

# Consumer Acculturation

Between

Consumer Protection and Asylum Policy

## Outline

1. Background, objectives and methodological design of the research project „Consumer Protection and Socialization of Refugees“ 03/2017 - 02/2020
2. Results
  - Restricted market access: asylum policy
  - Challenges for (refugees as) consumers: the German market
  - Consumer acculturation and its agents
3. Conclusion

# Consumer Competence in the Market Society

- Consumer Policy in Europe: Empowered, responsible Citizen-Consumers
- Consumer Agency: Mediating personal needs and public welfare in everyday life
- Preconditions: Freedom of choice (legal); access to information and knowledge about the complex relations of consumption, production, and their social and ecological consequences; connection to consumer discourses (intermediaries like foodwatch)

## How do we get competent consumers: Consumer Socialization

- Agents (family, peers, media)
- Incorporating practices (seeking information, choosing, complaining) that entail
- Cultural norms and values (»Cultural categories are the fundamental coordinates of meaning, representing the basic distinctions that a culture uses to divide up the phenomenal world.« McCracken 1986, p. 72)
- Socio-economic factors (financial resources, education, gender)
- Local/digital infrastructure

## Preconditions to act competent as Consumer

- As a result of consumer socialization: Identify needs, market knowledge (Nullmeier 2002), meta-education (Oehler 2017)
- Situative factors: Mental Capacity, planability, availability of information and consumer goods/services
- Access to infrastructure and markets (legal, economic)

“The canons for acceptable consumptive behaviour indicate that material goods have an inherent ranking according to the level of necessity of the consumer. Ironically, it is the well off (who have less needs) who establish this ranking.” (van Bavel und Sell-Trujillo 2003, p. 349)

→ Consumption and its hidden rationality can only be understood in the context of lifeworld

# Methodological Design: Focused ethnography

- Interviews and participant observation with refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria
- Interviews with consumer acculturation agents: volunteer helpers, community workers (MBE: migration consultancy for adult immigrants), teachers of the German integration courses, translators, staff from EAE (initial reception center) and interim accommodations (janitors, security)
- Collecting data online: YouTube videos, guides (welcome to Germany), apps, websites

# Refugees as flawed consumers? Some results

## Consumer acculturation shaped by asylum system

- Social welfare for refugees before recognition as non-cash benefit, sometimes supplemented with pocket money
- Goods voucher (instead of cash) determine what and where to buy
- Mostly after leaving the initial reception center, the region for settlement is set by a distribution key
- Arrival process: long, uncertain, stressful, no access to education or work or consumer information or internet
- Resettlement in rural areas complicates access to ethnic shops and support



# The Right to Consume?

Refugees threatened by exclusion in several dimensions

- Political: None of the preconditions to participate as citizen-consumer is met
- Social: Discrimination
- Economically: Secondary markets
- Culturally: Practices of consumer work in a digitalized market economy

# Agents of Consumer Acculturation Ia

## Personal attachment

- Family in country of origin
- Family and extended network in Germany
- Media Agents

Acculturation Strategies: Providing cultural knowledge, emotional support/burden, facilitate arrival, determining

# Agents of Consumer Acculturation Ib

## Volunteers

- Important support, especially on the housing market
- But choosing the refugees they like to support by own criteria
- Ability to support in distinct consumer fields is restricted
- Strategies of consumer acculturation differ widely between:

Explaining, accompanying, deciding, teaching, negotiating,  
withdrawal

## Agents of Consumer Acculturation II

### Unvolunteer Support

- Security staff: First interaction partners in reception centers
- Janitors: Basic support and orientation
- Sellers: Orientation in the city, advice and translation
- Integration course teachers: Trustful authorities and important mediators of support

Strategies: improvising, provide orientation in the local environment, mediating assistance, insisting on cultural norms

N: Most difficult are the first five days, that you have to arrive somewhere new, knowing nothing, not where the next bus stop is, where to shop, after the first few days they get organized somehow and then they get information among each other. But the first days, it is difficult. Because a communal worker is not always available.

M: We are the first persons they meet and this is why expectations on us are very high. Somehow they think we could tell them everything. We can say, to which doctor to go and, yes, we are the all-supplier for them and yes, in that sense we are the first persons, who are there for them and the first contacts. And so it is clear that hope is set on us and that they expect a lot. (Interview Janitors, p. 131)

# Agents of Consumer Acculturation III

## Organized Support

- Agencies of Integration (i.a. AWO, Caritas, MBE)
- Consumer Agencies
- Religious/migrant groups
- Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Strategies: Top-down and come-in structure, adjustment only temporary and project based (e.g. WEBi-Tipp)



Suche



Katharina

Startseite

Freunde finden

Erstellen



Geldkarten Babylon



Gefällt mir



Kommentieren



Teilen



WEBiTIPP



347

24 Kommentare

Chat



## Kommentare (24)

Relevanteste zuerst ▾



Mwoloud Daoud

أخي علاء محمد  
بتشايح شرح بالعربي تماما شو الفرق بين الكريدت كارت او  
بطاقة مسبقة الدفع  
والفيديو فقط مشان نحنا لنكتبه اذا معنا كريدت كارت او ملخص  
نصرف منها طول الشهر بدون ما نعرف قديش صرفنا ببجي  
اخر الشهر ومنكتشف انو صرفنا اكثر من قدرتنا على اعاده

Mehr anzeigen... 1

Gefällt mir · Antworten · Übersetzung anzeigen · 1 J · Bearbeitet



Anas AounAlsoud

فيديوهاتك مموله بتطلع شخصين عندي بصفتي ممكن توقفن او  
توقف ظهور بمقاطعنا لارتاح؟

Gefällt mir · Antworten · Übersetzung anzeigen · 1 J



Ghassan Ali Sipan Darwish

بفيدنا بشي

1

Gefällt mir · Antworten · Übersetzung anzeigen · 1 J

7 Antworten

# Conclusion and theoretical implications

## Theoretical starting point of the project

- Penaloza's model helpful for research design
- Interpretation: Askegaard et al. (2005), Lüdicke (2010), Üstüner and Holt (2007)

## Theoretical points of reference:

- Relation between acculturation, stress, and consumption
- Integration in and exclusion of consumer society (Bauman 1998; Jacob Miller 2019, Williams 2003)
- Socialization (Geulen 2011; Böhnisch, Lenz, Schröer 2009)



## Research Perspectives

- Limitations of the project
- Everyday life after flight
- Exclusion/Poverty of refugees (need for statistical data)
- Strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation (sociology and psychology)
- Longitudinal studies
- Re-Embedding acculturation in socialization theory?
- Digital consumer acculturation

Thank you for your kind attention!

## References

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Codesystem	3533
ROT	49
Prozessdimension: Wann	0
Herkunftsland	172
Flucht	119
Ankommen	51
Interaktionsdimension: Wer oder mit wem?	0
Netzwerk	337
Staat	130
Märkte	197
Handlungsfelder: Wo	1
Asylsystem	75
Kultur	149
Stress	133
Marktorientierung	138
Verbrauchersouveränität	249
Was?	0
Verbraucherbildung	46
Mediennutzung	99
Freizeit	53
Ernährung	69
Einkauf	64
Finanzen	89
Akkulturationsstrategien	313
Wie?	0
Einstellung/Werthaltungen	85
Motivation	182
Deutungsschema	466
Normen	220
Interviewsetting	47
Sets	0

285 **B:** (Laughter) Yeah and I stay there for 6 and half months. it really hurt.

286 **I:** Was it together with your family?

287 **B:** Yes. We were in one room like that 6. 3 children, me, my wife, and my mother. The room just like so was really hard. I never see like that and the- yeah (...) but something in the camp, that was really good. They came to us, they say going to be finished. You are not staying all your life here. They talk with us, they were good. Someday my little child - she likes the animals really - and there was a woman, she's name is Rosie's. In Germany it was the first woman, and she say I pick you tomorrow your all family to somewhere there're animal and it was a nice day. She take us with the car.yeah and I mean it's also there's somebody really they are good, they help us. They don't know us but they really help us. And also some they don't want to look at us. Every, anywhere and everybody is not the same also in this country somebody don't like us, but yeah (...) And after 6 months they give me transfer and I come to here to C-town. And now its 4 months I'm here in C-town.

288 **I:** And now you've got a flat for your family.

289 **B:** Yes it's not it's the house to (?Etage), the up, the Etage, upstairs I live in there and downstairs another family. But it's very good and more more better than camp. It's really good