This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

From loss to involuntary liquidity: refugees' relationships to possessions

Hokkinen, Maria

Published in:
Consumption Markets & Culture

DOI:
10.1080/10253866.2023.2224734

Published: 21/06/2023

Document Version
Final published version

Document License
CC BY

Link to publication

Please cite the original version:
Hokkinen, M. (2023). From loss to involuntary liquidity: refugees' relationships to possessions. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *26*(6), 423-442. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2023.2224734

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

This document is downloaded from the Research Information Portal of ÅAU: 03. May. 2024

Consumption Markets & Culture

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gcmc20

From loss to involuntary liquidity: refugees' relationships to possessions

Maria Hokkinen

To cite this article: Maria Hokkinen (2023): From loss to involuntary liquidity: refugees' relationships to possessions, Consumption Markets & Culture, DOI: 10.1080/10253866.2023.2224734

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2023.2224734

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 20 Jun 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 221

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=gcmc20

CONSUMPTION MARKETS & CULTURE
https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2023.2224734

From loss to involuntary liquidity: refugees' relationships to possessions

Maria Hokkinen

School of Business and Economics, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT
This paper explores refugees' relationships to consumption and possessions while they resettle in a Nordic country. The results of the empirical study (one-on-one photovoice interviews and micro focus group interviews with 32 Iraqi, Turkish, and Syrian refugees living in Finland) elucidate that the loss of possessions caused by forced displacement thrust refugees to prolonged liminality and alter their relationships to material possessions, pushing them from solid consumption to seek stability through temporary liquid consumption. The study contributes to consumer research by highlighting the role of liquid consumption during imposed long-term liminality and precarity and by exploring the temporal boundaries and characteristics of involuntary liquid consumption. The results improve our understanding of how people relate to consumption and possessions when navigating extreme and arduous life transitions and offers implications for NGOs working with refugee integration.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 16 December 2021
Accepted 7 June 2023

KEYWORDS
Refugees; possessions; liminality; loss; liquid consumption

1. Introduction

Consumption is a central daily activity; most of us spend our lives gathering possessions. Consumption enables fulfilling basic needs, like food and shelter, and serves as a terrain for self-actualization and identity construction (Belk 1988; Hill 1991). It is also used to negotiate the passing of time; restore memories, move forward emotionally, or purposefully relive past experiences (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022; Russell and Levy 2012). Few can imagine how we would feel if we suddenly lost all our possessions. Yet, given the increasingly frequent natural disasters, political turmoil, and current unprecedented global refugee crisis—an estimated 103 million displaced from their homes worldwide as of mid-2022 (UNHCR 2023a), and over 8 million Ukrainian refugees registered across Europe as of spring 2023 (UNHCR 2023b)—it is becoming increasingly clear that nobody is completely safe from the sudden loss of their former consumer lifestyle and belongings. Thus, it is fitting to map out people's strategies for navigating the unwanted and extreme circumstances caused by life's disruptions and examining the role possessions and consumption in them.

This paper looks at refugee consumers through the theoretical lenses of liminality and liquid consumption. Liminal experiences, described as the passages between "before" and "after" are powerful, emotional transitions involving separating, transforming and eventually incorporating into a new stable state (van Gennep [1909] 1960). However, the transformations are not always

CONTACT Maria Hokkinen maria.hokkinen@abo.fi Åbo Akademi University, School of Business and Economics, Fänriksgatan 3 B, 20500 Turku, Finland

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

voluntary, nor do they necessarily resolve themselves smoothly (Turner 1969; 1974). Indeed, the liminal transitions can endure over time and turn into permanent–also called perpetual–liminality where the individual is stuck in a state of turmoil and unable return to stability (Thomassen 2009; Ybema, Beech, and Ellis 2011; Appau, Ozanne, and Klein 2020; Wimark 2021). In addition to liminal fluctuations, the very structures to transition between may be dissolving. Bauman (2000) argued that modernity is no longer solid but is now liquid, lacking stable societal structures to attach to, which also prompts changes to how people relate to possessions. Society's changing demands drive people to engage in liquid consumption, which is characterized by being short-lived, immaterial, and access based. In liquidity, solid relationships and conventional structures become open for negotiation. (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Mimoun and Bardhi 2022).

By answering the research question *How does liquid consumption manifest concerning the involuntary, prolonged liminality of forced displacement?*, this study contributes to extant consumer research in the following ways: Firstly, while previous studies have excelled at examining the characteristics of liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Mimoun and Bardhi 2022), they have not engaged extensively with the possibility of liquid consumption being a temporary, imposed survival strategy rather than a voluntary and permanent lifestyle choice of those well-off. Hence, this paper joins the conversation by looking into non-elite mobile consumers enduring insecurity in the long run (as prompted by Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017, 592—593) and by exploring if and how liquid consumption can help individuals in involuntary long-term liminality to cope (as called for by Appau, Ozanne, and Klein 2020, 187). Secondly, the study complements earlier knowledge about the thresholds of liquid consumption by examining the entry into liquidity and the possible avenues of exiting it, both of which have been underexamined as of now. The study also enriches the knowledge about the temporal boundaries of liminality by building on Hartonen et al. (2022) and Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher (2017) in questioning the assumption of refugee liminality ending when permanent protection status is granted. By doing so, it offers societal implications for NGOs and state actors working with refugee resettlement and integration services by suggesting how societal actors could help people deal with and overcome prolonged liminal transitions, and answers thus to the call by Barnard and Pendock (2013) for more micro-level studies about refugee integration. Thirdly, existing literature has shed light on the importance of possessions during crisis and change (Darveau and Cheikh-Ammar 2021), but the loss of belongings inherent in the refugee experience severely impedes seeking security from material possessions. Thus, there is a need to better understand the consumer identities of those forcibly displaced from their homes, especially in contexts outside the refugee camps (as pinpointed by Oka 2014; and Dudley 2010).

The qualitative study is based on nine one-on-one photovoice interviews and 23 micro focus group interviews with recent refugees from Turkey, Iraq, and Syria living in Finland. The empirical findings imply that the forced displacement and loss of belongings have led these refugees to temporarily lose their attachment to material possessions, thrusting them into a state of prolonged liminality in which they rely on liquid consumption rather than solid possessions to cope. The empirical results suggest that the refugees consider their liquid consumption a temporary solution while wishing to exit the prolonged liminality and return to solidity in the future. While the focus of this study is refugees, the results can deepen our understanding of the possible coping strategies of anyone—refugee or not—caught in prolonged liminality by the force of events. Such other relevant contexts could, for example, include individuals involved in difficult life transitions that do not resolve quickly, such as long-term unemployment, the aftermath of natural disasters, drawn-out court battles or caring for an ill family member. In the following, the study's theoretical foundations are laid out, followed by a description of Finland as a country of resettlement in the empirical context. After presenting the empirical methods, the paper discusses the findings, analyzing them in the light of extant literature. Finally, in the discussion section, the results are

wrapped up, and the study's societal and scholarly implications are discussed, along with suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Liminal transitions and consumption

Liminality (van Gennep [1909] 1960) is a useful concept when studying consumer experiences involving "unsettling transitions and transformative events" (Darveau and Cheikh-Ammar 2021). Material possessions and consumption have an important link to identity and self-concept, especially in times of transition, as social and cultural life are inherently embedded with the material world (Belk 1988; Dudley 2010; Hill 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991). The link between consumption and liminality has been researched from different perspectives, regarding involuntary and voluntary transformations. In imposed transformations, people can use material consumption to overcome liminality or alleviate discomfort (Darveau and Cheikh-Ammar 2021). Consumption can help people survive crises and cope with stressful or threatening situations, anchoring them to life and the future (Pavia and Mason 2004). Purchases can also be used to connect the individual to the surrounding world or regain a sense of identity and control during crises (Hill 1991; Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, and Lacey 2012). Consumption—by distracting, soothing and challenging—can facilitate moving through a crisis to a resolution and a new identity (Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, and Lacey 2012; Pavia and Mason 2004). During liminality, when one's role in the social system and identity are disrupted, people tend to put more value on symbolic possessions—things that are valued for their emotional value rather than their utility, such as wedding rings or diplomas (Noble and Walker 1997). Value is placed on items that preserve the memory of those who are far away or deceased and can offer a security blanket during liminal transitions and fill a void after separation from family and friends (Mehta and Belk 1991; Nations, Baker, and Krszjzaniek 2017; Noble and Walker 1997).

Consequently, lacking access to or losing possessions can be traumatic. The degree of grief and distress upon losing possessions depends on how strongly the possessions are linked to the self, their values and self-worth (Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman 2011). For firestorm victims, the few charred and destroyed items that could be recovered from the disaster site became sacred possessions, regardless of their value before the fire, as they served as reminders of the past (Sayre 1994). The sadness such a loss causes is not just connected to individual items but can stretch to larger units such as homes or neighborhoods (Belk 1988). Objects can also remind one of traumatic events and tie a person to the past, as Marcoux (2017) observed in post-9/11 New Yorkers. In this case, "active forgetting" of the traumatic terror attack by disposing of and disregarding memory objects was a way of coping and moving on with life. Mimoun and Bardhi (2022) also identified the behavior of purposefully disposing of items when the voluntarily flexible consumers wanted to relinquish their past identity and sought liquidity.

A liminal transition involving financial constraints also shapes the importance of possessions. Consumers with limited funds have been found to gravitate towards material goods rather than experiences, focusing on items with long-term utility (Tully, Hershfield, and Meyvis 2015). In the case of extreme material poverty and loss of possessions among homeless women living in a shelter, symbolic and sacred possessions were valued rather than traditional consumer goods (Hill 1991). Photographs, religious artifacts, and other physical items reminding one of the past or anchored in future dreams carried special significance for the homeless (Hill 1991).

Noting that liminality is not always imposed is crucial. Some consumers also seek flexibility and change to break free from norms and succeed among modern society's requirements (Mimoun and Bardhi 2022). In their study of well-off expats relocating around the world, Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould (2012), found that the voluntarily mobile consumers engaged in a consumption style emphasizing immateriality, transferability, and freedom instead of solid, material possessions.

Instead of trying to escape their liminality, the expats strategically used consumption to manage their frequent relocations. This liquid relationship to possessions, characterized by a weaker connection between tangible possessions and identity construction as well as a dematerialized, shared, or access-based ownership, was theorized as a privilege of the wealthy and voluntarily mobile. Economic precarity, in contrast, would drive consumers to seek safety through tangible possessions. (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012)

2.2. Managing liminal time with consumption

Liminality is a timeless space, defined as a temporal passing from the before to the after (Darveau and Cheikh-Ammar 2021). According to Koselleck (2005), the current era characterized by accelerated change has turned the present into a mere passage from the past to the future. This ruptured sense of time can be managed and bridged with consumption (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022). Although belongings can help preserve the essence of the past, they can also help construct an identity in a new situation. Consumer timework is defined as the dynamics of how marketplace stakeholders negotiate the relationships between the past, present and future. Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario (2022) divide consumer timework into an integrative, disintegrative, subjugatory, or emancipatory type. The integrative and the emancipatory consumer timework are the most relevant types for this paper's purpose. Integrative consumer timework aims to harmonize the passing of time. One example is nostalgic consumption, which attempts to restore a past that would otherwise risk being declined, as well as collaborative consumption, which through repeated and ritualistic marketplace activities shapes in-group members' understanding of the past and future collectively. Through what is called emancipatory consumer timework, in turn, the consumer can overcome a failure or an adversity and regain an earlier consumer identity. (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022)

Liminal consumption during major life transitions, such as re-consuming past experiences, oriented towards the past or future (Russell and Levy 2012) involve consumer timework. Yet, liminality does not always resolve smoothly, and an individual can be stuck in the turbulence of transition for extended periods (Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022). Permanent or extended liminality is traditionally seen as a negative state or "error" that brings about disaster and exhausts people of their power (Szakolczai 2017). People in long-term liminality fluctuate between a past and future orientations in their consumption (Pavia and Mason 2004). Appau, Ozanne, and Klein (2020) investigated Pentecostal converts' consumption, noting they oscillated between separation and incorporation in a continuous struggle of perpetual liminality, while marginalized consumers of chronic illness medication (studied by Nakata et al. 2019) remained in a liminal space of compliance versus non-compliance with their treatment. In Mimoun and Bardhi's (2022) study, the voluntarily liquid consumers repeatedly sought to de-stabilize their consumption to stay free and flexible. As the above examples illustrate, consumption is a way to manage liminality; conversely, a particular consumer behavior can mark an individual's ongoing stage in the liminal process (Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, and Lacey 2012).

2.3. Refugee consumers and liminality

Moving to another country and being exposed to a new culture is a powerful liminal transition. Such can cause stress and lead to a higher risk of psychological problems, ranging from culture shock to depression, to anxiety and substance abuse (Organista, Organista, and Kurasaki 2003). Compared with voluntary migration, the refugee experience involves specific conditions contributing to an increased risk of stress and trauma, such as changes in a family setting caused by displacement, economic hardships, and past experiences in the home country or during the refugee journey (Hynie 2018; Kriechbaum-Vitellozzi and Kreuzbauer 2006). The psychological distress can be aggravated by new trauma experienced in the country of resettlement, such as difficulties in

integration and a lack of financial and social support (Porter and Haslam 2005). Both literally and metaphorically, refugees are pushed to the limit (Hartonen et al. 2022). Much like people grieving the death of a loved one, refugees also face losing important relationships. Moreover, they lose their possessions, status, and former way of life. Having left behind the familiar structures of their home countries and being unable to fully incorporate into the new society can lead to prolonged involuntary liminality (Appau, Ozanne, and Klein 2020, 186). The meta-analysis by Hartonen et al. (2022) suggested that reincorporation and exiting liminality can happen when permanent protection status is received. Yet, Hartonen et al. (2022) noted another possible scenario; a prolonged liminality stretching to the following generations. Furthermore, Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher (2017) recognize the risk of protracted exile caused by the lack of permanent residency status.

Consumption plays a role in refugee coping and well-being by giving the refugees a sense of normalcy, dignity, and agency under the pressure of forced displacement (Oka 2014). When moving from one country to another, the central role of possessions involving one's identity is heightened. Possessions can sustain the connection to the old home country, while they can help match the role expectations in the new (Belk 1992; Luedicke 2011; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994). Consumption and possessions are tools to negotiate the past and present during forced displacement. A connection to the pre-displacement past is important for refugees, as well as the endeavor to make sense of the present and connect the different eras of life (Dudley 2010). The inability to return to the previous life and the insecurity and indeterminacy about the future can place refugees—especially those awaiting asylum decisions or with a temporary protection status—in a "limbo" state characterized by anxiety and hopelessness (Hartonen et al. 2022). Refugees in liminal transitions use tangible activities such as craftwork (Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022), rituals, and wearing traditional clothes (Dudley 2010) to cope and retain their identity by meaningfully connecting to their past and constructing a narrative for the future. Spirituality, support from one's family and society (social services), actively "colonizing" the new living environment as a home, reframing the situation, and focusing on the future are some of the refugee's coping strategies that previous research has identified (Dudley 2010; Khawaja et al. 2008; Sossou et al. 2008). However, the same strategies that can help make sense of and counteract the liminality can repeatedly recreate the past and conjure painful memories, making the liminal state more noticeable (Dudley 2010).

Much of the previous research about refugees' relationships to consumption and possessions is limited to refugee-camp settings (Alloush et al. 2017; Dudley 2010; Oka 2014; Viswanathan, Alfonso Arias, and Sreekumar 2021). Thus, it explores a liminal state that appears temporary by definition (as people are expected to move on from refugee camps sooner or, as is often the case, later). There is a need for further exploration of how refugees who are settled in their new home country manage their perpetual liminality, and how they make sense of their liminal process with the help of consumption and possessions.

3. Context

According to the definition by the United Nations (UN 2021), *a refugee* is one who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to fear of persecution. The world has more refugees than ever. At mid-2022, over 103 million people were displaced from their homes. While many (about 52 million) stayed within the borders of their own countries, around half of the displaced people sought safety abroad (UNHCR 2023a). The reasons for fleeing vary from war and violence to human rights violations and natural disasters. For example, the long-drawn-out conflict in Syria, the war in Ukraine, and most recently, the unrest in Sudan, have all put people on the move towards safer areas (UNHCR 2023a). Due to the ongoing events, Europe is becoming increasingly more of an epicenter of the global refugee crisis. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, over eight million people have already fled abroad (as of May 2023; UNHCR 2023b). Before this war, the peak year of arrivals was 2015, with 1.3 million people (mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq) seeking safety in Europe (PEW Research Center 2016).

In Finland, where this study is set, the number of people seeking international protection has been rising since the early 1990s. Most refugees come to Finland without a previous permit and apply for international protection after arrival. In 2015, the number of asylum seekers in Finland peaked at over 32,000 arrivals—almost ten-fold compared with the previous years (Finnish Refugee Council 2020). After 2015, the numbers of new arrivals leveled off to around 1,500–6,000 people per year (Ministry of the Interior 2021) until 2022, when over 50,000 Ukrainians fled the war to Finland (Finnish Immigration Service 2023a). In addition to asylum seekers, Finland also receives so-called quota refugees whose selection process and residence permit paperwork are done abroad before arrival. From 2011 to 2019, Finland received 750 quota refugees annually, 850 in 2020, 1,050 in 2021 and 1,500 in 2022 (Finnish Immigration Service 2023b).

3.1. The economic integration of refugees in Finland

Finland's social security system follows the "Nordic model", granting basic income support to all residents (Hokkinen 2019). This support is organized through different insurances for specific situations, such as unemployment, education, sickness, old age, and becoming a parent and caring for a child at home (Niemelä and Salminen 2006). Those arriving in Finland as quota refugees are directly placed in municipalities and covered by the social security system just like other residents. Asylum seekers in Finland are accommodated in reception centers or hosted privately while their application is processed; they are not yet fully covered by the social security system. During the asylum process, applicants receive financial assistance as a monthly reception allowance ranging from about 102.15 euros to 348.50 euros (in 2023, for an adult living alone). The amount depends on whether the reception center has a meal service. (Finnish Immigration Service 2023c). If the application succeeds and asylum or subsidiary protection is granted, the applicant typically receives a fixed-term residence permit and becomes a resident in a municipality, becoming eligible for the same social benefits as permanent residents. An individual integration plan is drafted for all residence-permit holders, covering language courses and other training deemed necessary for successful integration into society. Following the integration plan's measures is a prerequisite for receiving the unemployment allowance and other social benefits. (The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 30.12.2010/1386). Unemployment is higher among immigrants than the general population in Finland (Nykänen et al. 2022). Also, using income support for unemployment and childcare at home is higher among immigrants than the general population, the difference being especially noticeable during the first years after moving to Finland, and among immigrants with a refugee background (Tervola and Verho 2014). The situation is most fragile for those with coinciding challenges of unemployment, health, and social integration (Peltola and Metso 2008). The consumption of the asylum seekers arriving in 2015 evoked relational conflicts and suspicion of abusing benefits in Finland (Hokkinen 2019) and across Europe (Pellander and Kotilainen 2017).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design and data collection

The empirical study was conducted in two stages. Stage 1, in 2017—2018, consisted of one-on-one in-depth photovoice interviews (Sutton-Brown 2014) with nine male refugees from Iraq. The participants were asked to photograph their consumption practices and possessions before the interview; the photos were then used as a discussion guide during the interview. The participants' photos, while not treated as data alone, served several essential purposes: The photos allowed the interviewees to discuss things important to them (rather than follow a strict interview guide drafted by the interviewer, which might have ignored certain topics), resulting in broad contextual explanations and discoveries that could have otherwise remained unaddressed. The photovoice method

made the interview situation less formal and eased communication over language barriers, as a translator was not used in the first stage of the study. Stage 1 proved critical for refining the research questions, learning to navigate interview situations with cultural and language differences (Kim 2011), and creating a broader understanding of refugee consumer behavior in Finland. However, solidifying and crystallizing the earlier findings by employing more targeted questions and recruiting a more diverse interviewee base that included women was necessary. An interpreter-assistant with language skills and existing contacts with Finland's Middle Eastern refugee community was included for Stage 2 of the empirical study to ease access and rapport.

Stage 2 of the empirical study was carried out in 2021, mainly as micro focus groups, with 23 interviewees and four to five participants in each group. Thirteen of the participants were women and ten were men. For Stage 2, an interpreter of Arabic and Turkish languages was used as many of the participants did not speak Finnish or English fluently. Two study participants asked to be interviewed separately (not in a focus group setting) due to confidentiality issues with their backgrounds. The research design accommodated this wish. According to Greenbaum (1998), a focus group is a qualitative technique designed to uncover a group's attitudes and feelings on a specific topic, and the "why" of consumer behavior. Unlike many other interview types, focus groups are based on the interaction between the participants and interviewer, with the latter acting as more of a moderator guiding the topic while leaving as much space as possible for the participants to speak. It became evident that the focus group setting was more effective than one-on-one interviews for covering sensitive topics and generating deep conversations (see Greenbaum 1999). The focus groups were kept small (with a maximum of five participants in each) to give enough time and space for everyone to speak.

Each focus group interview lasted approximately 90–120 min, focusing on the participants' relationships to possessions and consumption before, during, and after the refugee journey. For example, the interviewees were asked what they brought along on the refugee journey, and whether they missed some specific items from their past lives in the home country. Other topics were also covered, such as what their dearest possessions in their current home were and what a typical shopping basket would contain. The focus groups were organized to be entirely virtual over the video conferencing application Zoom due to the Covid19 pandemic. Conducting interviews online had practical benefits, enabling the interviewees to participate from their homes, meaning they did not need to rearrange, for example, childcare. However, the online format presented some confidentiality concerns, as controlling who was present at the other end of the conversation was impossible for the interviewer. The Zoom platform enabled all participants to use video as well as voice. However, many participants chose not to have the video switched on, participating with voice only. Technical, practical and cultural reasons could explain this decision; allowing interviewees to rely solely on audio was made to accommodate their wishes.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Arabic or Turkish) and translated into Finnish by a research interpreter assistant fluent in all three languages. English was sometimes used to complement, reducing the need for translation. When necessary, the researcher translated the quotes from Finnish to English in the Findings-section of this article. The interpreter assistant, like the researcher, was also an active part of the research, who did not simply transmit data but participated actively in knowledge production and interpreting the interviews (Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron 2011). After each interview, the researcher and research interpreter assistant reviewed the main points made during the interview, to initially interpret the results and improve the interview guide for the following focus groups. Towards the end of Stage 2, the same topics kept emerging, indicating that data saturation was reached (Saunders et al. 2018)–a point after which no more interviews were arranged.

Using an in-group interpreter assistant allowed for dividing the focus groups in a way to avoid confrontation (e.g. not mixing people with conflicting political backgrounds in the same focus group). Research ethics were constantly kept in mind due to the specific vulnerabilities related to

the studied population.[1] The interview excerpts presented in this paper were anonymized using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information to protect the interviewees' privacy.

4.2. Sampling and participants

Several methods of participant sampling were used. In Stage 1, the researcher accessed the participants through an NGO working with refugees in the area. Later, snowballing was used to recruit more participants. Stage 1 participants were all men and from Iraq, aged 21–35, and had lived in Finland for one to three years at the time of the interviews. Most had completed higher education in their home country and were fluent in English. All the Stage 1 interviewees lived alone and attended Finnish language courses or other integration training. It became evident that a demographically broader sample would deepen the understanding of the phenomenon, so a Stage 2 was later set up with the help of the interpreter assistant, an insider in the refugee community.

In Stage 2, as well as snowball sampling among the interpreter assistant's networks, participants were recruited though posts in local Facebook groups. Altogether, 23 people, 18 women and ten men, aged 18–43, were interviewed in Stage 2. Thirteen interviewees originated from Turkey, eight from Iraq and two from Syria. Most (17) were married and had children, while six were single, living in a single household or with their parents (which was the case for two of the younger participants). Most of the interviewees were still studying Finnish or vocational studies or waiting for their integration course to start. Three were caring for young children at home, and three were unemployed job seekers.

The interviewees were not specifically selected with certain background criteria in mind. However, during the interviews, most of them turned out to have belonged to a well-off section of the population in their home countries; attended higher education; pursued careers in business, education, or the public sector; and described their former economic situation as stable and comfortable. This aligns with the demographic profile of the refugees who arrived in Finland in the past decade, who are generally educated and have work experience in various fields (Dahl 2016). The push-factors in the interviewees' countries of origin possibly explain this. For example, in the case of Turkey, many who fled the country after the 2016 coup d'état attempt were intellectuals with important positions in the education and finance sectors, leading them to be alleged as insurgents or their supporters (Mayer 2016).

All interviewees in Stages 1 and 2 had a refugee background; having come to Finland as quota refugees, through the asylum process, or arrived through a family-reunification process as the spouses of those previously granted asylum in Finland. All the interviewees had received a residence permit in Finland and lived there for one to six years.

4.3. Coding and analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded with Nvivo. The analysis method was conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Simple word counts for determining reoccurring terms (Stemler 2000) could not be used, as the interview transcripts contained material in different languages. Instead, the transcripts were first read and reread several times to identify general themes and then categorized into meaningful clusters. On initial analysis, three sequential dimensions (clusters) emerged: past, present, and future—interpreted as liminal stages leading not to a resolution but prolonged liminality. For each of these temporal dimensions, codes relating to for

[1]Before starting the interviews, an ethics clearance was obtained from the researcher's university. The project's aims and methods were explained, and informed consent was collected from all participants. The anonymity and possibility to choose what to disclose and the right to end participation at any time was always emphasized. Re-traumatizing topics were avoided. See Leinonen et al. (2021) on ethically studying refugees.

example, consumption patterns, cherished possessions, encountered difficulties, and dreams were established. In the next step of the analysis, the codes were further subcategorized into material versus immaterial possessions and consumption. At this point, a decisive shift from material to immaterial started to emerge from the data, which was inductively interpreted as turning from solid to liquid consumption, where solid stands for the tangible, enduring possessions with strong attachments to the self, and liquid refers to the short-lived, access-based possessions (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012). The coding process included going back and forth between the data and the theory, allowing insights to emerge from the data rather than predefined theoretical assumptions (Dubois and Gadde 2002).

5. Findings

In the following, features of the refugees' liminality and relationships to possessions, as well as how they negotiate the time between the past, present, and future are illustrated and discussed with the help of anonymized quotes from the interviews.

5.1. The "before"—solid consumption and order

When analyzing the narratives about the interviewees' pre-liminal past in their native countries before setting out on the refugee journey, an impression of a wealthy and stable lifestyle emerged. The interviewees' past socio-economic status, combined with the structural differences in the markets of their home countries (such as the low prices of commodities and lower or non-existent taxation of income) had led to the interviewees' purchasing power having been relatively high. Interviewees reminisced as they remembered a pre-displacement life where balance and order prevailed. There, solid consumption played a central role and buying new things was easy and enjoyable, as this quote exemplifies:

> There, my personal economic situation was stronger. I did not have a rent to pay—it was my own home. My salary was good, I was working at a good job, and I owned my home. And the price range there is lower than here; things are mostly cheaper. So, a person can have a more comfortable economic situation. (Ahmed, 39, formerly working as a government official in Iraq)

As described by the interviewees like Ahmed above, consumption in the home country is interpreted as a solid relationship to consumption—a material, enduring type of consumption based on ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). This counters the often-repeated claim that refugees come to the Nordic countries "for the money", to exploit the social welfare system (Hokkinen 2019). In the case of these interviewees, the change appears to have been the opposite. They had left their strong socio-economic position in a country with higher income inequality (World Inequality Database 2018a) to arrive in a more precarious position in a country with lower income inequality (World Inequality Database 2018b). This drop in the standards of living relative to their surroundings is construed to have made their experience of loss stronger. The forced displacement, inevitably a major life transition, could also be interpreted in terms of consumer timework as a temporal disruption to the individuals' consumer identity (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022). The previous lifestyle is viewed by the interviewees as a relatively empowered state where unconstrained consumption was possible. The developments leading to one becoming a refugee—persecution, security threats or war—then discontinued this stable past and disrupted the consumer identity familiar from home.

Becoming a refugee is the turning point at which one leaves behind the old lifestyle and enters liminality. We know from previous literature (e.g. Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, and Lacey 2012; Pavia and Mason 2004) that people tend to alleviate the discomfort of liminal transitions with consumption, and financial precarity is found to increase attachment to material possessions (Tully, Hershfield, and Meyvis 2015). However, the interviewed refugees' previous interest in solid

possessions appeared to have declined rather than heightened after entering the extreme liminality of becoming a refugee, as the following quote exemplifies:

> I liked to buy a lot of clothes. I always loved buying a lot of clothes. I studied at a university and clothes were important. But this thing changed in Finland. I don't know why, but this changed in Finland. I lost the desire to be in fashion. (Faiza, 31, from Iraq)

Thus, the immediate consumer response to the liminality that forced displacement caused appears to not follow the expected consumption pattern to overcome liminality (Darveau and Cheikh-Ammar 2021). Instead, the loss and trauma of forced displacement is interpreted to have pushed people from solid to liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Mimoun and Bardhi 2022). This change in the relationship to consumption and possessions is further analyzed in the following.

5.2. From solid to liquid

Based on the analysis of the interview data, entry into the extreme liminal transition of forced displacement seems to have altered the refugees' relationships to possessions, replacing solid consumption with liquid consumption for survival and coping. Unlike voluntarily liquid consumers (Mimoun and Bardhi 2022) who frequently seek to destabilize their consumption and avoid getting "fixed" on anything, the refugees appear to experience the thrust into liquidity only once.

Transitioning to liquid consumption coincided with losing possessions. For most, the refugee journey included numerous dangers. Many interviewees had arrived in Finland through irregular routes, often risking their lives when crossing borders and the Mediterranean. With limited possibilities to bring belongings, they focused on important documents and items relevant for survival. Some things were lost along the way; even those that withstood the trip were typically later discarded and replaced.

> I left Turkey with a backpack … I had two phones with me, an HTC and an iPhone. When I arrived here, I arrived with just my clothes, nothing else. [I lost] everything, yeah. Like, I started throwing [things], because I didn't want to keep the dirty clothes in my bag. When I arrived somewhere, I changed my clothes, and I kept going. (Tariq, 28, Iraq)

Tariq is describing the disposal of his clothes along the way as a practical decision to be able to "keep going"—in the literal sense of the phrase. Several other interviewees also described making similar decisions to dispose of the few possessions they had managed to bring. Few could name any item they still had from their pre-flight life. One explanation could be pragmatic, as seen with Tariq: The refugees could not carry anything extra on the perilous journey and relied on possibly replacing the lost possessions later when safely settled. Yet, this does not explain the sentimental side of possessions—the ability of material items to remind one of the past and bring comfort in loss (Nations, Baker, and Krszjzaniek 2017; Noble and Walker 1997). Even the few items the interviewees had been able to bring along on the refugee journey were later discarded and replaced rather than saved for nostalgic purposes. One could argue that the almost careless attitude towards possessions from the past life is an attempt to break free from the previous identity (Mimoun and Bardhi 2022) or is an act of active forgetting (Marcoux 2017), where the disposing of memory objects is necessary to continue life after a traumatic event. The refugees seem to engage in emancipatory consumer timework (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022) where leaving behind the old possessions is a way to make sense of the present and a way to break free from the past. According to Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario (2022, 103), with emancipatory consumer timework, one who has experienced disruption in their consumer identity can attempt to re-engage with their previous identity.

The immediate trauma of loss and displacement, along with the need to survive and move on, forced the refugees to rearrange their priorities—exemplified by the following quote by Azra (41, from Turkey), who was asked which items she wanted or missed when she first arrived in Finland:

> Nothing. Because of the feeling I had, because of everything I had to experience … nothing could have made me happy at that time, when I came. Don't get me wrong, it's not because of this country, it's a fine country. But after what I lived through and experienced, nothing could have made me happy at the time. […] There is no item that I could not live without. I have lived through a time when I could have named a lot of important items. But I have learned that you can live without any things. I have learned that no item is important anymore … Their importance has disappeared. When you have had to give [them] up, you learn that you can live without them. Their value has decreased. You can make it without them.

Azra is speaking about a learning experience; through difficulties and loss, she has learned to live with few material possessions and decreasing their worth, meaning the refugees have learned to make do with liquid consumption, despite it not being their desired consumption style.

As the refugees had arrived in a country offering basic social security to newcomers, such could have also enabled their consumption turning liquid. As the reception center provided basic necessities, there was no immediate emergency requiring them to stock up on or replace lost items using their own means. Instead, immaterial values, such as privacy and knowledge of the outcome of the asylum application, became more important, as this quote illustrates:

> It's more about knowing destiny. Because material needs, stuff—it was mostly available. Most of things and basic needs were available, like a bed, a place to cook, a bathroom and [so on]. But I was looking for the next step and the future. I was not expecting to end up in camp life [a reception center], and to such a place where there is no privacy, just one room … It's more about knowing destiny than wanting materials. (Ali, 37, a father of 6 from Iraq)

As illustrated above, the entering liquid consumption is characterized as involuntary, involving the traumatic loss of a former lifestyle, socio-economic status, and possessions, complemented with the voluntary disposal of the remaining belongings. As the basics for immediate survival, such as a place to sleep and food, are provided by the host society, the need for the emergency stocking up of necessities upon arrival is reduced. In the following, a closer look is taken at what happens after consumption has turned liquid and the liminal transition persists.

5.3. The "during"—navigating long-term involuntary liminality

At the time of the interviews, most of the study participants had lived in Finland for several years and re-established themselves, at least somewhat. Everyone had secured a residence permit, most were attending or had completed their language and integration training, and none were living in a reception center anymore, and they had all settled in private apartments. Yet, the liminal transition of integrating into a new country was ongoing, and the interviewees were dreaming of a distant future where things would go "back to normal". Instead of having exited liminality upon securing a permanent protection status—a type of legal exit from liminality (Hartonen et al. 2022)—the liminality is interpreted to have continued in a space "between what was left and what is to come" (Wimark 2021). Despite the financial support for refugees in Finland, enabling participation in the everyday consumption of necessities and some freedom in the consumption choices (Hokkinen 2019), most of this study's participants described their personal economy as scarce compared with their previous lifestyle in their home countries. As consumers, refugees are also easily pushed to the margins, as the local population questions their legitimacy on the consumer market (Hokkinen 2019). This, combined with losing their home, possessions, transferrable skills, and social capital, and the long and rocky road of integrating into a new country, is interpreted to have led the refugees into prolonged liminality.

For example, Ali (37, from Iraq), who had lived in Finland for five years at the time of the interviews, still felt like he did not quite fit in:

> I left my home country by force, not by choice. There, it was a different lifestyle; I had more options there. Here, I couldn't yet fit in to live a normal life. I feel … I also got depressed here, which I never was in my home country. If my home country had a normal situation, I would have stayed there. Because I cannot fit in here yet. Because of, of course, language and work [issues].

The interviewees mostly attributed their integration difficulties to not having learned the local language enough to meaningfully join the workforce, putting them in a position of prolonged liminality and precarity, despite having a residence permit and passing Finland's formal integration system.

The interviewees seemed not to have many cherished possessions. When inquiring about their most treasured possessions, most struggled to name an item. Immaterial possessions, as well as replaceable items with functional value, such as electronic devices for information-seeking, entertainment, or keeping in touch with loved ones, were important to all the interviewees, thus implying ephemerality, where context-dependent access is valued over solid possessions and ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). For example, when discussing one's most treasured possessions, the centrality of digital consumption was emphasized, as the quote below illustrates:

> [My] phone. Phone is [my] dearest possession. Through it, I can contact all the people, and get information through it, I can get to social media through it. I can do so much through it, so it's a very important item. (Sara, 35, from Iraq)

The physical device is not the important possession; rather, the value is placed on what it facilitates: access to important documents, entertainment, information, and contact with loved ones back home, indicating dematerialized consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). Liquid consumption of digital services enables deeper solid structures and values, like maintaining relationships with family and friends. Several interviewees mentioned a "mandatory" daily call to their home country, to their parents and relatives to check their well-being. As Mohammed, a 43-year-old father of three from Iraq, put it, only relationships with loved ones are important in the end, everything else can be "replaced and re-bought":

> It's not about the stuff, it's about the human beings, the relationships, and friends and family members. Those are the dearest things for me. Everything else could be re-bought and replaced … Stuff can be replaced with new stuff.

Despite their geographical distance, the strong attachment to loved ones speaks against the liquefying of structures and relationships (Bauman 2000). While engaging in liquid consumption through access based, digital consumption, refugees still tried to maintain the solid structures of social ties, contrasting with previous theories on liquid consumption, where sentimental attachments are seen as burdensome and relationships as more transactional (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017, 590). However, as Dudley (2010) noted, the past and current place diverge more as time passes, even if the refugees attempt to maintain connections. Thus, even the solid social structures slowly liquefy, despite attempts to cling to them for safety.

Like the digital devices enabling something deeper and immaterial to be experienced, a symbolic use-value is tied to other types of objects. Unlike the traditional understanding of the importance of tangible, symbolic, and sacred possessions (see, e.g. Hill 1991), here, the focus is again on immaterial and intangible values that are only facilitated by the material possession, meaning these items did not appear to have a nostalgic worth, such as by being brought on the refugee journey, or being an irreplaceable physical artifact. Instead, they had been purchased after arrival in Finland and came to symbolize the inherent emotional and immaterial values. Rather than the attachment being to a specific, replaceable material item, this attachment is interpreted to be directed towards what this item symbolizes, what it is used for, or the emotions it evokes:

> Things are not important for me. But at the moment, the most important item for me is the double bed at home. Because I used to live in difficult times when I did not have a double bed. It is very important. It's comfortable. Also, for me, it's so important to be a family, and [the double bed] has to do with that. (Fatma, 30, from Turkey)

Another component of the liquid nature of refugee consumption becomes evident from the many stories about food. When participants were asked to photograph their most important belongings for the initial photovoice interviews in Stage 1 of the empirical study, most just showed photos of

food items, predominantly the ingredients to make traditional Middle Eastern dishes. The interview notes were filled with stories of specific dishes prepared by the interviewees' mothers, the celebrations and gatherings they enjoyed over these foods in their home countries, and their attempts to learn how to cook them alone in Finland with YouTube's help. Food's ability to bring back memories and facilitate a short-term reincorporation of the past (as Dudley theorized in 2010) is interpreted as a form of liquid consumption, which, in its accessibility and shortlivedness, still aims to help cope with prolonged liminality. Such nostalgic consumption is also a form of integrative consumer timework (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022), enacted to harmonize the past with the present. However, as Dudley (2010) pointed out, the same foods that can help refugees reconnect with their past and cope with the stress of liminality bring back painful memories making it obvious there is no return to the past. This ambivalence is clearly exemplified in the following excerpt from the interview with Abbas, a 21-year-old Iraqi:

> [Showing a photo of a package of cheese] For example this one, it's my favorite cheese. That's one of the things I liked, even in [the city I come from]. I used to eat that for breakfast with bread and tea. Now I can get it here. It's kind of cool. The same style, the same thing that you used to eat for breakfast with your parents, and now it's here. But you're eating it alone, that's the difference. Yeah, sometimes, like you get into that deep feeling: "Oh! I used to eat that stuff with my family, with big family [at] the same table". But, that's life. I'm running away … I'm following my dreams and my life, so, it's not very good to think emotionally. But, of course, sometimes … (Abbas, 21, Iraq)

As these examples illustrate, even in their drawn-out liminal state, the interviewees found ways to temporarily navigate their situation and harmonize their past with the present moment with liquid consumption. The following analyzes possible avenues for refugees to exit the liminality and enter their desired reversal to solid consumption.

5.4. The "after"—dreaming of a solid future

The interviewees' future dreams included steps that can be interpreted as exits from the liminal transition, such as learning the local language, securing employment, or getting citizenship. Those with children focused on the next generation's future possibilities and education. Language learning and employment can be interpreted as tangible stepping-stones out of liminality, moving into new-found stability and resolution, enabling a stronger personal economy and the possibility to fully participate in a consumer lifestyle. As Amina (35, from Syria) put it, when asked about her future dreams, the aim was to reach the same kind of life as "back in normal times" in her home country:

> Learning the language, me and my kids, during [the upcoming] years. Being able to communicate with the Finnish people. And being citizens also. To have the same kind of life that we had in Syria back in normal times.

Thus, Amina's pre-displacement lifestyle emerges as something she would like to return to someday. Instead of returning to her home country, she dreams of returning to the normalcy the solid structures and consumption once offered. Moreover, many interviewees also dreamed about solid possessions, such as new furniture, their own house, or a car:

> A spacious home and a car, a new car. These would fulfill my dreams and needs at the moment. (Mostapha, 36, from Turkey)

The liquid consumption identified during the liminal transition is expected and desired to end once the liminal transition ends. At the time of the interviews, consumption was still access-based (i.e. things were not owned); thus, strong relationships were not formed with items (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). However, interviewees pursued ownership rather than mere access and solidity rather than liquidity. The refugees appeared to depict their past lifestyles as the desired point of return (Dudley 2010), if only through consumption and not physically. None of the interviewees regarded the possibility of moving back to their home country as feasible or even desirable. The

refugees attempted to bridge their past and future lives by returning to solid consumption through what is interpreted as integrative consumer timework—reestablishing the breached connection between their pasts and their futures (Robinson, Veresiu, and Babić Rosario 2022). The interviewees did not name a specific event or timeline for reaching these goals, which could be interpreted as the risk of liminality continuing indefinitely. The following comment by Farid, 38, from Iraq, who, at the time of the interviews, was unemployed, exemplifies how one should expect to wait for larger solid purchases, even after securing employment:

> If you want to buy something big, like a car or a home, or an apartment, you need a job first. Continuous job for two to three years. That's the first thing to get to your goal. This is my point.

Based on these dreams of a solid lifestyle in the future, the refugees' liquid relationship to possessions is interpreted as a period of deviation from the "normal" solid life, not the desired lifestyle for the rest of their life. Once the liminality is expected to end—however long that might take—one could return to one's old lifestyle of solid consumption. The interviewees still expected to remain in the liminal state for a long while. Establishing a permanent home, independence from social security, and long-term employment were depicted as markers of full integration in a new country of residence. Prolonged and precarious liminality is interpreted to have forced refugees to adopt liquid consumption in the meantime, while their goal remains toward solid consumption and life in general.

5.5. Summary of findings

As elaborated above, the interviews with the refugees indicate that the imposed liminality of forced displacement led them to exhibit a liquid relationship to possessions and consumption. Rather than using material consumption to overcome liminality, they cope with the help of online-based social relationships and consumption that symbolizes immaterial values. They attempt bridging their past with the future through consumption, first in a liquid manner and eventually by returning to solid consumption. The following table summarizes the different stages of the refugee liminal experience and the corresponding changes in the relationship to possessions Table 1.

6. Discussion

This paper aimed to explore how liquid consumption plays out in involuntary, long-term liminality. By studying refugees resettled in Finland, the study shed light on the abilities of liquid consumption to facilitate navigating prolonged, involuntary liminality. Below, the characteristics of refugees' liquid consumption are contrasted with the extant knowledge about liquid consumption in voluntary contexts, highlighting the study's contribution to theory and practice. Finally, the limitations of the study along with directions for future research are presented.

Table 1. The stages of refugee liminal experience and the relationships to possessions.

Time	PAST: Lifestyle in the home country	PAST: Becoming a refugee	CURRENT: Lifestyle in Finland	FUTURE: Desired lifestyle in the years to come
Stage of the refugee liminal experience	Before liminality	Onset of liminality	Long-term liminality	Anticipated exit from liminality
Characteristics of consumption	• High purchasing power • Enjoyment in shopping • Attachment to material possessions	• Loss of possessions • Disposal of belongings • Loss of attachment to material possessions	• Digital, immaterial consumption • Items with functional value cherished • Nostalgic consumption of food	• Re-establishment of previous lifestyle • Dreams of material possessions (a house, a car, etc.)
Relationship to consumption	Solid consumption	Solid -> liquid consumption	Liquid consumption	Liquid -> solid consumption (anticipated)

6.1. Contribution to theory

The results of the empirical study corroborate the liquid consumption theory (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Mimoun and Bardhi 2022) by suggesting that people on the move do not cling to solid possessions but value usability, replaceability, and access. This liquid consumption style, previously theorized as a voluntary choice of those wealthy and capable, is in this paper extended to people forced into liquidity due to their precarious and extreme circumstances.

Firstly, the entry into liquid consumption appears to be a one-time event for refugees. In contrast to the voluntarily flexible consumers (Mimoun and Bardhi 2022), who seek to repeatedly liquefy their consumption in different areas of life, the researched refugees thrust into liquid consumption only once, in connection with the traumatic refugee journey and the loss of their possessions and homes. Moreover, the one-time entry into liquidity is involuntary, thus differing from the voluntary types of liquid consumption identified previously (Mimoun and Bardhi 2022; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Barhdi and Eckhardt 2017). The extreme circumstances of the refugee journey forced the individuals to leave most of their belongings behind and dispose of the rest along the way. Refugees also appear to engage in intentional disposal to forget traumatic events (for examples of similar behaviors, see, Marcoux 2017). The interview data implies that involuntary liquid consumption is learned in order to survive during extreme liminality, challenging the assumption by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017, 592), who stated that "Those who are thrust involuntarily into liquidity, such as homeless people, are particularly vulnerable. The literature has shown that they try to manage this unwanted liquidity in their lives via solid consumption." Thus, the results challenge the theoretical assumptions that people attach their identity to solid possessions in situations of drastic change and loss or economic precariousness (e.g. Hill 1991; Tully, Hershfield, and Meyvis 2015). Deriving from the involuntary and traumatic nature of the refugee experience, the material, financial, and social position of the refugee consumers differ significantly from the elite consumers studied in the previous literature regarding liquid consumption (for example, the expats studied by Bardhi, Eckhardt and Arnould in 2012). The interviewed refugees were used to a higher standard of living before the onset of the problems in their home countries. Due to their forced displacement, they experienced not only general economic constrains related to property loss and lack of employment but a drop in general socio-economic position upon fleeing from their home countries to Finland (Dahl 2016; World Inequality Database 2018a; 2018b).

Another key finding of the study is that in contrast with previous studies about liquid consumers, the importance of solid social relationships—digitally maintained due to circumstances—is heightened in the liquid consumption exhibited by the refugees. Previous literature about liquid consumption assumes social ties as burdensome for those living a liquid life and relationships to liquefy into a more transactional and benefit-based nature (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017, 590). Such seems not to be the case for refugees, who actively maintain family ties via digital means, indicating that their digital devices are their most important belongings. Building on this, the study's findings imply that liquid (access-based, digital, and ephemeral) consumption can support people in long-term liminality, thus responding to the call for future research by Appau, Ozanne, and Klein (2020, 187).

Finally, refugees' liquid consumption is characterized by a dream to return to solid consumption when circumstances allow—when permanent employment, housing, and language skills are reached, differing from the previous conceptualizations of liquid consumption, where liquidity is a lifestyle intended to last (e.g. Mimoun and Bardhi 2022). The desired exit from liquid consumption is interpreted to coincide with when long-term liminality ends. Restoring the solid, pre-displacement lifestyle appears as a marker of complete integration and an imagined return to life as it was before the onset of the traumatic events. The article contributes to the liminality theory by shedding light on liminality's temporal aspects, establishing that refugee liminality does not necessarily end when a residence permit is obtained (Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher 2017; Hartonen et al. 2022) but suggests that liminality continues long past that, as illustrated by the refugees' desire to return to their solid lifestyle in the distant future.

6.2. Practical implications

This study's results give new insights into policy and practice around reception and integration services for refugees. The results indicate the need to depart from assuming that integration is full-fledged after one receives a residence permit or passes the formal integration program. The speedy handling of asylum applications and swift entry to integration services undeniably benefits the well-being of refugees. However, the narratives depict that the refugees' liminality does not end there. The refugees are interpreted to exist in a long-term state of instability and transformation, calling for better strategies to help them navigate the liminality. At the simplest, this could mean supporting the refugees in those activities that help them cope with long-term liminality, such as liquid consumption in the form of keeping in contact with loved ones far away through digital devices. However, assisting refugees to find a way out of the long-term liminality emerges as even more vital. Based on this study's findings, the most accessible route to achieve this would be to increasingly focus on helping people find long-term employment, as this emerges in the results as a stepping-stone out of liminality. Employment not only enables an income level sufficient for engaging in consumption—whether it be liquid or solid in nature—but is also tied to integration and the possibilities of involvement and inclusion.

6.3. Limitations and directions for future research

There are always limitations to how far qualitative, deeply contextually embedded research can be generalized. The specifics of the Finnish situation will not apply directly to other contexts. However, as very similar challenges related to refugee integration have been identified in many other Western societies (see, e.g. Abkhezr, McMahon, and Rossouw 2015; Pozzo 2022; van Dijk et al. 2022), it is reasonable to assume that the insights of this paper can enrich knowledge on how refugees navigate their prolonged liminality, also in other Nordic and European contexts. Specifically, it seems likely that the ability of liquid, and especially digital, consumption to support wellbeing in long-term liminality is a discovery that can be carried over to other contexts, even beyond the realm of international mobility.

Some issues that were beyond the scope of this project can hopefully inspire future research. As this study was not longitudinal, the later developments of the interviewees' relationships to possessions and consumption could not be followed. Studying if and how individuals can exit liquid consumption would be interesting to better understand the temporary dynamics of liquid consumption. Based on this study, we know the refugees dreamed of reverting to solid consumption, but whether this can actually happen, and which factors possibly contribute to this is still unexplored.

Also, researching the different emotional states related to solid versus liquid consumption and the affects that steer the disposal or acquisition of possessions would be an intriguing direction for future studies. The possible trauma-related reasons of disposing of memories (Marcoux 2017) and, conversely, the emotional bonds to items one tries to bring along could deepen our understanding of how and why one transitions from solid to liquid consumption. People's perceptions of liquid vs. solid consumption—meaning whether they are deemed acceptable consumption styles—and the occasions when they feel most at ease versus most uncomfortable with liquidity, would add understanding of why someone would want to enter or exit liquid consumption.

Further research must address digital service usage among refugees and its implications for prolonged liminality and integration. Easy access to digital services helps one access the relevant information and knowledge for resettlement. Moreover, the support of loved ones far away can be a necessary form of coping during liminality. The constant consumption of news and entertainment from the country of origin and the active upholding of social relations with the home country can sometimes act as obstacles to integration by increasing the risk of isolation from the surrounding society. Whether this active upholding of contacts with the former home country and culture leads

to self-ethnicization or facilitates coping and actually eases code-switching is worth exploring further (see Foroutan and Hensel 2020).

Also, citizen responsibilization for refugee integration deserves more attention in the future. We know that the support of locals is crucial in refugee integration (e.g. van Dijk et al. 2022). How the local individuals and communities relate to refugee liquid consumption and how they could facilitate a swifter exit from liminality could be explored in the future.

This paper has sought to shed light on some of the ways refugees use consumption to navigate their extreme liminality, while offering implications for anyone thrust into unexpected and unwanted transformations. As the world becomes increasingly more unpredictable, we need a better understanding of liquid consumption's abilities to support and empower people experiencing involuntary prolonged liminality.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Åbo Akademi University School of Business and Economics (Finland).

Notes on contributor

Maria Hokkinen is a recent PhD graduate from the Åbo Akademi University School of Business and Economics (Finland). Her research interests include consumer behavior and refugee integration trajectories.

References

Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers 2010/1386 (available in Finnish and Swedish). Accessed November 15, 2021. https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2010/20101386

Abkhezr, P., M. McMahon, and P. Rossouw. 2015. "Youth with Refugee Backgrounds in Australia: Contextual and Practical Considerations for Career Counsellors." *Australian Journal of Career Development* 24 (2): 71–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416215584406

Alkhaled, S., and I. Sasaki. 2022. "Syrian Women Refugees: Coping with Indeterminate Liminality During Forcible Displacement." *Organization Studies* 43 (10): 1583–1605. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406211040214.

Alloush, M., J. E. Taylor, A. Gupta, R. I. R. Valdes, and E. Gonzalez-Estrada. 2017. "Economic Life in Refugee Camps." *World Development* 95: 334–347. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.02.030

Appau, S., J. L. Ozanne, and J. G. Klein. 2020. "Understanding Difficult Consumer Transitions: The in/Dividual Consumer in Permanent Liminality." *Journal of Consumer Research* 47 (2): 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucaa010

Bardhi, F., and G. M. Eckhardt. 2017. "Liquid Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research* 44 (3): 582–597. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx050

Bardhi, F., G. M. Eckhardt, and E. J. Arnould. 2012. "Liquid Relationship to Possessions." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39 (3): 510–529. https://doi.org/10.1086/664037

Barnard, H., and C. Pendock. 2013. "To Share or not to Share: The Role of Affect in Knowledge Sharing by Individuals in a Diaspora." *Journal of International Management* 19 (1): 47–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2012.11.003

Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Belk, R. 1988. "Possessions and the Extended Self." *Journal of Consumer Research* 15 (2): 139–168. https://doi.org/10.1086/209154

Belk, R. W. 1992. "Attachment to Possessions." In *Place Attachment. Human Behavior and Environment*. Vol. 12, edited by I. Altman and S. M. Low, 37–62. Boston, MA: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-8753-4_3.

Dahl, P. 2016. Turvapaikanhakijat sittenkin varsin koulutettuja — ministeriön tilaama kartoitus valmistui. *YLE News*, 21.3.2016. Accessed September 2, 2022. https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8757220.

Darveau, J., and M. Cheikh-Ammar. 2021. "The Interplay Between Liminality and Consumption: A Systematic Literature Review with a Future Research Agenda." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 45 (4): 867–888. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12678.

Dubois, A., and L. E. Gadde. 2002. “Systematic Combining: An Abductive Approach to Case Research.” *Journal of Business Research* 55 (7): 553–560. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(00)00195-8
Dudley, S. H. 2010. *Materialising Exile: Material Culture and Embodied Experience among Karenni Refugees in Thailand (Vol. 27)*. New York: Berghahn Books.
Esses, V. M., L. K. Hamilton, and D. Gaucher. 2017. “The Global Refugee Crisis: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement.” *Social Issues and Policy Review* 11 (1): 78–123. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12028
Ferraro, R., J. E. Escalas, and J. R. Bettman. 2011. “Our Possessions, our Selves: Domains of Self-Worth and the Possession—Self Link.” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 21 (2): 169–177. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.08.007
Finnish Immigration Service. 2023a. Immigration in 2022. Accessed May 5, 2023. https://migri.fi/-/maahanmuuton-vuosi-2022-venajan-hyokkays-ukrainaan-vaikutti-laajasti-maahanmuuttoon?languageId = en_US.
Finnish Immigration Service. 2023b. Quota refugees. Accessed May 5, 2023. https://migri.fi/en/quota-refugees.
Finnish Immigration Service. 2023c. Reception Allowance. Accessed May 5, 2023. https://migri.fi/en/reception-allowance.
Finnish Refugee Council. 2020. *Pakolaisuus Suomessa*. Accessed September 21, 2021. https://pakolaisapu.fi/pakolaisuus-suomessa/#.
Foroutan, N., and J. Hensel. 2020. *Die Gesellschaft der Anderen*. Berlin: Aufbau Digital.
Greenbaum, T. L. 1998. *The Handbook for Focus Group Research*. London: Sage.
Greenbaum, T. L. 1999. *Moderating Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Group Facilitation*. London: Sage Publications.
Hartonen, V. R., P. Väisänen, L. Karlsson, and S. Pöllänen. 2022. “A Stage of Limbo: A Meta-Synthesis of Refugees’ Liminality.” *Applied Psychology* 71 (3): 1132–1167. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12349
Hill, R. P. 1991. “Homeless Women, Special Possessions, and the Meaning of ‘Home’: An Ethnographic Case Study.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 18 (3): 298–310. https://doi.org/10.1086/209261
Hokkinen, M. 2019. “Unacceptable Consumption: Conflicts of Refugee Consumption in a Nordic Welfare State.” In *Nordic Consumer Culture*, edited by S. Askegaard and J. Östberg, 95–117. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1_5.
Hsieh, H. F., and S. E. Shannon. 2005. “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.” *Qualitative Health Research* 15 (9): 1277–1288.
Hynie, M. 2018. “The Social Determinants of Refugee Mental Health in the Post-Migration Context: A Critical Review.” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 63 (5): 297–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717746666
Kennett-Hensel, P. A., J. Z. Sneath, and R. Lacey. 2012. “Liminality and Consumption in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster.” *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 29 (1): 52–63.
Khawaja, N. G., K. M. White, R. Schweitzer, and J. Greenslade. 2008. “Difficulties and Coping Strategies of Sudanese Refugees: A Qualitative Approach.” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 45 (3): 489–512. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461508094678
Kim, Y. 2011. “The Pilot Study in Qualitative Inquiry: Identifying Issues and Learning Lessons for Culturally Competent Research.” *Qualitative Social Work* 10 (2): 190–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010362001
Koselleck, R. 2005. “Temporal Foreshortening and Acceleration: A Study on Secularization.” In *Religion and Politics*, 207–229. Leiden: Brill.
Kriechbaum-Vitellozzi, E., and R. Kreuzbauer. 2006. “Poverty Consumption: Consumer Behaviour of Refugees in Industrialized Countries.” In *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 33*, edited by C. Pechmann and L. Price, 435–444. Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research.
Leinonen, J., E. Lyytinen, M. Tiilikainen, and M. Kmak. 2021. *Ethics of Studying Forced Migration: Critical Questions to Consider*. Accessed November 11, 2021. https://liikkeessaylirajojen.fi/ethics-of-studying-forced-migration-critical-questions-to-consider/.
Luedicke, M. K. 2011. “Consumer Acculturation Theory:(Crossing) Conceptual Boundaries.” *Consumption Markets & Culture* 14 (3): 223–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2011.574824
Marcoux, J. S. 2017. “Souvenirs to Forget.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 43 (6): 950–969. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw069
Mayer, M. 2016. *After the Coup Attempt: Asylum for Turkish citizens*. In Lexology. Accessed December 7, 2021. https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g = b1a89a52-fbaf-4cce-b455-1ac78a9c86c4.
Mehta, R., and R. W. Belk. 1991. “Artifacts, Identity, and Transition: Favorite Possessions of Indians and Indian Immigrants to the United States.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 17 (4): 398–411. https://doi.org/10.1086/208566
Mimoun, L., and F. Bardhi. 2022. “Chronic Consumer Liminality: Being Flexible in Precarious Times.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 49 (3): 496–519. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab073.
Ministry of the Interior. 2021. Refugees flee persecution in their home countries. Accessed September 8, 2021. https://intermin.fi/en/areas-of-expertise/migration/refugees-and-asylum-seekers.
Nakata, C., E. Izberk-Bilgin, L. Sharp, J. Spanjol, A. S. Cui, S. Y. Crawford, and Y. Xiao. 2019. “Chronic Illness Medication Compliance: A Liminal and Contextual Consumer Journey.” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47: 192–215.

Nations, C., S. M. Baker, and E. Krszjzaniek. 2017. "Trying to Keep you: How Grief, Abjection, and Ritual Transform the Social Meanings of a Human Body." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 20 (5): 403–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2017.1367678

Niemelä, H., and K. Salminen. 2006. Social Security in Finland. *Eläketurvakeskus*.

Noble, C. H., and B. A. Walker. 1997. "Exploring the Relationships among Liminal Transitions, Symbolic Consumption, and the Extended Self." *Psychology & Marketing* 14 (1): 29–47. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199701)14:1<29::AID-MAR3>3.0.CO;2-Q

Nykänen, S., R. García-Velázquez, H. Yüksel, H. Kuusio, and S. Rask. 2022. "Työllisyys ja koettu elämänlaatu maahan muuttaneessa väestössä." *Suomalaisten hyvinvointi*, 116–131.

Oka, R. C. 2014. "Coping with the Refugee Wait: The Role of Consumption, Normalcy, and Dignity in Refugee Lives at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya." *American Anthropologist* 116 (1): 23–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12076

Organista, P. B., K. C. Organista, and K. Kurasaki. 2003. "The Relationship Between Acculturation and Ethnic Minority Health." In *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research*, edited by K. M. Chun, P. Balls Organista, and G. Marín, 139–161. American Psychological Association.

Pavia, T. M., and M. J. Mason. 2004. "The Reflexive Relationship Between Consumer Behavior and Adaptive Coping." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (2): 441–454. https://doi.org/10.1086/422121

Pellander, S., and N. Kotilainen. 2017. *(Not) Looking Like a Refugee: Visual Memories of Refugeeness and the Figure of 'The iPhone Man'*. Accessed March 23, 2022. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/06/not-looking.

Peltola, U., and L. Metso. 2008. Maahanmuuttajien kuntoutumisen ja työllistymisen tukeminen Helsingissä. (*Kuntoutussäätiön tutkimuksia*: Vol. 2008, No. 79).

Peñaloza, L. 1994. "Atravesando Fronteras/Border Crossings: A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of the Consumer Acculturation of Mexican Immigrants." *Journal of Consumer Research* 21 (1): 32–54. https://doi.org/10.1086/209381

PEW Research Center. 2016. Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015. Accessed March 22, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/.

Porter, M., and N. Haslam. 2005. "Predisplacement and Postdisplacement Factors Associated With Mental Health of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Meta-Analysis." *Jama* 294 (5): 602–612. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.294.5.602

Pozzo, M. 2022. "Moving on from Dutch to English: Young Refugees Feeling Betrayed by the Dutch Language Integration Policy and Seeking for More Inclusive Environments." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 35 (1): 348–367. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab091

Robinson, T. D., E. Veresiu, and A. Babić Rosario. 2022. "Consumer Timework." *Journal of Consumer Research* 49 (1): 96–111. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab046

Russell, C. A., and S. J. Levy. 2012. "The Temporal and Focal Dynamics of Volitional Reconsumption: A Phenomenological Investigation of Repeated Hedonic Experiences." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39 (2): 341–359. https://doi.org/10.1086/662996

Ryan, L., E. Kofman, and P. Aaron. 2011. "Insiders and Outsiders: Working with Peer Researchers in Researching Muslim Communities." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 14 (1): 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2010.481835

Saunders, B., J. Sim, T. Kingstone, S. Baker, J. Waterfield, B. Bartlam, H. Burroughs, and C. Jinks. 2018. "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring its Conceptualization and Operationalization." *Quality & Quantity* 52 (4): 1893–1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Sayre, S. 1994. "Possessions and Identity in Crisis: Meaning and Change for Victims of the Oakland Firestorm." *ACR North American Advances* 21: 109–114.

Sossou, M. A., C. D. Craig, H. Ogren, and M. Schnak. 2008. "A Qualitative Study of Resilience Factors of Bosnian Refugee Women Resettled in the Southern United States." *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 17 (4): 365–385. https://doi.org/10.1080/15313200802467908

Stemler, S. 2000. "An Overview of Content Analysis." *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* 7 (1): 17.

Sutton-Brown, C. A. 2014. "Photovoice: A Methodological Guide." *Photography and Culture* 7 (2): 169–185. https://doi.org/10.2752/175145214X13999922103165.

Szakolczai, A. 2017. "Permanent (Trickster) Liminality: The Reasons of the Heart and of the Mind." *Theory & Psychology* 27 (2): 231–248. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317694095

Tervola, J., and J. Verho. 2014. *Maahanmuuttajien sosiaaliturvan käyttö vuonna 2011*. KELA.

Thomassen, B. 2009. "The Uses and Meaning of Liminality." *International Political Anthropology* 2 (1): 5–28.

Tully, S. M., H. E. Hershfield, and T. Meyvis. 2015. "Seeking Lasting Enjoyment with Limited Money: Financial Constraints Increase Preference for Material Goods Over Experiences." *Journal of Consumer Research* 42 (1): 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv007

Turner, V. 1969. "*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*." *Aldine*.

Turner, V. 1974. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Cornell University Press.

UN. 2021. Global Issues: Refugees. Accessed October 29, 2021. https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees.
UNHCR. 2023a. Refugee Data Finder. Accessed May 5, 2023. https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/.
UNHCR. 2023b. Ukraine Refugee Situation. Accessed May 5, 2023. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine.
van Dijk, H., L. Knappert, Q. Muis, and S. Alkhaled. 2022. "Roomies for Life? An Assessment of how Staying with a Local Facilitates Refugee Integration." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 20 (3): 321–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1923879
van Gennep, A. (1909) 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. University of Chicago Press.
Viswanathan, M., R. Alfonso Arias, and A. Sreekumar. 2021. "Extreme Exclusion and Relative Deprivation in Subsistence Marketplaces: A Study in a Refugee Settlement in Nakivale, Uganda." *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 55 (1): 87–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12296
Wimark, T. 2021. "Homemaking and Perpetual Liminality among Queer Refugees." *Social & Cultural Geography* 22 (5): 647–665. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1619818
World Inequality Database. 2018a. Income Inequality, Iraq. Accessed September 18, 2022. https://wid.world/country/iraq/.
World Inequality Database. 2018b. Income Inequality, Finland. Accessed September 18, 2022. https://wid.world/country/finland/.
Ybema, S., N. Beech, and N. Ellis. 2011. "Transitional and Perpetual Liminality: An Identity Practice Perspective." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 34 (1–2): 21–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2011.11500005