

Hospitality, reciprocity, and power relations in the home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland

Introduction

For a long time there has been this discourse that those of us who don't think asylum seekers are a problem for Finland are being told that 'Then you go on and accommodate them in your homes.' Like it was an absurd idea or something. So, we thought, 'Fine, let's try it, let's see how it goes.'¹

In this chapter, I discuss the home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland as a hospitable civic response to migration. In the quote above, a founding member of the Finnish Home Accommodation network describes how the idea of hosting asylum seekers in private homes was born among local activists towards the end of summer 2015. Seeing what was happening in Central Europe, they anticipated that the number of asylum seekers needing assistance would increase in Finland as well. The network came into being when a priest and an activist based in Helsinki, inspired by the German Refugees Welcome movement, approached a group of representatives of different religious communities and denominations she knew personally. Her initial idea was to create cross-denomination cooperation in receiving asylum seekers, so that homes could be found for a handful of asylum seekers. This humble initiative quickly spread in social media and attracted wider interest among activists and volunteers, also those of nonreligious backgrounds. Some of them had prior experience in hosting migrants in their homes, for others this was the first time they had considered opening their homes this way. A meeting was held in a church in Helsinki where the diverse group of locals started planning the model for accommodation together with asylum seekers. The general pattern and guidelines were drawn up, contacts to immigration authorities and press material were made, and soon a nationwide

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

network was born.

This chapter examines hospitality in the home accommodation of asylum seekers; taking place in the private home it is a particular form of pro-asylum mobilization. In home accommodation, the debate over the right to asylum is brought to the private sphere – and the home becomes a *counterspace* (see Introduction) where immigration categories are lived and contested. I see it as an action that blurs the lines between the public and private spheres of agency. Keeping in mind that hospitality always involves power relations and resistance (e.g., Bulley 2016), I consider home accommodation an activity that aims to overcome divisions among people common in migration discourse, such as ‘host/guest’ and ‘us/them’.

Drawing on interviews with hosts, I first examine the ideas and values home accommodation activity is based on. I argue that home accommodation is generally not perceived by the hosts as one-way assistance, but rather as a way of acting together that recognizes the agency of asylum seekers. In the hosts’ narratives, I see a will to surpass the discursive division into ‘us’ the nation, and ‘them’ the migrants. For many, offering hospitality is also a way to influence wider society and to contest tightening asylum policies in Finland. Lastly, I examine how power inequalities in this particular form of hospitality affect everyday life. I also consider how boundaries of belonging to the family are drawn, as well as spatial boundaries within the shared home.

Pro-asylum mobilization in Finland

The autumn of 2015 was historically significant in the history of migration to Finland with the unprecedented number of migrants seeking international protection. That year 32,477 asylum seekers arrived in Finland, ten times more than the previous year (Finnish Immigration Service 2019). Hospitable civil society and third sector agents responded by quickly organizing assistance to the newcomers. At first, also the political response was both practical and hospitable. Even the Finnish Prime Minister announced he would offer his empty house to a refugee family and encouraged others to demonstrate care towards asylum seekers

(Ikävalko 2015). However, towards the end of the year 2015, the mainstream political stance in matters of asylum had become stricter, and nationalist movements demanding border closure became increasingly visible in the media. In the end, the Prime Minister's house was never given to a refugee family.

The role of civic solidarity movements has become indispensable all over Europe, partly because of the insufficiency of the official responses (Ataç et al. 2016; Chtouris and Miller 2017; della Porta 2018). These efforts include loosely organized groups, protests, and networks as well as third sector projects and church initiatives, many of which were in place before 2015 (della Porta 2018; Rosenberger et al. 2018). Since the beginning of 2015, the large number of asylum seekers, combined with the limited capacity of states to respond to the needs of newcomers, led to the emergence of new collectives and forms of action all over Europe. In Finland too the pro-asylum movement grew, protests were organized to claim fair treatment and to denounce deportations, and home accommodation became one popular way to express support and to do something concrete.

A large share of the activity is organized through the Home Accommodation Network, which operates independently but in collaboration with municipal reception centres. The network remains a grassroots movement with a couple of employees, and most of its activities are autonomously organized by its regional groups' volunteers.

Interviews with hosts

The data in this chapter draw on semi-structured interviews with 25 hosts, which I conducted during 2017 and 2018. I used multiple methods of accessing the field, mainly through my personal contacts, snowballing, and social media. Most of the people I interviewed were contacted through someone I know, and some participants in turn introduced me to other hosts. I also posted an advertisement about my research in a Facebook group, which resulted in some interviews. Because I wanted to understand what different kinds of arrangements exist, I did not rule anyone out who wanted to participate. Thus, I found a variety of accommodations, some of which had been arranged through the Home Accommodation Network, others through personal networks. The length of these accommodations ranged from a couple of months to over two years, and some of the hosts had

lived with several asylum seekers over the years.

Some hosts identified themselves as activists, and many had participated in the demonstrations against deportations (see Näre 2018). Many had also volunteered in a reception centre. These hosts had often met the asylum seeker through these activities or through common friends. Other hosts had no prior contact to the pro-asylum movement and no volunteering background, and in most of these cases the networks' volunteers introduced the host to an asylum seeker. The research participants represented various class backgrounds and were between 30 and 70 years of age, though the majority of them were of middle-class origin and in their 40s or 50s. Most of them identified as Finnish, though not all had been born in Finland. The asylum seekers they hosted were also from diverse class and regional backgrounds; most had lived in Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan, but many had come from other regions, including East Africa and Eastern Europe. Many identified as Muslim, others as Christian, and some as atheist or having no specific religion. Most of them were male in their 20s, yet there was some diversity in both age and gender. When conducting interviews, I loosely followed a set of questions modified throughout the fieldwork as the empirical material opened up new relevant questions (Warren 2001). I let the participants talk without being interrupted and focused on what they found important in their hosting experience. I did not have a strict focus in mind when I started the fieldwork, as I wanted to leave room for emerging points of view. This openness proved to be a fruitful approach. Interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and thematically coded, and the transcripts were then analyzed thoroughly. For this chapter, I also analyzed the guideline material for hosts found on the Home Accommodation Network's website which describes the general principles of home accommodation and gives potential hosts and guests ideas about what to expect.

Home and hospitality in the context of migration

The word 'home' has different meanings to different people. It can refer to the place where one usually lives or the place where one grew up – or it can refer broadly to one's 'native country' (Ahmed 2000, 86–87). Home is a place where one experiences security, familiarity, and continuity as well as control and autonomy

(Boccagni 2017, 7). Home is not just the material place of living, but a place where one feels safe and where one belongs. However, for people who have had to leave their home, home may also stand for other kinds of experiences, such as oppression, violence, and inequalities, despite the warm connotations the word generally holds (Boccagni 2017, xxiv). Also, feminist literature has a tradition of pointing out that in fact the home is not always a safe haven (e.g., Blunt and Dowling 2006). In terms of hospitality, the home is also a site of unequal yet unstable power relations between hosts and guests. In the case of home accommodation, the authority over the home remains with the host, who can determine the duration of the accommodation as well as other conditions regarding living together. The possible tensions deriving from this imbalance of power is one of the key interests of my research.

Unequal, unstable, and contested power relations are of great interest for scholars studying hospitality in the context of migration (e.g., Bulley 2016; Derrida 2000; Germann Molz and Gibson 2016; Rosello 2001). In all situations where hospitality occurs, from private homes to whole states, the host gets to decide the conditions of hospitality and to choose the recipients (Derrida 2000). Nevertheless, the roles of guest and host are never quite fixed, and the power relations can be overturned (Bulley 2016). This dynamic understanding of hospitality offers a possibility to consider it as a reciprocal practice in which the agency of migrants is not overshadowed by assumed power inequalities between guest and host. In the case of home accommodation, the act of hospitality could thus generate a counterspace where host and guest together contest the restrictive migration policies and claim the right to asylum.

Home is typically understood as a place of safety. Derrida (2000) claims a host grants asylum to guests when inviting them into their home. In home accommodation, the dimensions of safety and asylum are literally part of hospitality, often in a practical sense. Many hosts assist their guests by reading through case documents, finding lawyers, and providing mental support throughout a stressful period. Besides offering a place to live in, the host offers protection and support

– an asylum while waiting for asylum.

Seeking asylum in the Nordic welfare state

In the Nordic context, there is an expectation that the welfare state should take care of those in need of shelter, and that neither private homes nor charity organizations are the primary providers of safety and care (see Introduction chapter).

The expansion of the welfare state shifted many aspects of care from home to state institutions (e.g., Dahl and Eriksen 2005). Finland, like the other Nordic countries, has traditionally had a relatively high level of civic participation, visible in the high number of registered associations and in the level of trade union membership. Volunteering is also quite popular.² However, as noted in the Introduction to this volume, the societal role of Nordic civil society and charity organizations is important but it has been primarily perceived as complementary to the welfare state, although their importance has grown because of cuts to welfare services.

Critical studies on Nordic welfare states have highlighted the exclusiveness of Nordic welfare systems and also argued that nationalist practices reinforce the division between natives deserving welfare and racialized ‘others’, perceived as undeserving and exploiting the system (Keskinen et al. 2016, 322). In the case of asylum seekers, the role of volunteers and civil society in delivering many aspects of welfare is significant, since asylum seekers do not have full access to the national welfare system during the long application process. In Finland, asylum seekers are entitled to reception services, which include, for example, receiving an allowance and immediate health care. Yet language training or support in finding employment is offered mostly by volunteers, as these are part of integration services for residents. The term differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013) can be applied when describing asylum seekers’ precarious situation in receiving states, and as Könönen (2018) points

² Sources: OECD (<http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TUD>) and Finnish Patent and Registration Office (www.prh.fi/en/yhdistyksrekisteri/submit/numberofassociationsandtradeunions.html), Statistics Finland (www.stat.fi/ar/tikka/lit/2011/a/rt_2011-09-26_02.html?s=3), SOSTE (www.soste.fi/jarjes/tobar/vapaaehtoistoiminta-voimien-hyvinvointi-tyojen-eta-tyoantajat) (Accessed on September 20, 2019).

out, in Finland non-citizens often live years in an in-between space, since access to services depends on the type of residence permit one holds causing differential inclusion to the welfare state.

Kynsilehto and Puumala (2016, 204) argue that for several years Finland has already upheld policies that intend to make Finland a non-desirable country for asylum seekers and efficiently enforce strict migration policies. Even before 2015, the debate over immigration had been a heated one, and migration policies were subject to several changes over the last decades (see Näre 2018). Since 2015, the discourse has become prominent in media and in politics, whereby migration to Europe has been framed as a threat that needs to be controlled and securitized (e.g., DeGenova et al. 2018). As Franko, van der Woude, and Barker in Chapter 4 argue, the Nordic countries are no longer the tolerant exception, and indeed penal power is increasingly being used to restrict migration. At the end of 2015, the Finnish government introduced stricter asylum criteria that aimed to – as the Prime Minister put it – ‘stop the uncontrollable flow of asylum seekers’ (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018, 1).

Choosing ‘good immigrants’ and ‘real refugees’, that is, those who ‘deserve’ to enter the national home, is typical for the present-day migration discourse in Europe. Migration has been increasingly constructed as an economic burden, and some migrant qualities and categories are favored while others are excluded. (e.g., Ahmed 2001; Anderson 2013; DeGenova et al. 2018; Lonergan 2018). As a response to increased securitization, a surge of social movements and protests against bordering in Europe and elsewhere in the world has arisen (Ataç et al. 2016). A body of research has also emerged on contentious mobilizations by migrants and their supporters over the past decade (e.g., Castañeda 2013; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Tyler and Marciniak 2013) and over the past couple of years (e.g., della Porta 2018; Rosenberger et al. 2018).

I now turn to the empirical focus of this chapter, namely, the home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland. In what follows I address the blurring of categories such as ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ and show how hosts describe accommodating

in relation to helping. Through their accounts and the network's material, I analyze the ideals on which home accommodation activity is built.

'We are doing this together'

In the public discourse, asylum seekers and refugees are often depicted as passive victims; only victimized refugees are worthy and deserving of asylum. Refugees are associated with victimhood to the extent that demonstrating agency is known to negatively affect the asylum process (Khosravi 2010) and performing 'deservingness' is part of humanitarian aid practices (Huschke 2014). Home Accommodation activity is not framed as assistance for the needy. Instead, it is about offering support in starting a new life and enabling asylum seekers to, as one participant put it, 'help them to help themselves'. In the Home Accommodation Network's guidebook for hosts I interpret the will to recognize asylum seekers' agency by renouncing the host's role as a 'helper':

The Home Accommodation Network is not about givers and receivers of assistance but about people living side by side. In a reciprocal and communal living situation, anyone may at times need or give assistance. The aim of home accommodation is a fair everyday life for which all the parties are responsible. The host has the right to decide about the basic rules of her/his home, but as many things as possible should be decided together when the accommodation starts.³

As this excerpt demonstrates, in an ideal situation, home accommodation is not about helping or assisting, but about creating a reciprocal everyday life. The idea is to build an equal relationship and not to offer one-way assistance, which would only reinforce the differentiation into victims and agents. The guidebook also reminds hosts that it is important to remember where the asylum seekers come from, but also to let them be relieved of having to bear the label of asylum seeker:

A person coming from a different culture is first and foremost an individual

³ Kotimajoitusverkosto (2018) 'Kotimajoitusopas', viewed April 2018, <http://kotimajoitusverkosto.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Kotimajoitusopas.pdf>. The guidebook and most of the interviews are originally in Finnish. All translations to English are mine.

who may share more similarities with you than you might think. Many asylum seekers have faced difficult things in their lives, but ‘asylum seeker’ or ‘immigrant’ is no one’s identity.

Being an asylum seeker does not define the person. Sara Ahmed (2000) writes about how ‘a generous encounter’ recognizes the broader historical and economic context against a background of, for example, war or poverty which leads some people to migrate, without permanently labelling the other person (ibid., 151). I interpret the above remarks in the Home Accommodation Network’s guidebook as a call for ‘generous encounters’. Breaking down labels and barriers between groups of people came up in the interviews as well. The Finnish home accommodation model was developed by local activists together with asylum seekers and former refugees, as one of the founding members describes:

What I find important is that, from the very beginning, we had asylum seekers with us [in the network], from that first meeting on. It’s not something that we’re doing *for* someone, rather from the beginning it was kind of, ‘We’re doing this *together*.’

Doing things together, not for someone, is a key principle in the network. Also, many individual hosts emphasize the reciprocal nature of the arrangement, which they do not see as helping. Some hosts feel uncomfortable thinking about themselves as somehow more generous than others. As one host, Liisa, describes it:

People tell me that this is such a great thing what I’m doing, and I’m like ‘I’m not doing anything!’ It has really been so easy, I had an empty room anyway. [...] He often says ‘How can I repay this?’ or ‘I’ll take care of you when you are old.’ It feels almost unpleasant. I’ve told him that I have received at least as much from this as you did, and my position is ... I mean, I am safe.

The roles can be reversed so that it is unclear who benefits most. The host may offer a home and safety, but in turn receive a reciprocal relationship. Calling this relationship friendship is also a way to try to escape the possibly asymmetrical power relations and divisions between migrants and locals. Timo, a host who has

a long experience of activism with irregularized migrants also feels uncomfortable about seeing himself as someone who helps:

Timo: I think helping is a very controversial word.

Paula: Yeah, it is.

Timo: There is always the one who helps and the one who is being helped, and they are not equal. I always go into everything with a friendly attitude. Then when we're friends, I don't have any pressure about anything. It is what it is. [...]

Paula: So, a friendship describes it best?

Timo: Yes, definitely. For me it's not about helping.

Although many hosts, like Timo, avoid using the word help when it comes to hosting or assisting with the asylum process, others feel that not talking about helping blurs the fact that asylum seekers are in a different power position both at home and in society – and are thus sometimes in need of help. Saija, also a host and an activist, describes how she feels about the equality discourse used by many hosts that avoids using the word help:

Saija: There has been this discussion that we shouldn't use the verb help. You shouldn't say you are helping refugees. Well, okay, I admit this is reciprocity. I do it because I also get something out of it. [...] But I think that the steep equality discourse also blurs the vision. We are not roommates. [...] I'm the boss here, haha! My child has to adapt, and he has to adapt to us both.

Paula: That's interesting. [...] That discourse clearly comes from a good place, but there might be a danger that it blurs the fact that they do sometimes need help.

Saija: And that some have privileges and others don't, that's just how it is. But yeah, I don't want to see myself as a helper so I could polish my image. In reality, I am on the receiving end here, I feel I have only benefited from this.

Many hosts share Saija's consciousness about the privileged position of power they have both at home and in society. The dynamics of hospitality are not fixed, and the positions of guest and host may become destabilized at any time, present

simultaneously, or be reversed (Bulley 2016; Vandevordt 2017), in home accommodation as well. Often the roles of givers and receivers of assistance shift as a result of sharing everyday life, and many achieve the goal of reciprocal living. Many hosts, like Saija, told me they were content with having received not just a friend, but also another adult to share responsibilities at home, although they rarely had expected such reciprocity.

Yet some hosts complained that the asylum seeker did not properly take care of chores at home, which caused friction. The hosts usually explain what they consider as passivity with the asylum seeker's difficult situation, possible depression, or with their relatively young age, and in most cases they had been able to overcome it through discussion. Others find it hard to discuss difficult issues and negative feelings with their guests because of what they see as cultural differences in communication. Several of them mentioned the stereotypical Finnish blunt honesty as the key difference when communicating with people from other cultures, which can be mistaken for impoliteness. Finns, being used to such directness, get easily frustrated in situations where they have to guess how the other person is feeling or thinking. Other cultural differences, especially regarding gendered roles in housekeeping, were often mentioned as something they had to renegotiate. Despite occasional misunderstandings or frictions, the hosts generally feel that the experience has been rewarding and for some even eye-opening, regardless of the degree to which reciprocity is achieved.

Hospitality that blurs the public and private divide

Home accommodation is located in the hosts' private home, yet for many hosts the reasons to engage in it have been motivated by changes at the national level. My findings support the arguments made by others (e.g., Kleres 2018; della Porta 2018) that the recent 'crisis' has mobilized people on an unprecedented scale, because of the mediatized crisis discourse and imagery (cf. Prøitz 2018) and state actions that many found insufficient (Gill 2018). The home accommodation of asylum seekers is one of these local counteractions directed towards the national level; a grassroots movement that attracts different kinds of people motivated by a variety of sentiments and values.

Some hosts identify as long-time activists, and some had accommodated migrants before the 'crisis' of 2015. Others in turn have no activism background or prior volunteering experience. Some strive for fundamental political changes, others prioritize responding to immediate needs. There are volunteer groups and individual hosts whose hospitality is entangled with religious values, while for others the motivation is rooted primarily in secular values of humanity and human rights. Regardless of their background or identification, for most of my participants becoming a host signified a kind of counteraction to the official responses to migration. Many reported that the decision to host was driven by the will to show hospitality when the state institutions are doing the opposite. As the following quote from Emilia illustrates, the increasingly restrictive and inhospitable asylum policies in Finland drove her to act:

Paula: Where did you get this idea of inviting someone in here?

Emilia: Well, I think it began when they started tightening the criteria for asylum and deporting people. And the more inhumane Finland became as a state, the more I felt like, 'Hey, can I do something better?' That's how it started for me.

Accounts like this demonstrate that the private home is not simply a private space separate from the national home. Instead, as Boccagni (2017, 91) describes it, the home is a political space and a site of interaction and conflict across divides such as public and private, native and immigrant. Indeed, home accommodation is not an activity that affects only the spatially limited domestic sphere and the people who inhabit it. The following quote demonstrates how, according to Noora, becoming a host can function as a statement about asylum seekers being welcome. For her, home accommodation is a way to affect Finnish people's perceptions of migrants and bridge the divisions among Finnish people regarding migration:

I see it as a statement and as a form of civic activism, but at the same time

I wonder why it must be that way ... I'm from a small town with lots of different divisions among people, so it worries me that we are so divided here.

That's why I believe that, if there is an Iraqi guy living in a neighbourhood,

it affects the life of the family, of their children, their grandparents, neighbours, and colleagues. Even just one person living among these Finns can affect the lives of hundreds. And that is why it is so important and so effective, though at the same time something so ordinary.

Showing hospitality and offering a home to someone is not only important for that individual, it can also have a wider influence. Like Noora, many hosts were hoping that, through their own example, they could affect the opinions of others and bridge gaps in a divided society. For hosts like Noora, the private home is a counterspace where the opinions of wider society about migrants can also be influenced. Next, I consider how power relations affect everyday life between the host and guest in the shared home.

Power relations and boundaries in the shared home

The home accommodation of asylum seekers resembles communal living or family life in many respects, the most notable difference being the imbalance that derives from the asylum seeker not paying rent. Hosts have the power to choose whom they offer their hospitality, for how long, and under what conditions.

There exists a body of literature on multicultural gendered relationships in the private home from research on au pairs (e.g., Búriková 2006; Cox and Narula 2003; Rohde-Abuba and Tkach 2016), to migrant domestic workers (e.g., Anderson 2000; Hochschild 2000; Näre 2011), which addressed classed and ethnicised power positions in the shared home as well as drawing intimate and spatial boundaries. Next, I examine how power relations affect the way the space of home is shared in the home accommodation of asylum seekers.

Besides the imbalance of power inside the home, asylum seekers are in a precarious situation in the host society in general. Moreover, there is often great financial inequality. If we take into account social inequalities, the power of the host over the home, and the fact that asylum seekers do not financially compensate their hosts for the rooms they are given, it is not surprising that in many cases forming an equal relationship based on reciprocity takes time. The hosts often feel that the asylum seeker is not completely at ease at home but instead continues to demonstrate a debt of gratitude. This is how Noora, who lives communally

in a shared house, describes their situation:

The problem is the power position that reigns when they don't pay rent. Obviously, they don't, and it is OK for us, and we have tried to tell them that this is your home just like it is ours, and you can invite friends over and treat this house as your own. We all have our own rooms and the common rooms are truly common. But when I say 'Oh, the grass has grown so much recently,' they think it's their job to go out and cut it immediately.

Hospitality changes the space of home, and everyday life has to adjust to the new living situation. The guest has the responsibility to adapt to the house rules and to the rhythm of the host, even though it is part of the idea of hospitality to encourage the guest to 'feel at home' (Järvinen-Tassopoulos 2010). The above quote suggests that asylum seekers in home accommodation are faced with the tension of being someone's guest and at the same time trying to 'feel at home'. Henna, too, who has shared her home several times with irregularized migrants, describes such a situation as follows:

Henna: Establishing a balance of power is very challenging, when someone moves in with you. It was something we had to work towards, that everyone feels equal in this space. And I guess it was never really completely achieved, because they were financially in a very different situation. But socially maybe, I think ...

Paula: How did it manifest? Did they seem to think they owed you or something?

Henna: They were really grateful, all the time. They wanted to pay me back somehow. They were always cleaning up and so on. Hmm ... It was quite hard to get the message through that you don't have to be so grateful, that this was my own decision. All that gratitude can feel a bit heavy at times.

'Being at home' in someone else's home can be difficult, as can accepting the generosity of the host. Although in many cases the hosts and guests share their food, spend time together, and describe each other as family members, in many other cases a certain distance remains in the relationship. For example, Anni explains

that Ahmad, a 25-year-old man, really wanted to start a life of his own and not be anyone else's burden. The home never felt truly shared during the year he lived with them. Anni told me that Ahmad did not seem comfortable spending time in the common rooms of the house, or even using the kitchen daily:

Anni: We did talk about it in the beginning. He would squirm about it, saying he could not eat our food, and I told him that you can pay it back someday. But you don't have to repay us, because we feel what we are giving you will compensate someday by helping someone else in turn. [...]

Paula: Did you talk about house rules when he moved in?

Anni: We didn't really. My husband figured, there's no point that Ahmad would ever go upstairs, since there's nothing there but our bedrooms. And his room was downstairs in the basement. We cleared a kitchen cabinet for him, but he didn't really ever keep his food there, preferring to keep it downstairs in his room. There was no fridge there even. And he ate there alone most of the time, though we did tell him to join us every once in a while.

When a whole family is hosting, the question of how the space of a home is shared during the accommodation relies on the perceptions of privacy and boundaries by several persons. As the above quote suggests, sometimes members of the host family feel differently about including the asylum seeker in the family. During the interview, Anni described several occasions when her husband was more reserved about opening his home and his heart and seemed protective of their biological son's status as 'the most important son' in the family. In other cases, familial and spatial boundaries were clearly drawn. Some hosts, like Marja, were explicit about them:

Paula: OK, so he had the room downstairs, with his own entrance. Did you also go through [rules regarding] these rooms here, did you use them communally?

Marja: Yes, we showed him all these and said he can come here, but that he has to knock first. We had a situation once, because you can come in straight from that door there, and he came in without knocking, and we had to tell him that you should knock first. That in that sense you're

not part of the family, and we can have something going on in here. Then, for example, the girls [granddaughters] were here to sauna. We had to set some boundaries, about what is OK and what is not, and the rest will work out. [...] We made it clear from the beginning that we did not consider him like part of our family, that we wouldn't include him in everything. That we would give him a home, safety – that is what we give him. [...] But we did tell him several times, that it is truly OK that you are here, really.

For her the idea of giving someone a home is linked to safety, asylum, and the place of living. The host determines the limits and conditions of hospitality, and some hosts feel that being explicit about that makes it clearer for everyone. This meant, for example, defining some rooms as common and others as private, and setting down rules regarding visitors. Unequal power relations within society and within the shared home do seem to affect the relationship between the host and the asylum seeker, in some cases more than others. Furthermore, I see a tension between encouraging the guest to feel at home on the one hand and drawing boundaries on the other. Yet power relations in hospitality exclude neither reciprocity nor friendship. As others have pointed out (e.g., Bulley 2016; Vandevooort 2017), the subject positions of host and guest are neither fixed nor permanent; guests can sometimes offer hospitality, and hosts occasionally depend on guests or become guests in turn. The power relations in hospitality are not static, and neither is the relationship formed in home accommodation.

Conclusions

In the Nordic context, the arrangement where a private home becomes a space where asylum seekers' needs are being taken care of is somewhat surprising, seeing that safety and care are rarely expected to be provided by homes. As noted in the Introduction to this book, the ideology that people should not depend on the goodwill of others lies at the core of the Nordic welfare states. However, the Nordic welfare states are exclusionary systems protecting mainly their own citizens, while non-resident migrants must depend more on philanthropic practices. It is argued that private and public are not separate realms within society,

and that home is a political question (e.g., Boccagni 2017). The state and immigration categories affect private and domestic lives in many ways, for example, in matters of family reunification. In many ways, asylum seekers in the Nordic countries are excluded from the welfare state, yet also controlled by it. In the current situation, with the long application processes, asylum seekers may live years within the borders of the welfare state without fully being included in it (e.g., Khosravi 2010; Könönen 2018).

I argue that home accommodation as a form of civic agency aims to challenge divisions in society. Many of the hosts expressed the explicit intention to use their privilege to contest restrictions to migration and to bridge gaps between groups of people. This seemed to be the common motivation for the diverse group of hosts. Moreover, I argue that home accommodation of asylum seekers consolidates the understanding of home as not just a space of intimacy, but also as a site of civic agency – a counterspace, where rights are being claimed and differentiating divisions between groups of people are being challenged. By opening their own homes, local hosts welcome asylum seekers into Finnish society, which is not merely a symbolic deed. As Kjellin in this volume (Chapter 6) also points out, the Nordic home can seem inaccessible to newcomers, and friendships with locals take time to develop. By sharing their homes, the hosts hope to facilitate migrants belonging in society and to set an example. Thus, the activity confounds the discursive division between public and private.

I have demonstrated a will among the hosts to overcome the inequality that derives from the precarious situation of the asylum seeker in society and from the situation in which one person offers the other a place to live for free. However, in many cases unequal power relations and inequality of status and money affect how reciprocity and equality are achieved. Yet, the hosts I interviewed do not see themselves as helpers, but rather often emphasize that the arrangement has been rewarding for them in one way or another. Unequal power relations do not turn asylum seekers into mere victims in need of help – although some hosts are wary about dispelling the fact that asylum seekers often do need help in the process and in starting a new life. While inequalities of power and the asylum

seeker's precarious situation marks the relationship on some level, on another it is emphasized that hospitality is something very ordinary, and that in the end migrants are the same as everyone else. As in any communal living arrangement, mundane quarrels or frictions occur, or the relationship may remain more distant than hoped for. I argue that by emphasizing the ordinary, friendly, and often reciprocal nature of living together, the hosts attempt to evade the problematic victimizing discourse, in which migrants are framed as powerless victims, and to redress the imbalance between discursive categories of 'us' and 'them', 'host' and 'guest'.

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