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Published in:
Nordic Consumer Culture: State, Market and Consumers

DOI:
[10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1)

Published: 01/01/2019

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Document License
Publisher rights policy

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:
Hokkinen, M. (2019). Unacceptable Consumption: Conflicts of Refugee Consumption in a Nordic Welfare State. In S. Askegaard, & J. Östberg (Eds.), *Nordic Consumer Culture: State, Market and Consumers* (pp. 95–117). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04933-1>

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Unacceptable consumption?

Conflicts of refugee consumption in a Nordic welfare state

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, almost 66 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, over 22 million of them internationally (UNHCR, 2017). Most of the world's refugee population lives in developing countries, but the prolonged conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East have escalated the refugee crisis also in Europe. In 2015, a record-high number of asylum-seekers and refugees arrived in the Nordic countries. The numbers of filed asylum applications varied by country: Sweden topped the list with 163,000 applications (Migrationsinfo, 2016), whereas Finland received approximately 32,000 applications (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016), Norway 31,000 (IMO Report for Norway, 2017) and Denmark 21,000 (Library of Congress, 2016). This movement changed the lives of those displaced as well as stirred unforeseen reactions from those born and raised in the Nordic countries. The newly arrived asylum seekers were not only receivers of different types of public services but also active consumers whose presence in the marketplace was hard to ignore.

Most studies on multicultural consumers are focusing on immigrants who migrate for work, studies or family reasons, making their experience greatly different from that of refugees. The refugee experience can involve specific circumstances, such as changes in family setting caused by displacement, economic hardships, and trauma from past experiences in the home country or during the refugee journey (Kriechbaum-Vitellozzi & Kreuzbauer, 2006). In addition, a loss of material possessions (Belk, 1988) is often imminent, making it necessary to acquire a number of items when resettling in the new country. Simultaneously, the refugees need to deal with the task of transforming their everyday life, navigating legal and societal complexities while being expected to actively learn a new language and integrate into a new culture. During this grand transformation phase, consumption is happening constantly. In other words, refugees as

consumers and the implications of the refugee consumer status for the relations to the locals still deserve more attention.

This chapter addresses a core dimension of the state-market nexus, certain consumers' legitimacy to consume, by looking into the reactions of the locals in a Nordic welfare state toward newly arrived Middle Eastern refugee consumers. In the Western societies, consumption is regarded as the norm; it is through consumption that people access the normal and happy life (Bauman, 2007). The ways in which one is "allowed" to engage in this activity seems, however, to vary between different members of the society. In Finland, some financial assistance is offered to the applicants during the asylum process, and more so to those receiving the residence permit, enabling participation in the local consumer culture. The refugee crisis of 2015 showed that there are preconceived ideas on how refugees are supposed to consume. Their use of smartphones, the amount of money spent on the journey from the Middle East to Northern Europe, as well as the mere appearance of the newly arrived asylum seekers stirred confused reactions in the media and public discussion (Pellander & Kotilainen, 2017; O'Malley, 2015).

I investigated what types of relational conflicts the introduction of the refugee consumers in the Finnish sociocultural environment stirred, and what these can reveal us about the underlying values and attitudes toward consumption in a welfare state context. Based on a relational configuration analysis of indigenous' responses to immigrant acculturation (Luedicke, 2015), this chapter explores the idea that the responses toward refugee consumption stem from feelings of community erosion, challenged authority positions, expectations of equality matching and micro-macro level moral dilemmas. I argue that some of these relational tensions in the marketplace are emphasized in the Nordic welfare state context and with refugee consumers. In addition to the four conflicts identified by Luedicke (2015), I suggest a fifth dimension of mistrust in the fairness of the welfare system, which becomes evident in the Nordic setting.

This chapter also illustrates the phenomena by analyzing online discussion forum posts regarding refugee consumption in Finland in the aftermath of the 2015 peak year of refugee arrivals. The purpose of the examples from the online forums is not to provide a full-blown empirical analysis, but rather to illustrate my conceptual arguments regarding the position and legitimacy of certain consumers on the market by demonstrating these with excerpts. The study contributes to consumer acculturation research – specifically mutual acculturation literature – by deepening our understanding of the local community's reactions toward new consumers on

the market. I also suggest that the relational conflicts that emerged in the wake of the 2015 events in Finland have roots in the very foundations of the Nordic welfare model as well as in the rising distrust in traditional state institutions.

First, a brief overview is provided of the existing acculturation literature, with a specific focus on inter-group relations in consumer settings. Second, the context that this conceptual framework is studied within is presented. Then, the empirical part follows with examples from online forums illustrating the conceptual arguments, followed by a discussion and implications for the current societal debate and future directions of research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the following, I aim to give a short overview of how consumer acculturation (Berry 1997, Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Luedicke, 2011), in particular mutual acculturation (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997) and ethnic conflicts in consumption settings (Luedicke, 2015), is understood in the current literature. The subsequent analysis of the events following the 2015 refugee situation in Finland builds on the model by Luedicke (2015) about the conflicts between immigrant and indigenous consumers.

2.1. ACCULTURATION AND CONSUMPTION

When people are exposed to new cultures, for example when resettling in a new country, they undergo changes in self-identification. One of the classic models of this process is the acculturation taxonomy by Berry (1997). This psychological model is based on two dimensions; on the one hand, the individual's extent of identification with the culture of origin and, on the other hand, the desire to relate to the host culture. Because cultural differences and identity clashes often become visible in the marketplace, the acculturation of immigrants to the consumer culture of their new home countries attracted the interest of scholars early on. The early wave of consumer acculturation studies (Hirschman, 1981; Reilly & Wallendorf, 1987) explored the different acculturation outcomes and the extent of acculturation among immigrant consumers, laying the foundation for the systematic investigation of culturally specific aspects of consumer behavior. In older research, the acculturation process was seen as linear, moving gradually from identification with the culture of origin toward assimilation with the culture of

the new home. More recently, the research focus has shifted from the linear assimilation models toward *postassimilationism* (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Luedicke, 2011). Assimilation, or gradual immersion into the host culture over time, is no longer taken for granted. Instead, myriad different identity outcomes and experiences have been identified, taking in consideration the contexts that shape the acculturation processes (Peñaloza, 1994, Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999). Oswald (1999) studied Haitian immigrants in the United States, confirming that the acculturation outcomes are not stable, but consumers engage in “culture swapping” depending on the social context. Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005) added a third acculturative force to the mix; in addition to the culture of origin and the host culture, immigrants are also influenced by global consumer culture. An extensive body of literature about multicultural and immigrant-background consumers shows that people adapt and integrate to the consumer culture of their new country in different ways and at different paces (Peñaloza, 1994; Luedicke, 2011).

2.2. MUTUAL ACCULTURATION

The underlying assumption of the early acculturation theories was the relative dominance of the local community (or “host culture”) over the immigrant groups. The immigrants were expected to adjust to the local customs and culture, often due to their minority position in the different domains of society (Bourhis et al., 1997). As a response to this, the model of Interactive Acculturation (IAM) was developed, aiming to consider both minority and host community acculturation in multicultural societies (Bourhis et al., 1997). This model takes into account the context in which the immigrant is acculturating and the expectations and responses of the receiving community on the acculturation process and identity outcomes. It is not always without conflicts that the interactions and the mutual acculturation between the immigrants and the locals play out. In the following, I provide a closer look at the possible relational conflicts between immigrants and locals in consumer settings, based on the relational configuration analysis developed by Luedicke (2015).

2.2.1. MUTUAL ACCULTURATION ON THE MARKETPLACE: LUEDICKE’S RELATIONAL CONFIGURATION ANALYSIS

Immigration requires the adaptation of existing social relations, cultural practices, and expectations by the locals who have lived in the space before the immigrants’ arrival, Luedicke

(2015) points out. His study is set in a rural Austrian village and looks at the relationships between indigenes and Turkish immigrants through a relational models theory (Fiske, 1991) lens. Luedicke (2015) points out that human interactions are often structured by expectations and relational rules (Fiske, 1991), but the role of consumption in ethnic group relationships has so far not been sufficiently studied. He applies the Fiskeian relational model on a market where immigrant consumers are present, identifying four sources of ethnic group conflict in the multicultural consumption setting.

Firstly, Luedicke found out that the indigenous felt an *erosion of their community* as the immigrant consumers drew closer to the indigenes. For example, the locals were reluctant to sell their property to Turkish immigrants and opposed to marketers adding Turkish labels to grocery products. The indigenous felt that their community was vulnerable to change, especially when the perceived sell-out was done with profit in mind. Secondly, *authority ranking relationships* were shaken up due to certain consumption practices of the immigrants. As Luedicke (2015) remarks, the locals' position of authority in the "host country" has been taken for granted in most of the acculturation literature until now. In Luedicke's interviews, Turkish immigrants driving BMWs were causing the locals to feel that the immigrants outperformed them, and their hierarchical position was threatened. Ownership of luxury items positioned the immigrant consumers symbolically above the locals. Immigrant consumption practices that challenge established consumer hierarchy were interpreted as an ethnic takeover or uninvited change in status recognition rules. Another source of conflict in the Austrian setting (Luedicke, 2015) is the perceived *violation of equality matching rules*. The locals compared the immigrants' and the locals' economic and socio-cultural contributions toward society, perceiving certain immigrant behaviors as unearned privileges. As Luedicke (2015) points out, people do not usually have exact data about others' contributions to society or the benefits that they receive. Lacking exact statistical information, people tend to rely on visual cues of what others are consuming in their assessments of wealth and societal contribution vs. exploitation. The Austrian locals suspected the Turkish immigrants of system abuse by, for example, adopting children in hopes of getting higher child-care benefits. Immigrants' ownership of higher-end cars spurred suspicions of exploitation of the Austrian system. The fourth and last ethnic group conflict identified in the Austrian-Turkish setting is called *micro-macro moral dilemma*. The indigenous adhere to macro-level norms of equality, solidarity and mutual respect among all the members of the society. Simultaneously, however, the indigenous treat Turkish immigrants in their village as outsiders and fail to regard them as equal consumers and

community members. There seems to be a problem of transferring the high norms of equality and respect to everyday practice in the own local community.

2.3. PERCEPTIONS OF REFUGEES

Luedicke's (2015) model about indigenes' responses to immigrant consumer acculturation excels at highlighting sources of ethnic group conflict on a multicultural marketplace. However, in a setting where the immigrants have a refugee background, some of the relational conflicts mapped out by Luedicke (2015) are likely to play out differently.

Before going forward and discussing the relational conflicts on markets receiving refugee consumers, it is necessary to clarify what is meant here with the term "refugee". The United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2010) defines a refugee as a person who flees their country in the fear of political or other forms of persecution. The definition is declaratory, meaning that a person should be regarded as a refugee until their case has been determined (UNHCR, 2018). However, many people who leave their countries in the fear of violence and persecution have neither a determined status as refugees nor the authorization or documents to cross borders. Instead, the transit is often taken irregularly (IOM, 2011) and with the help of smugglers and dangerous vessels. In 2015, over one million people arrived in Europe by irregular means, many over the Mediterranean Sea, and almost 4,000 are believed to have drowned (UNHCR, 2015). In the European Union, the newly arrived refugees are usually called asylum seekers. Refugee council (2018) defines an asylum seeker as follows: "A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded." This chapter deals with the refugee situation of 2015 in Finland, thus focusing mainly on the people who applied for asylum after their arrival in Finland. However, for the sake of simplicity and out of respect to the declaratory definition of the UN, the term "refugee" is used in this chapter to denote both those whose asylum application is still being processed and those whose refugee status is already determined.

Apart from formal definitions, people tend to have their own preconceived ideas of who qualifies as a refugee and how a "real" refugee is supposed to be (Malkki, 1996; Gibney, 1999; Wright, 2002; Haynes, Devereux & Breen 2004). Many of the presumptions of how refugees should look like, behave and consume seem to come from media representations of former refugee crises, more often than not distant in either time or space. According to Wright (2002),

there are common elements in the portrayal of refugees in the media. The images serve to elicit the proper emotional reaction among the viewers and to determine how we see refugees. For example, a typical image portrays people in a state of degradation, naked and stripped of their possessions (Wright, 2002). When researching Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki (1996) found that refugee administrators on site were prone to define “real” refugees based on their looks – and reversely excluding certain people from the refugee category and assistance because they did not look or behave in a certain way. People who had freshly arrived and looked at their worst were deemed to be worthier of help than those whose visible signs of being a refugee had faded (Malkki, 1996). The world’s largest refugee populations live in Africa, Middle East, and North Africa (UNHCR, 2017). From the Nordic point of view, these locations may seem distant and unfamiliar. Gibney (1999) argues that people are more sympathetic to refugees who they can relate to, and who come from geographically close locations. Media reporting, especially negative discourses, deepen the gap between the local population and the refugees and can heighten the sense of “us” and “them”, treating refugees as the others (Haynes, Devereux & Breen, 2004). For instance, metaphors of threat and natural disasters when reporting about refugee “floods” as well as the political discourse of a zero-sum game with refugees causing a financial burden to society (Grove & Zwi, 2006) serve to deepen the gap between the refugees and the local population.

Considering how refugees are presented and perceived in society, the relational conflicts are likely to evolve differently when the Luedickean model is applied on a setting with refugee consumers. For example, the natural disaster discourses in media serve to heighten the worries of ethnic takeover and erosion of the local community. Moreover, when the receiving society is dominated by a strong, universalist social welfare system, the suspicions of benefit abuse and violations of equality matching are likely to intensify. I will now proceed to an analysis of how these dynamics unfolded in the context of the Finnish refugee situation in 2015.

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHOD

When the refugee arrivals to Finland were at their peak in 2015, the situation was discussed lively both online and offline. Politicians, the Finnish Immigration Service, grassroots organizations as well as the public were all involved in uttering their opinions, and the differing voices sometimes took aggressive tones. In this chapter, I have chosen to analyze some of the local population’s opinions of the refugee situation. The aim is not to provide a full empirical

review of the sentiment toward refugee consumers in Finland, but rather to illustrate with examples how the relational conflict model by Luedicke (2015) played out in a specific setting. Before presenting excerpts from online forums where locals discuss the newly arrived refugee consumers, I will set the theoretical concepts in their context by briefly presenting the ideological foundations of the Finnish welfare state and the societal responses to the 2015 refugee crisis.

3.1. FOUNDATIONS OF THE NORDIC WELFARE STATE

The term “welfare state” has been used since the 1930s but still lacks one unified definition (Greve, 2007). As Kananen (2016) points out, the Nordic welfare states, unlike their counterparts in Continental Europe and the UK, developed in countries without a history of a totalitarian political regime or strong class hierarchy. The Nordic model is characterized by universalism (rather than means-tested support targeted only at the poor), a high level of taxes, and low levels of wage differentiation (Greve, 2007). Welfare states enjoy significant support from people. Bowles & Gintis (2000) claim that this support for redistributive policies comes not from seeking self-interest (as would be the case according to traditional theories of the selfish *homo economicus*), but rather from deeply-held values of reciprocity and obligations to others. Interestingly, Bowles & Gintis also (2000) theorize that the support for egalitarian policies may lessen if there is a perceived social distance between the giver and the recipient. Economic inequality, racial and language differences would lead, Bowles & Gintis (2000) argue, to decreased motivation to help those in need. According to Barker (2017), the Nordic welfare state, although being universalistic, does not always extend its humanitarian principles to outsiders and others. The ideology of the Nordic welfare states is based on ideas of all humans’ worth of economic and social investments, but there has been a rising cynical view on the income support recipients. Especially newer legislation in Finland seems to be occupied with avoiding benefit abuse and strengthening sanctions in case of non-compliance to rules (Kananen, 2016). There seems to be a rising conditionality on who is eligible for the benefits of the welfare state.

3.2. NORDIC RESPONSES TO THE 2015 REFUGEE SITUATION

All Nordic countries, except Iceland, were the top receivers of refugees in Europe in relation to their population (Etzold, 2017). In the wake of the 2015 events, the Nordic countries seemed to

keep a close eye on what their neighbors were doing and proposed stricter asylum laws one after another. Many of the legislative changes attempted to make the countries less attractive destinations in the eyes of potential refugees. The governments were quick to tighten their asylum politics and even border controls were implemented, a measure unheard of in the post-war Nordics that had been characterized by free movement since the 1950s. As Barker (2017) argues, the strict response was not only due to a claimed reception “system overload”, but also stemmed from the need of the welfare state to preserve security for those on the inside (at the cost of causing insecurity for the “outsiders”). The Nordic welfare states had thus a conflict in upholding their humanitarian values and respecting the human rights of the refugees, while attempting to protect the national welfare state project (Barker, 2017).

3.3. THE 2015 REFUGEE SITUATION IN FINLAND

In 2015, 32,476 asylum applications were filed in Finland, which was nearly tenfold compared to previous years (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016). Most of the applicants, approx. 63 percent, came from Iraq. In addition to Iraq, typical countries of origin were Afghanistan (16 percent), Somalia (6 percent), and Syria (3 percent). The sudden increase in applications quickly overwhelmed the Finnish Immigration service, responsible for processing the asylum applications. Reception centers for housing the asylum seekers were established around the country (their number increased from 20 to 140 in 2015), and during the busiest times people were housed in temporary facilities and even tents outside (Rautio & Juutilainen, 2016). After the peak in autumn 2015, the arrival numbers started to decrease. European countries put up barriers and controls on their borders, thus stalling the northward movement.

Yet, tens of thousands of people remained in Finland waiting for their asylum decisions. During the asylum seeking process, the seeker is not covered by the Finnish social security system. Instead, the financial assistance is paid in the form of reception allowance. This money is meant to cover necessities during the asylum process and is paid by the state of Finland. The reception allowance (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018) for a single adult is €263.78 per month, or €75.36 per month if the asylum seeker lives in a reception facility where the meal services are included. If the asylum seeker is granted international protection in Finland, they are covered by the same public social and health services as the other inhabitants of the municipality (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2017). If the immigrant is registered unemployed and/or

receiving financial support, an integration plan is drawn up by the municipal employment office and the immigrant (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, 1386/2010). The immigrant receives financial support while following the plan. The daily unemployment benefit for a single household is €32.40 per day for five days a week (Kela, 2017). If the immigrant fails to participate in the integration measures defined in the plan, they lose the right to financial assistance (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, 1386/2010). In addition to this, the individual is typically eligible for social welfare benefits, such as housing allowance and income support from the local municipality to cover necessities. As these excerpts from the legislation show, the newcomers have the financial means to participate in the local consumption culture, having at least some degree of freedom in their consumption choices.

3.4. DATA

The examples of online discussions regarding refugee consumption are taken from two Finnish discussion forums, Suomi24 and Hommaforum. Suomi24 is one of the biggest social media outlets in Finland, with around 20,000 new discussion entries about a range of topics published each week. Hommaforum, in turn, is a discussion forum solely focused on immigration-critical discussions. The data was collected by performing a search with Finnish keywords relating to refugees and consumption on the forums. The resulting discussion threads were sorted for relevance and thereafter 14 of them were chosen for closer scrutiny. The opinions expressed on these forums cannot be treated as representative for the whole population. However, they are efficient in painting a picture of the opinions of people who experience conflicts toward refugee consumer behavior.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The naturally occurring and unfiltered online data from the discussion forums was first coded manually using keywords and then categorized according to topics, following the four conflict types outlined by Luedicke (2015). Then, a thematic analysis (Aronson, 1995) was performed, forming a picture of the discussion forum participants' opinions. The data analysis revealed critical sentiments toward refugees, mostly backed up rumors or forum participants' firsthand experiences in consumption spaces or social welfare offices. Some also used official reports and statistics (e.g. of social welfare use by nationality) to justify their opinions. Jealousy, distrust, and fear were recurring emotions in the entries, along with aggression.

The knowledge accrued from the discussion threads was applied to Luedicke's (2015) model with four sources of ethnic conflict, to study the relational conflicts experienced by the locals upon the introduction of refugees to their familiar consumption spaces. When looking into the forum discussions, a fifth dimension, specific to the welfare state context, arose. I call this mistrust in the welfare system and discuss it after Luedicke's four conflict types.

4. RESULTS

In the following, I will illustrate with the help of excerpts from online forum discussions as to how some of the conflicts identified by Luedicke (2015) were shaped in the Finnish context in 2015. I build on Luedicke's model and provide an additional perspective, a fifth conflict, to the existing theory.

4.1 COMMUNITY SELL-OUT

In 2015, centers for housing the newly arrived refugees were established throughout the country at a high pace. The centers brought the refugees, until then known for many Finns only from newspaper headlines, close to the home sphere. This spurred a discussion of community sell-out. The main fear connected to the reception centers seemed to be similar to that observed by Luedicke (2015); the worry of cultural erosion. In addition, the economic aspects of receiving the refugees to the local community were treated negatively. Pseudonym "Kellere", writes in August 2015: *"This is the last drop for our town, nothing can save it anymore."* The author continues to lament how the town, seemingly struggling with financial scarcity, will now experience a drop in property value and an increase in crime. The sentiment reminds you of a "NIMBY" (not in my back yard) phenomenon (defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as opposition to something considered undesirable in one's neighborhood) backed up by economic arguments, fear of crime, and general unwillingness to face the refugees in your community. Similar to Luedicke's findings, the indigenous community was aggravated by the idea of having to live close to the newcomers. The conflict was heightened by the notion of economic profit being made from the "reception center business", in towns and communities otherwise deemed to be struggling with economic hardships.

4.2 CHALLENGED AUTHORITY RANKING POSITIONS

In the Nordic welfare state context, as elsewhere, the authority position of locals seems to be uncontested compared to immigrants. The perceived conspicuous consumption of refugees is met on online discussion forums with aversion. Because the consumers in this setting are refugees, their consumption – especially if it is considered to consist of valuable items – is interpreted as proof that they are not really in need of international protection. The online forum participants express anger and envy toward the possessions of refugees, revealing a mismatch in their expectations of how a refugee should look like and behave. Small details in appearance, such as hairstyles, trigger resentment in the locals, according to them proving that the young people with “gel in the hair” are not in need of asylum or humanitarian assistance, but in fact criminals. *“You can see from a kilometer’s distance that the crimi... poor gel-children hanging out in town are not here to respect or thank the local society. They are here to take it over.”* (pseudonym “Foobar”, January 2018). As this comment shows, a fear of ethnic takeover by refugees is present, similar to Luedicke’s findings. The pseudonym “ChewBacca”, in turn, offers observations on the appearance of the refugee youth on the forum in November 2015. The forum author notes that the refugees are using phones and headphones actively, and their school bags and clothes seem to be new from the store. “ChewBacca” also mentions that the charities were “begging” for donations for the refugees, implying that the brand-new supplies might be handouts instead of purchases. As these forum posts signal, the possessions, purchases, and even donations used by the refugees triggered envious comments. As also noted by Luedicke, the locals try to regain their authority status on the market by claiming that the immigrant consumers did not earn their luxury goods themselves. In the context of Finland in 2015, the newcomers failed to adhere to the local population’s expectations of how “real refugees” should look like. With their groomed looks and unused school supplies, the refugees seemed to occupy a position in society not reserved for them.

4.3 VIOLATION OF EQUALITY MATCHING

In the Finnish welfare state setting, the suspicions of benefit abuse and unearned privileges enjoyed by the refugees are a recurring theme in online discussions and political debates alike. Especially in the aftermath of 2015, accusations of people using false grounds for asylum with the sole purpose of accessing the welfare benefits in Finland proliferated. The Finnish government was planning major changes to the law regulating social security, with the aim to

cut the welfare benefits for refugees for the first years after receiving asylum (Koivuranta, 2015). However, the plan was found unconstitutional and later cancelled (Kaija, 2016). In Luedicke's context, the Austrian villagers used visible consumption as a cue to assess the Turkish immigrants' societal contribution vs. exploitation. In the Finnish context, immigrant-looking people are grouped as refugees and their mere visits to Kela, The social insurance institution of Finland, is used as a proxy to confirm their violation of the equality matching principles. For example, pseudonym "Dvitamiini" writes in November 2017, that upon visiting the social welfare office, most of the clients seem to be "refugees from Middle East or Africa". "Dvitamiini" continues to suspect that they are unwilling to work and instead cheat the welfare system, while harming those who are in real need of assistance. On the discussion forums, the argument was not only that refugees had not contributed enough to society to earn the social welfare benefits, but also more deep-rooted sentiments of inherited right to the social welfare system of the native country. *"We should not offer foreigners the same and especially not better benefits than for Finns, because Finland is the country of the Finns and it should favor Finns in everything. It's not racism, it's our exclusive right."* (September 2017, pseudonym "Kipusisko"). Unlike in the Austrian setting, where the claims of unearned privileges were only based on societal contribution vs. exploitation, the Finnish discussion also brings up historical or inherited rights to the welfare benefits. The universalist principles of social welfare seem to not stretch to people who do not belong to the (here undefined) category of "Finns". Pseudonym "Kipusisko" continues their post by accusing immigrants "reproducing uncontrollably", which in turn, brings us back to the fears of ethnic takeover and outright racist sentiments.

4.4 MICRO-MACRO MORAL DILEMMA

In the Austrian village studied by Luedicke, the locals and the immigrants had lived side by side for decades. There were incidents of discrimination on the local micro level, while higher moral norms of every person's equality were adhered to on a macro level. In the situation of Finland in 2015, however, the refugees (in larger numbers) had recently arrived and those locals who were not involved in voluntary efforts to help the refugees were likely to have had very few personal contacts with them. Instead, they appeared to be a faceless mass whose "flooding" into Finland should be stopped by any means possible, regardless of moral norms or international agreements. Pseudonym "Atte Saarela", writing in October 2015, summarizes these sentiments by suggesting that the immigrants be served low-quality food and housing in order to give a signal that they are not welcome to Finland. The political Left and their human

rights campaigns is met with repulsion. Unlike in Austria, in the context of Finland an adherence to high moral norms is not visible. Instead, the forum members seem to dwell on fantasies of cutting the existing social welfare benefits, while ridiculing international law and human rights. A moral dilemma between high norms and what is practiced locally is less obvious than in Luedicke's material.

4.5. MISTRUST IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE WELFARE SYSTEM

When going through the discussion forum posts regarding the above themes, an additional topic, not present in Luedicke's material, emerged. Namely, many were blaming the Finnish welfare system for "allowing" benefit abuse and handing out gratuitous support. The tangible aggression toward refugees was partly shifted toward the government and the social welfare institutions for allegedly favoring refugees and immigrants over the local population. New terms, such as the "magic wall" (referring to ATMs), were invented to ridicule the refugee's right to monetary benefits. For instance, pseudonym "Kela_Platinum" claims in November 2015 that money is handed out to refugees while they are just slacking off. Interestingly, the author shifts the blame to the very foundations of the Finnish welfare system: *"We can only blame our own stupidity, for having this utterly insane system, where all people of the world can be paid money without doing anything in return."* As the post illustrates, the frustration is triggered by the refugees but reveals an underlying discontent with the welfare system. In addition, many online discussion participants seemed to have a misconception about how the benefits are distributed, claiming the existence of gratuitous benefits paid to everyone without any activity in return. Some authors seemed to exhibit a degree of sympathy mixed with irony, declaring that they would do the same if they were in a similar situation, *"--- I'm not that good of a person that I would abstain from the free health care, education, apartment and disco money, if they were offered it to me on a golden platter..."* (pseudonym "Histon", January 2018). The refugees were also suspected of coming to a welfare state only to enjoy its benefits. The "disco money" was a recurring topic in the forums, referring to the forum participants' sightings of young refugee-looking youths spending free time in bars and cafés. Apart from this consumption practice, deemed unfit for refugees, health care and education were also considered unjustified for refugees.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have described the refugee situation that occurred in Finland in 2015, focusing on the relational conflicts that were triggered by refugee consumer behavior in the Finnish welfare state context. The examples from online forums illustrate how the Luedickean (2015) ethnic consumer conflicts played out in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee situation in the Finnish welfare state context.

In the Finnish context, where the refugees recently arrived in larger numbers and where the local social welfare system covers refugees and locals alike, some of the relational conflicts played out differently from Luedicke's theory. The sell-out of community also worried the Finnish locals, and the towns and NGOs were accused of embracing the newcomers despite economic scarcity in the community. The authority ranking relationships were shaken when the refugees' appearance and possessions did not match the expected image of the "good refugee", spurring accusations of the refugees not being in need of assistance. The third conflict, violation of equality matching, revealed underlying nationalistic attitudes, striving for a social welfare system only available to Finns themselves. Refugees' mere visits to the social welfare office were interpreted as benefit abuse. A micro-macro moral dilemma was not as obvious as the other three conflicts; instead, the discussion entries on the forums were preoccupied with ideas of closing the borders and cutting all of the benefits from non-indigenous people. The fifth and additional relational conflict deals with the mistrust expressed by the locals toward the social welfare system. Instead of merely blaming refugees for benefit abuse, the debaters shift their aggression toward a system that allegedly allows this. This is a novel finding that expands on the analysis presented by Luedicke.

These conflicts have roots in the very foundations of the Nordic welfare model. In societies with a strong welfare system, people tend to support the egalitarian system. However, if the social distance to the benefit recipients is large, the willingness to support tends to be lower (Bowles & Gintis, 2000). In the case of refugee consumers, the benefit recipients are culturally distant and unfamiliar and thus treated as second-class citizens by many of the opinionate online forum participants. The 2015 refugee situation in Northern Europe also challenged the preconceived image of the looks of an accepted refugee – those of hungry, battered people in distant locations. Suddenly, the young, healthy-looking men in their neatly cut hairstyles, trendy

clothes, and using their iPhones like any other twenty-something came to the towns and villages in Finland. This triggered aggression and fear along with accusations of benefit abuse.

We do not know who the people in the forums discussing under the cover of pseudonyms are, and we lack information on their socio-economic situation and possible patronage at the social welfare institution. The frustration of the locals in the discussion forums seems to be propelled by the feeling of unequal treatment by the welfare system. This could indicate that the harsh attitudes toward benefit use by the refugees stem from people who themselves need to rely on the social welfare system for support. The style of writing differs by author, but for most debaters logical (however racist) reasoning and spelling seem not to be a problem, indicating that they are somewhat educated. An interesting direction for future research would be to contact some of the discussion forum participants (e.g. through private message on the forum) and to interview them to get richer data on their backgrounds and attitudes.

The choice of discussion forums to be analyzed naturally affects the outcome; the people engaging in anti-immigration discussions online can be assumed to represent the most critical group in the society, not suffering from moral dilemmas despite harsh words and ridicule of human rights. It is also theorized that people tend to be more aggressive online, behind pseudonyms, than in their face-to-face encounters with people (Suler, 2004). These extreme examples serve a purpose of exemplifying underlying sentiments toward refugee consumers and help conceptualizing the new situation in the society. It would be interesting to explore whether and how the attitudes toward refugee consumption are different at the other end of the “opinion spectrum”, namely among those locals who engaged in helping the refugees. In order to deepen our understanding of the prerequisites of consumption, it would also be interesting to extend the empirical material from refugees to other groups using the social welfare system, whose social distance to the locals is smaller (such as students and stay-at-home parents).

The analyzed material shows that the Finnish government and the social insurance institution have failed in informing people about how the welfare system works. Despite the repeated efforts of the official institutions to inform the public of the same levels for benefits for everyone, regardless of ethnic background, the Finnish discussion forum activists keep repeating the claims of gratuitous benefits and higher amounts of money being paid to refugees. The rumors of a social welfare system that unfairly benefits immigrants lack factual ground but seem to feed each other and slowly emerge as “facts”. The aversion is targeted toward both the

social welfare system and the foreign-born individuals using it. The emergence of so-called alternative media and the increasing distrust in traditional news outlets and governmental institutions is partly responsible for heightening the spread of false information. In addition to mere misconception or ignorance, there are actors who purposefully spread false information in order to benefit their own political agenda. This type of propaganda is a feature of the post-truth society, where opinions are no longer based on tested facts but rather on personal beliefs and feelings. Media and political crisis discourse, emphasizing the economic scarcity and the inability of the Finnish economy to support its own population, let alone the “floods of refugees”, also plays a role in heightening the conflicts. Inequality and the feeling of being left out when the social welfare benefits are distributed are bigger societal issues that mere information campaigns cannot solve.

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