referring to the actual act.

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<sup>1</sup> By queers or “the queer” I am in this article referring to people who do not identify or fit into a heteronormative framework. In this article queer citizen refers to parents who do not fit into a heterosexual nuclear family-framework, and who are the imagined target group of the legislation being discussed in the parliament on the 12th of October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The English translation of the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments (1237/2006): <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2006/en20061237.pdf>, (accessed December 21, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the parliamentary debate, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006: [http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk\\_100\\_2006\\_ke\\_p\\_1.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk_100_2006_ke_p_1.shtml) (accessed December 10, 2008)

## 2.1 The debate on assisted reproduction as a debate on values

During the past ten years Finnish GLBTQI<sup>4</sup> citizens have become increasingly visible not only in popular culture and media, but also in the field of legislation and state politics. The Act on Registered Partnerships<sup>5</sup> from 2001, and the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments from 2006, and the public discussions that were connected to them, both opened up questions about the meaning of family, kinship, reproduction and sexuality. Different identity categories were also produced/constructed in these discussions, most notably ‘the lesbian’ and ‘lesbian couple’. These identity categories were largely invisible during the debate on registered partnerships – there the focus was primarily on homosexual men as the object of legislation (Charpentier 2000). One explanation for this is that the debate became both implicitly and explicitly focused on gay men, as often seems to be case when ‘homosexuality’ is discussed (in both media or in academia), lesbians and queer women remain invisible (Garber 2005).

Both the debate on registered partnerships and the debate on assisted reproduction were framed by members of parliament (MPs) and the media as ‘value-discussions’. Briefly, this meant in the case of the parliamentary debates that a MPs positioning in favor of, or against the proposed Act not only expressed her/his view of a certain legislative measure, but also was understood as an expression of basic values. Sometimes the MPs stated the foundation of their basic values outright, e.g. “As a Christian I believe that the heterosexual nuclear family is the best environment for children and therefore I cannot condone this act”, or “It is against the principles of equality to deny lesbian couples access to reproductive technology”. In these debates, what are being constructed are not only discourses regarding gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship, but also entire value platforms. Apart from discussing whether or not lesbians and single women should have access to assisted reproduction, the MPs debated the role of Christianity and the state Church in (secular) politics, secularism, marriage as an institution, welfare politics, equality politics and so on. The framing of the debate on assisted reproduction

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<sup>4</sup> GLBTQI = gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersexed

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of the Act on Registered Partnerships (950/2001): <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2001/en20010950.pdf>, (accessed December 21, 2008)

as a value-discussion put pressure on the MPs to be confessional – in other words to make clear from ‘where’ they are speaking:

There has here tonight been a demand for a discussion on values, and I think some of the MPs have had their basic values questioned, and I want to now testify, that I consider myself a Christian, I am a member of the evangelical church, but I feel distant from a church that does not support people’s equality. If this is the case, I feel distant from such a church. MP Jouni Backman, Social Democrats

The above example is quite telling of the discursive terrain that the MPs had to navigate through. Through a close-reading of the parliamentary minutes I have identified two discursive strands that emerge within the debate: a discourse on gender and sexuality rooted in a certain interpretation of Christian teachings/canons and a discourse on Finnish equality politics<sup>6</sup>. There are a number of ways in which these discourses are interconnected.

## 2.2. Values, sexuality and religion

First of all, both the discourses make use of a two-sex model<sup>7</sup>, with naturalized identity categories such as man, woman, father, mother, lesbian. Furthermore, the framing of the debate as a value-debate was not questioned. The framing has a number of effects: firstly the idea that values and sexuality are connected becomes normalized, and secondly (in connection to the normalization) that statements regarding sexuality can be grounded on values. After a presentation I gave at a

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<sup>6</sup> “Genealogically speaking, for example, Finnish equality discourse has been a site for identity construction for particular kind of “woman” that stands in a particular relationship both to the “man” (the Finnish man) and the nation. The history of Finnish women (written in the 1980s and early 1990s) is a history of equality, but also of normalized heterosexuality (Honkanen, 1997).” (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 17)

<sup>7</sup> The term two-sex model builds on work by Thomas Laqueur (1990) and Yvonne Hirdman (2001), and is widely used in Finnish/Nordic Women’s/Gender- studies. The basic premise of the two-sex model is that there are two biologically separate and mutually exclusive (and complimentary) genders. Kattis Honkanen argues that: The language of equality is a hegemonic arena for the construction of the two-sex model. It allows for various combinations of sexed meanings to be circulated and articulated. Equality discourses are sites where a language of woman and man is produced and where power is constantly negotiated in relation to man and woman (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 29).

conference, one of the members of the audience asked why it seems to be that political discussions on morals or values seem to be dominated by religious discourse? My response was that it has to do with the (political) history of Finland, and with the role that Christianity has played in the formulation on what has been seen as the commonly acceptable morals and values for the Finnish citizen<sup>8</sup>. Over time the explicit power of the Church and its teaching on the lives, morals and values of Finnish citizens has decreased and become challenged by other ideals and ideologies. Teemu Taira (2007, 1) states, that Finland has changed discursively from a religiously and culturally homogenous society to a more pluralistic and heterogeneous one, where Christianity has come to be defined more as a ‘cultural heritage of Finnishness than ‘religion’. This according to Taira “implements a certain hierarchy in which a liberal form of *Christianity is privileged and fused with pluralism and moderate secularism*” (2007, 1, emphasis in original). There is thus also a multiplicity of values and morals that inform the arguments put forth by the MPs in the debate on assisted reproduction. However, I question the notion that these values can be fully differentiated into those that fall into categories of ‘religious’ or ‘secular’.

There were a few challenges to a discursive naturalization of the connection between values, sexuality and religion. The opening quote of this article can be read as an example of this: “*I fully understand that deeply religious people condemn that single women or lesbian couples could receive fertility treatments...*” The MP, Sirpa Asko-Seljavaara, actually repeats the statement almost verbatim later on in the debate. There is a myriad of ways that this statement could be read, however, I find the tone of the statement to be somewhat sarcastic with its allusions to ‘bastards’, a term that is extremely outdated – the aim seems to be to connect deeply religious people to the past/pre-modernity, and by the use of the term ordinary for less religious people imply that the deeply religious people are an exceptional minority. A rhetoric that ties religiosity to backwardness and homophobia is frequently employed in current public discussions about Islam in Europe (Scott 2007, Butler 2008). The common denominator in these examples is the othering of religion/religiosity by stressing the modernity and ‘superior logic’ of a secular standpoint, especially when it comes to questions regarding gender or sexuality (Pitcher and Gunkel 2008, Butler 2008). This rhetoric is, however, not especially efficient in the case of the

debate on assisted reproduction since the connection between tradition and religion is presented by the opposition of the government act as exactly what superior values are built upon in the first place.

A further common factor in the statements by MPs that oppose the proposed act is what Sanna Karkulehto calls heteronostalgia (2004, 58), a longing back to an imagined time of ‘innocence’ when men were men, women were women, and there were no queers.

Today, as this discussion has shown, there is a multiplicity of values and multiple ways of relating to different values, and so it follows that our idea of the family is very different and that there are different types of families, and one could say, that the traditional one, based on the marriage between a man and a woman is being destroyed in this society, and that makes me very sad. I find that those traditions, that are included in the Finnish Christian tradition, have been based upon that family, marriage between a man and a woman, is a good foundation. We humans of course commit adultery, don’t love enough and so on, and the result of this is negligence and sickliness, but that does not mean that the relationship between a man and a woman is not foundationally well intentioned. MP Leena Rauhala, Christian Democrats

Taking a stand for so called traditional values seems to occur when heterosexuality is threatened by the ‘queer’. Michael Cobb writes about the ‘rise of values voters’ (2005, 251) as result of an increased visibility of queers (see also Castelli, 2007). The queer, in debates on queer civil rights, thus becomes a ‘constitutive outside’ of values. Attempts to formulate values as non-discriminatory, in the debate on assisted reproduction, seemed to necessitate a defense of the legitimacy, or indeed the normalcy, of non-normative sexualities or forms of kinship:

Sexual orientation does not belong to the realm of free choice. In my value-world all people are equal, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation, or type of family they represent. I support the Government proposition. It will not open the gates of hell, but it will let the current, moderate treatment practice continue. (MP Susanna Rahkonen, Social Democrats.)

There are two particularly interesting points in the above statement: firstly, notice how religion is brought into the argument in a rather extravagant fashion by the invocation of ‘the gates of hell’. A second interesting point to note is how the concept of free choice works in the argument. Michael Warner, commenting on the search for the so called gay gene and the attempts to legitimize homosexuality writes: “Both sides seem to agree on an insane assumption: that only immutable and genetic sexuality could be legitimate, that if being gay could be shown to be learned, chosen, or partly chosen, then it could be reasonably forbidden.” (1999, 9)

One can interpret Susanna Rahkonen’s argument as case in point with regards to Warner, or one could read her as saying that a woman willingly can be in a same-sex relationship at some point in her life and then be in a opposite-sex relationship in the next, or be single – and that these relationships are not really a matter of choice and that she therefore should be entitled to fertility treatments regardless of what kind of relationship she is in (or not). Rahkonen’s statement nonetheless leaves the question of what would happen if sexuality were a choice unanswered. The notion of sexual fluidity does not sit well in debates regarding legislation where GLBTQI citizens are the object – these are debates that are dependent on an identity politics with clearly defined borders as I will show next.

### **3.1 Queer kinship and legislation**

The Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments (1237/2006), which states that *all* women, regardless of their marital status, have legal access to fertility treatments, was finally passed in 2006. Up until this point Finland was the only Scandinavian/Nordic country that did not have any kind of legislation on assisted reproduction. Mainly, this was due to the fact that a consensus around the right of single women and lesbian couples to have access to assisted reproduction could not be reached. Because the issue was constructed as problematic in reference to these identity categories, the proposed acts were either withdrawn or shelved (Juvonen 2006, Jämsä, Mustola & Sorainen 2005). In practice, the situation was such that it was up to the fertility clinics and their doctors to decide whether or not to give treatment. The new Act also ended the possibility

of using anonymous gametes; it states that only sperm and egg cells from known donors can be used for fertility treatments in Finland. According to the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments, a child has the right to know the identity of the donor who's gametes were used when the child turns 18 (chapter 4 § 23).

The demand for the non-anonymity of donors was in the debate argued for mainly by claiming that it is an essential human need, 'the right of the child', to know 'where he/she came from'. This argument was, at least on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, completely uncontested. In fact, it was part of one of the arguments that the proponents of the act used most frequently. There are several problematic issues in this line of argumentation; firstly it is blatantly biologist, assuming that identity is essentially tied to biology, and secondly, it reinforces an idea found in psychoanalytical and anthropological thinking, namely that two sexes need to be present, even if only in a symbolic manner, for the child to be properly culturally intelligible – i.e. that culture itself is dependent on the presence of the male and female (Butler 2004). The most commonly used argument in favor of granting lesbians and single women to fertility treatments is thus tied to the reiteration of heteronormativity.

As I mentioned previously, the previous significant debate regarding legislation on non-heteronormative kinship issues in Finland was the debate regarding registered partnerships. A family commission set up by the Ministry of Justice in the spring of 1992 proposed the possibility of registering gay/lesbian partnerships. It took ten years for the registered-partnership act to be passed (Juvonen 2002, 53). During these ten years the debate circulated around the reasons for, and nature of, homosexuality. Due to the limited space I will not discuss the arguments brought up in that debate at length here. I will rather now focus briefly on some of the ways in which debates on same-sex marriage and queer kinship in a broader sense have been thought and problematized within the field of queer studies, and more specifically, some of the possible consequences of what happens when queer kinship(s) become legitimized by the state.

### 3.2. State legitimized queers?

In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Judith Butler ponders the question of what the implications of so called the turn to marriage might be for queer politics, for a politics that strives to proliferate and support sexual practices outside of marriage and the obligations of normative kinship-relations. The issue of gay marriage has become, or has been constructed as, one of the key issues of contemporary gay and lesbian politics. Michael Warner states that the debate over gay marriage has been one-sided and not reflective enough when it comes to the implications for queer politics if the campaign for gay marriage (in the US) were to succeed (1999). Finland does not have ‘gay marriage’, but registered partnerships. The framing of the debate differs to the US debate on several accounts, primarily in that the issue was not discussed in terms of gay marriage but in terms of registered partnerships. These registered partnerships have thus far not been equal to hetero-marriage(s), for example, the government proposition did not include the right to adopt. Although the Finnish debate was heated, the act on registered partnerships was not a politically decisive issue in the same way as gay marriage was in, for example, the US presidential election in 2004 (Duggan 2004). Voting for the act on registered partnerships did not adversely affect the political careers of the MPs that did so – our current Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, Minister of Justice Tuija Brax, and Minister of Education Sari Sarkomaa all rose to their current posts despite voting for the act.

Lisa Duggan (2004, see also Duggan and Kim 2005), speaking about the US debate on same-sex marriage, takes a different route in her analyses of what lies at the heart of the opposition to same-sex marriage and GLBTQI rights more broadly. Duggan views the opposition as grounded in socio-economic factors more than in homophobia as such: the defense of marriage – initiatives strive to anchor the symbolic position of the conjugal family as the sole legally recognized household structure. Focusing on gay marriage, according to Duggan, actually limits the possibilities of legally recognizing other forms of kinship and household arrangements (2004, 223). Opening up the possibility of a flexible menu of different partnership and household recognition available to all citizens depending on varying needs would “threaten the normative

status of the nuclear family, undermining state endorsement of heterosexual privilege, the male “headed” household and “family values” moralism as social welfare policy” (ibid., 223).

When reading the minutes of the parliament debate on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October I did find examples where the two-parent heterosexual nuclear family is constructed as the glue that holds society together in terms of economics. The fatherlessness of children in lesbian families, and thereby the lack of a second breadwinner, was by many MPs seen as putting a strain on state funds. As one MP put it: “in the case of single women and lesbians the Finnish state is the father and will be so until the child turns 18” (Lasse Hautala, center party). This perceived problem, of course, has nothing to do with the fact the children in lesbian families are fatherless, but rather with the fact that Finnish legislation, at the time of writing, only recognizes biological parents as legally liable to provide maintenance.

The situation will in all probability change during 2009, as it is expected that 9§ of the Act on registered partnerships will be modified in order to make it possible for the registered partner of a biological parent to adopt his/her child. Nevertheless, adoption for GLBTQI citizens will still only be possible for citizens in registered partnerships – thus reinforcing the coupledness norm, a norm that can be seen as essential to heteronormativity (Cover 2006, paragraph 2). Some of the MPs that opposed assisted reproduction for lesbians and single women warned during the debate that the outcome of passing the act would be the opening of the doors for ‘gay adoption’. Most of these MPs are also opposing the so called interfamily adoption act<sup>9</sup>. The Center Party MP Tapani Töllli likened this new proposition to a slice of salami sausage, saying that the traditional understanding of family is being chopped away one piece at a time, and that this started with the act on registered partnerships. The opponents are using very similar arguments in the current debate as they were in the debate on assisted reproduction although with a lesser focus on Christian tradition and more on traditional understandings of family and biology. One reason might be that Church Council issued a statement in support of the interfamily adoption act (this statement is brought up in the debate). In the statement the Church Council says that it views the betterment of the legal situation of children living in registered partnership as well

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<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the parliamentary debate, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2008, on the government proposition to change 9§ of the act on registered partnerships: [http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk\\_113\\_2008\\_ke\\_p\\_2.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk_113_2008_ke_p_2.shtml), (accessed December 9, 2008)

founded, but stresses that a child should have a right to a mother and father and, that it does not view the creation of families where this right is lacking as good<sup>10</sup>.

One might ask why it is that sexuality has come to be such a central and emotionally explosive element in debates about legislation that deals with social security, inheritance, rights of visitation and so on? Furthermore, why is religion so frequently referred to as the basis for resisting the implementation of new forms of legislation pertaining to private life? Gayle Rubin, in the opening lines of her classic text “Thinking Sex”, makes an apposite remark touching upon these questions that seem as relevant now as they were in 1984, namely:

The time has come to think about sex. To some sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality. Contemporary conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious conflicts of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight. Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. (1984, 267)

As I will show below, religion, as well as sexuality, has been seen as an ‘unimportant’ topic with regards to politics in much of Europe. It is time, to paraphrase Rubin, to think about religion, and also, about its connection to secularism, gender, sexuality, temporality and geography.

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<sup>10</sup> The Church Council of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland’s official statement on interfamily adoption: <http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/Documents/A97D914EA20D447EC22574A4004C6073?OpenDocument&lang=FI>, (accessed December 10, 2008).

#### 4.1 Past – present – future: Christian Finland and the Möbius strip

If the Lord, when he created the world, would have come to the conclusion, that a woman could have a child on her own, then he would have created her as a hermaphrodite, so that problems of this kind would not exist. MP Seppo Lahtela, Center Party

It is not common place practice in Finnish parliament to refer to Genesis when making a political argument. However, the whole debate on assisted reproduction, and the minutes of the discussion in parliament on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, are scattered with references to creation and God, as well as the ‘Christian values’ that Finnish society is built upon. The MPs discuss not only the proposed act, but also their own faith, the role of the church, or what the role of the evangelical-Lutheran state church should be.

In both the debate on registered partnerships and the debate on assisted reproduction, the prevailing values of society, in terms of past – present or indeed future, are held up as the reason why the heteronormative family is entitled to its special and privileged position. In their memorandum<sup>11</sup> on the act on assisted reproduction the Act Committee recommend that fertility treatments should only be given to heterosexual couples. The preamble given is that:

...the regulation pertaining to assisted reproduction is a very sensitive issue from the legislator’s point of view. In an area such as this the choices made by the legislator are in an exceptionally large degree dependant on the different ethical viewpoints dominant in society as well the attitudes towards for example different family forms that are influenced by these viewpoints.

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<sup>11</sup> Act Committee memorandum on the act on assisted reproduction:  
[http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/lavm\\_12\\_2006\\_p.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/lavm_12_2006_p.shtml), (accessed December 10, 2008)

Here a kind of Möbius strip<sup>12</sup> is created; it does not matter which way you travel, you can never really get to the other side (still traveling on the same side of the strip) and you can never get out of the loop. Monique Wittig also uses the figure of the Möbius strip in her discussion on heterosexuality and the social contract: "...But this Möbius strip is fake, because only one aspect of the optical effect appears distinctly and massively, and that is heterosexuality. Homosexuality appears like a ghost and sometimes not at all (1992, 41)".

According to Karin Sporre, religions can be seen as social systems, where discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation is legitimized and accepted (2007, 30). She asks how this could be understood using feminist epistemological tools. By placing gender at the foreground, the discriminatory practices of, for example the Christian Church, become evident. Sporre further states, that by looking at how churches symbolically perceive the numinous, it is clear that the 'masculine' aspects are dominant. In defense of the masculine divine, be it in the case of opposing female priests or openly gay or lesbian clergy, the 2000 year *history* and *tradition* of the Church is used as legitimating of the past – present and future of gender and its 'proper' place. The referencing to tradition and the canons (texts that are hundreds or thousands years old) creates an epistemological prerequisite which is quite uncommon in most academic disciplines; a prerequisite that needs to be acknowledged and destabilized.

Sporre's contention that religions can be seen as sites of legitimized gender and sexual discrimination becomes clear in the above quote by the Center Party MP. However, the discursive power of a religious tradition for the re/negations of heteronormativity in the Finnish debate on assisted reproduction has not hitherto been scrutinized or analyzed to any large extent; often the referencing to God and the Bible is taken as empty rhetoric by a Christian minority in parliament. I believe this approach misses the point of *why* this line of argumentation is employed in the first place. Furthermore, dismissing the religiously based argumentation as minority rhetoric might also hide the power that these arguments are invested with as well as the effect they have.

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<sup>12</sup> Lee Edelman also uses the figure of the Möbius strip in his commenting on the "politics of futurity": "...that rhetoric was intended to avow that this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, *permitted* only one side."(2004:2) Elisabeth Grosz understands the figure of the Möbius strip as creating *both* inside and outside. (1994: 116)

#### 4.2 Vicarious Religion and the Post-Secular Turn

Religion, as a part of the Enlightenment project, has in Europe been constructed as the constitutive outside of modernity, as something no longer relevant in the public sphere (Keenan 2002, Latour 1993, Wolin 2005). The portrayal of Europe, and especially Scandinavia, as secular, has been hegemonic in sociology and several other academic disciplines (Keenan 2002, Davie 2000). The secularization theories (which can be seen as Eurocentric grand narratives – European religious life held as a prototype of global religiosity) put forth by Weber (1961), Berger (1967) and others, have permeated academia to the extent that questions about how religion, or in the case of Finland – Lutheranism, can be seen to shape politics and everyday life, seem insignificant and marginal (Davie 2000).

The secularization theories have come under sharp criticism from a wide variety of academics and thinkers, and some of the criticism has come from the originators of these theories themselves (Berger 1999). This criticism has fostered a debate around what is being called the post-secular turn. The debate has, apart from academics and scholars, also engaged religious authorities, most prominently Pope Benedict XVI, who entered into an exchange with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, 2006). The central point of the critique is, to paraphrase Bruno Latour (1993), that we have never been secular, or as Meyda Yegenoglu puts it, that “religion has never ceased to be in the public space” (2006, 246). Thus, it might be claimed that it is not a resurgence of religion as such that has fostered the debate around what has been called the post-secular. Hans Joas argues that “‘post-secular’...doesn’t express a sudden increase in religiosity, after its epochal decrease, but rather a change in the mindset of those, who, previously, felt justified in considering religions to be moribund” . (cited in de Vries and Sullivan 2006, 2)

Hent De Vries argues that a nation state can be said to be ‘post-secular’ if it counts on the diminishing but enduring existence of religion (2006, 3). I would add to this the view of the role of religion as shifting in terms of both meanings and expressions. In keeping with this argument I find the concept of *vicarious religion*, introduced by Grace Davie, useful in discussing the case of

Finland vis-à-vis the normative discursive power of Christian tradition within the debate on assisted reproduction: "...the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing (2006, 24)."

According to Davie, religion can operate vicariously in a number of ways; church leaders and churchgoers embody moral codes on behalf of others, and further; churches can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies (ibid, 25). I find the latter point very interesting with regards to the debate on assisted reproduction. Davie asks, whether it could be the case, that churches offer space for debating topics that could be difficult to address elsewhere in society, and gives the example of a current debate about homosexuality in the Church of England. Is this just a matter of an internal debate about senior clergy appointments, or is it one way in which society as a whole is coming to terms with shifts in 'moral climate'? If the latter is not true, Davie states, then the attention given to the churches in question is hard to understand. It seems as if a lot of European media is pointing to controversies within the Church, while at the same time stating that religious institutions must be marginal to modern societies (ibid, 26). This can be seen as case in point with regards to the pervasiveness and power of secularist discourse (rooted in secularization theories).

Davie is here talking explicitly about *European* churches and religious life. The way in which religious institutions matter to people who are not active participants in them is important to understand. What Davie calls the 'exceptional nature of Europe's religion' is derived from a particular history of state-church relationships, out of which the notion of a state-church as a utility rather than private organization, has grown (ibid, 27). The Church is, especially in the Lutheran countries in Europe such as Finland, set up as a public utility available to the whole population and funded by a tax system. One of the central points in the new Finnish *Freedom of Religion Act* (came into effect in August 2003) was, that religion should not be considered only as a choice of the individual but also as a part of a *community* tradition<sup>13</sup>. The ways in which the

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<sup>13</sup> *Church in Change – The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 2000-2003*, page 16. Church Research Institute, Publication 55. Tampere.  
[http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/english/publication2000\\_2003/p55.pdf](http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/english/publication2000_2003/p55.pdf) (accessed October 10, 2007).

church works as a public utility are manifold, but most frequently this is tied to different rites of passage; baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the religious institution for secular politics might *seem* marginal, but the impact it has on everyday life and especially the turning points in people's life, is all but marginal. One of the most visible rituals of the contemporary Finnish sacralisation of heteronormative hegemony is the continuously reiterated spectacular heterosexual (ecclesiastic) wedding ritual (Charpentier 2000, 16). As the rationale behind the new *Freedom of Religion Act* makes evident, the role of religion in Finland is closely tied to the idea of a Finnish community with shared values and rituals. The debate on registered partnerships and assisted reproduction is thus also a debate about what 'Finnish-ness' is, or what it ideally should be. Michael Azar (2001, 301) argues that one of the primary goals for every project of nation-building is to create a sense of loyalty between the people and the state-apparatus; hereby it becomes consequential that the 'matter' (race, language, history etc.) the population is meant to accept as the basis for its identity also serves the purposes of governmental power and a hegemonic order. Michael Cobb argues that the queer push for civil rights is also a contest of citizenship (2005, 251). He further states that queers function at the limits of the (American) "nation-state, and, as such cannot ever fully be included."(ibid, 252)

If we return to the question of whether it could be the case that churches offer space for debating topics that could be difficult to address elsewhere in society, a further complication might be added; might it be that 'religion' as opposed to 'the Church' in the Finnish context of vicariousness becomes a site for contestations of topics deemed inappropriate for discussion in a what is described as a modern secular state?

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<sup>14</sup> The percentage of those baptized of all births in Finland is 87 percent, 68 percent of all marriages (hetero only) are solemnized in church, 10 percent of civil marriages are blessed in church, of the deceased 98 percent are given a Lutheran funeral (this number being higher than the percentage belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church). Church Research Institute, 2005.

## 5. Conclusions

...Tonight there appears to be two competing ideas in this hall, the Christian Democratic and green liberalism. Christian Democracy is founded on the central aspects of Christianity and democracy, which societies have been built upon for thousands of years. Green liberalism is intrinsically tied to the values of feminism. The platform of the Greens claims that green feminism is a liberation movement for men also. However, in connection to this act on assisted reproduction, green feminism presents itself more as movement to demean and abase men. In the vision of the Greens the role left to men is that of a sperm-machine, when female couples and single women want to have children through fertility treatments. MP Kari Kärkkäinen, Christian Democrats

In this article I have questioned an understanding of Finland as being a secular and egalitarian nation by using the debate on assisted reproduction in Finnish parliament as a case study. I will now discuss what can be seen as the shared history and interconnectedness of the two discourses that I have analyzed in this article. In the above quote, by one of the most fervent opponents of the proposed act on assisted reproduction, the two discourses I have analyzed in this article are given the names 'Christian Democratic' and 'Green feminism'. The MP attempts to make a clear break between the two. In the following concluding remarks I argue that such a break is highly contestable.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart note that "even in highly secularized societies, the cultural legacy of given religions continues to shape worldviews and define cultural zones" (2004, 17). While I do not subscribe to the notion of Finland as a 'highly secularized society' – I find it to be an oversimplification, I do agree with the latter part of the argument. 'Finnish culture' is very much shaped by Christianity, but also by the narratives of modernity and the legacies of Enlightenment. The narratives of modernity, progress and democracy are in fact bound closely to Judaeo-Christian tradition. In her discussion on Samuel Huntington, the man who famously coined the notion of a 'clash of civilizations', Judith Butler concludes that:

...the ideals of democracy that Huntington espouses are also those that express the values of a Judaeo-Christian tradition, a view that suggests that all other religious traditions are outside the trajectory of modernization that constitutes civilization and its 'missionary' claim to the future. (Butler 2008, 14)

'Green feminism' is presented as the opposite of Christian Democracy – as anti-Christian, anti-men, and anti-society – and implicitly secular. The arguments in the debate of those labeled as 'Green feminists', were, as I have shown, built on the idea of equality, and more specifically gender-equality. Richard Wolin (2005, paragraph 12) cites Jürgen Habermas as saying that modern notions of equality and fairness are secular distillations of time-honored Judeo-Christian precepts. The idea of universal human rights, according to Habermas reading of Durkheim in his two volume "Theory of Communicative Action" (1989, 43), has its roots in the Christian ideal of the equality of *all men and women* (emphasis mine) in the eyes of God (see also Habermas 2006, 252).

If we accept the claim that the notions of equality and fairness are rooted in a religiously legitimated two-sex model, and that these notions are not unproblematically 'secular', as there seems to be a tendency to think so, it might be easier to fathom why heteronormativity is not destabilized in the debate on assisted reproduction. The debate instead works to further a dichotomous and exclusionary identity politics. Equality and human rights are neither 'innocent' nor unproblematically secular (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 4). One can argue, on the basis of the examples that I have presented from the debate on assisted reproduction or the current debates on the role of Islam in Europe, that the idea of secularism as somehow foundational to modern European nation-states is challenged when this idea comes face to face with its religious self – this realization occurs via the encounters with religious or sexual others.

Finally, I am not advocating that we should 'get rid' of the ideals of equality and fairness – the ideals are not the problem, but rather (some of) the politics done in their name. Neither do I say that all values should or even could be abandoned, nor that we should all become 'secular', as this might not be at all desirable. With regards to this Judith Butler aptly states that some varieties of secularism involve "forms of absolutism and dogmatism that are surely as problematic as those that rely on religious dogma" (Butler 2008, 13). I am rather arguing for a problematization and

awareness of the genealogy of these ideals, in order for us to be able to question our complicity in structures of power that undermine a striving for an inclusive and open-ended politics on queer kinship.

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