



Hospitality and Rejection: Peddlers and Host Communities in the Northern Baltic, 1850–1920

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Peddlers were one of many social groups in the late nineteenth century whose livelihood depended on temporary or constant mobility. Itinerant traders crossed regional and national borders, arriving in stationary local communities as outsiders. In his famous essay “The Stranger,” published in 1908, Georg Simmel portrays the potentially threatening “outsider” as a trader.¹ In her seminal book on peddling in Europe, historian Laurence Fontaine maintains that peddlers generally evoked ambivalent emotions; on the one hand, they were received as anticipated guests and, on the other, they were viewed with suspicion, especially due to their mobile

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lifestyle.² In this chapter, we examine the ambivalent reception of itinerant traders as pointed out by both Simmel and Fontaine in the context of late nineteenth-century Sweden and Finland. We argue that the perception of peddlers, either as guests to be welcomed or as a security issue, depended on the situational and relational context, on the traders' origin, and on the capacity of different social groups within the host communities to make their voices heard. In fact, the categories of "peddlers" and "host communities" were culturally, socially, and economically heterogeneous entities that encompassed a multitude of conflicting interests. Peddlers, local merchants, authorities, and the consumer hosts all had their own interests in their interactions and they strove to create their own space in which to operate. By disclosing this heterogeneity and the contradictory relationships between peddlers and the recipient communities, this chapter adds nuance to former research results on trader-host relations along the northern shores of the Baltic Sea.

We analyze gestures of hospitality and rejection toward four groups of peddlers, each of which differed from their host communities in terms of geographic origin, ethnicity, language, and confession. The so-called *knallar* were ethnic Swedes, mainly from Västergötland County in Sweden, while the other three groups of peddlers originated in the multiethnic Russian Empire. The "Rucksack Russians" were from White Sea Karelia, a region bordering the Grand Duchy of Finland; the Eastern European Jews originated from the empire's western provinces; and the Muslim Tatars came from the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate. We investigate hospitality and/or rejection that these traders were granted, with a focus on three themes: the threats that the peddlers were perceived to pose and the security measures taken to address them, the reciprocal relationships between traders and hosts, and the gestures of hospitality and rejection in light of ambivalent encounters around the goods that the peddlers carried with them. We use the analytical terms of hospitality and securitization to capture the ambivalence and reciprocity that characterized trader-host relations. According to the anthropologist Tom Selwyn, hospitality and hostility should be viewed as opposite ends of a single spectrum. For the hosts, hospitality can be a means to establish or uphold a relationship by befriending a former or potential enemy.³ However, the motives for showing hospitality to outsiders are not only altruistic; allowing an outsider into the house also offers an opportunity for the host to monitor the guest.⁴ Securitization, in turn, refers to the rhetoric and the practical means through which various actors in the host

community handled peddling as a security issue and took measures to address it.⁵

Previous research has shown that mobile petty trade has left relatively few and fragmentary traces in historical sources, no doubt a result of its informal character and existence in a gray zone between the legal and illegal.⁶ To meet the challenge posed by the scarcity of documentation, we combine two types of sources: newspaper articles and responses to ethnographic questionnaires. Searchable digital newspaper archives at the Finnish National Library and the Royal Library of Sweden have opened up new possibilities to localize the fragmentary mentions of itinerant petty trade in the press. Newspaper articles are contemporary with the events they depict but pose source-critical challenges that need to be acknowledged. The press mainly represents the local authorities' and merchants' predominantly negative attitudes toward peddlers; newspaper articles can therefore be expected to stress rejection, rather than hospitality.⁷ Yet, the press played an important role in forming public opinion in the period under study; newspapers both described and contributed to shaping reality.⁸ Through its influence on public opinion, the press directly or indirectly affected the ways in which host communities received peddlers.

The newspaper articles can be read alongside the responses to three ethnographic questionnaires dealing with itinerant trade: the West Gothians' Trade-questionnaire (*Västgötarnas handel*, 1933) preserved at Nordiska Museet in Stockholm; the questionnaire Trade and Fairs (*Handel och marknad*, 1938), held at ULMA in Uppsala; and the questionnaire Russian Itinerant Traders (*Kringvandrande ryska handelsmän*, 1957/1968), held at the Cultural Studies archive *Cultura* at Åbo Akademi University in Turku.⁹ Created by ethnologists from the 1920s onwards, these questionnaires originally responded to a perceived need to document the traditional agrarian society in the Northern Baltic that was seen as under threat from modernization. Until the 1950s, documentation focused on gathering knowledge about the customs and material culture of traditional rural society. From the late 1950s onwards, questionnaires were used to answer new types of inquiries related to cultural contact and societal change.¹⁰ Ethnographic questionnaires are retrospective in character, being conducted several decades after the events they purport to describe. Reminiscences can arguably be affected, and even distorted, by factors such as forgetfulness, nostalgia, reliance on

second-hand information, and leading questions.¹¹ Still, the questionnaires gave a voice to people who had encountered peddlers in their everyday lives and who had received them as guests. Thus, the responses contain information about the informal side of peddling that newspapers or official sources do not reveal, including lodgings and food, personal relations between peddlers and hosts, everyday trading encounters, and the emotions that the traded goods evoked.¹² The two Swedish questionnaires, sent out to the network of informants that the archives established, do not contain explicit questions relating to hospitality and rejection; however, responses to other questions on trader-host interactions indirectly illuminate hospitality-related issues. The Finnish questionnaire on Russian itinerant traders, on the contrary, explicitly addresses the topic. A section entitled “Reception in the village” lists questions such as: How were the peddlers received? Did the locals look forward to their visits? Did everyone receive them well? Was the peddler protected from the rural police?

Combining newspaper articles and ethnographic questionnaires allows us to address the source-critical challenges that both source types pose and therefore to offer a more nuanced understanding of hospitality and rejection in trader-host relations than an analysis of a single source type would make possible. Thus, the methodological aim of the chapter is to illustrate how the character of the analyzed sources will inevitably affect the conclusions that can be drawn about hospitality and rejection. We also aim to nuance former research on itinerant petty trade by including several groups of peddlers in the analysis. Even though mobile trade was strikingly transnational, peddlers have usually been studied as separate groups in a single national setting.¹³ Swedish researchers have mainly studied the mobile livelihood of *knallar*, while Finnish scholars have focused on the “Rucksack Russians.”¹⁴ The Jewish and the Tatar peddlers have been the subjects of a number of articles with a focus on legislation, cultural encounters, and the stereotypical preconceived notions associated with ethnified trade.¹⁵

PEDDLERS IN THE NORTHERN BALTIC: TRADERS FROM NEAR AND AFAR

Situated in the northern periphery of the Baltic Sea, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sweden and Finland were similar in many ways. While politically separated since 1809, when Finland was transformed into

a semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, they shared a long common history, and social and economic contacts across the Bothnian Sea were dense. Both were still predominantly agrarian societies covering vast territories that were more sparsely populated than regions along the southern shores of the Baltic Sea. Partly due to the long distances between communities, peddlers played a central role in the circulation of commodities in the late nineteenth century, a period that has been described as the zenith of mobile trading in terms of scope and variety.¹⁶

In addition to the growing supply of and demand for consumer goods that can be discerned from the mid-nineteenth century, the development of modern transport technologies partly explains the influx of peddlers from the outside into the Northern Baltic. The expanding railway network made migration, travel, and the transport of commodities faster and more efficient both within states and across national borders.¹⁷ In particular, the linking of the Finnish railway system to that of Russia in 1870 made the region more accessible to itinerant traders from the Russian Empire.¹⁸ Peddlers could now effectively utilize trading networks that stretched from St. Petersburg to the Russian interior, from Moscow all the way to Kazan, an important market town some 800 kilometers to the east.¹⁹ In turn, regular steamship routes made journey times between ports along the shores of the Baltic Sea faster than ever before, which also benefited domestic peddlers, who carried both imported and local goods.²⁰

The four groups of peddlers investigated here differed from one another in terms of the origin and legal status of their trade. The Swedish peddlers originated in the southern parts of Västergötland County, whose inhabitants had enjoyed the privilege to peddle for hundreds of years. These itinerant traders were called *knallar* or *västgötar*, denominations that were also used as generic terms for peddlers in colloquial speech.²¹ *Knallar* traded all over Sweden, occasionally crossing borders into Norway, Denmark, and Finland. The liberal Swedish Trade Law of 1864, which followed the principles of freedom of trade, abolished the old regional privilege.²² Itinerant trade waned somewhat in the last decades of the century, but Swedish peddlers continued to play an important role in the distribution of consumer goods in the more remote regions of the country. The “Rucksack Russians” mainly originated from White Sea Karelia, a region of the Arkhangelsk Governorate of the Russian Empire, and from the northern parts of the Olonets Governorate, bordering the

Grand Duchy of Finland. As the region failed to offer subsistence all year around, peddling had been an important additional source of income for its inhabitants for centuries. Peddlers from Russian Karelia traded all over Finland, as well as in northern Sweden and Norway.²³ The Eastern European Jews and the Tatars were newcomers in the Northern Baltic, arriving only in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Jews originated in the Pale of Settlement in the western parts of the Russian Empire and started to migrate to Sweden in the 1860s. They were part of a broad European migration movement from east to west, a result of many concurrent factors, such as a demographic crisis, harsh economic conjunctures, and pogroms. More than two million Jews left Eastern Europe in the decades preceding the First World War.²⁴ Most ultimately aimed to migrate to the United States, but some settled permanently in Western Europe, including Sweden.²⁵ Tatar peddlers arrived in Finland around the same time, also forming part of a migration of diverse groups of Tatars from the Russian interior toward the Baltic Sea.²⁶ Those who arrived in Finland mostly originated from a few villages in the Sergach district in the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, roughly 550 kilometers east of Moscow. Many had previously resided in St. Petersburg, where they had gained a seasonal or permanent livelihood as petty traders.²⁷ In a way that was typical for migrant newcomers, the Tatars and Russian Jews initially engaged in petty trade, a low-threshold livelihood that did not require any investment.²⁸ Swedish law allowed foreigners to peddle between 1864 and 1886, and a conspicuously liberal immigration policy facilitated mobility. As for Finland, the Grand Duchy had its own internal legislation and separate citizenship rights, despite being a part of the Russian Empire. Peddling was forbidden to anyone without citizenship rights, including the Russian Karelians and Tatars, who as Muslims could not even acquire them.²⁹ Despite the formal prohibition, it is a well-known fact that the customers, often even the authorities, turned a blind eye on illicit peddling.³⁰

The four groups of peddlers differed from both each other and their stationary customers to varying degrees. *Knallar* were the most similar to their hosts, although they were also in some respects perceived as “outsiders” or “strangers” by local society. In contrast to the other three groups, they did not differ from their hosts regarding language, ethnicity, or nationality. The “Rucksack Russians” from White Sea Karelia were the equivalent of *knallar* in Finland, although they were neither Finns nor Finnish citizens. While they differed from their Finnish customers

through their Orthodox faith and some cultural attributes, such as clothing, Karelians were perceived as being closely related to the Finns. Most also spoke Karelian, in this period considered a dialect of Finnish, and could therefore communicate effortlessly with their customers. While a shared language naturally facilitated communication, previous research has shown that linguistic differences did not pose a severe impediment. Peddlers who traded in the Swedish-speaking regions of Finland, on the Åland Islands, and along the Baltic coast, quickly learned the basic vocabulary needed for trading.³¹ The Eastern European Jews and Tatars differed more from their Northern Baltic host communities in terms of appearance, language, and confession. The Tatars represented the first Muslims that people in the region encountered in their everyday lives, and attitudes toward them were affected by a derogatory “Oriental” image.³² Jews, in turn, were associated with negatively charged anti-Semitic stereotypes that had been central to European thought for centuries.³³ Tatar and Jewish peddlers were relatively few in absolute numbers, amounting to a few thousand at most. Yet, against the background of pejorative preconceived notions, they attracted attention in the host communities due to their mobile lifestyle and their distinct appearance.³⁴

MOBILE TRADE IN SEDENTARY SOCIETIES: PERCEIVED THREATS AND SECURITY MEASURES

Peddlers’ mobile lifestyle was commonly associated with a diverse set of threats in both Sweden and Finland. Mobility was viewed as a potential menace in societies based on the notion of “estates,” in which every individual ideally occupied a fixed social and geographic place.³⁵ While the estate-based society was slowly transforming into a modern class society in the course of the nineteenth century, negative attitudes toward mobility prevailed among those in the stationary society who were responsible for maintaining order or who felt their personal interests to be threatened. Thus, mobile people were commonly viewed with suspicion, and their “otherness” was utilized to create and sustain mechanisms of caution and fear. In times of distress, in particular, they often became scapegoats who were allegedly to blame for harm and conflicts.³⁶ This aspect of rejection was highlighted in contemporary newspaper articles in both countries, in which peddlers were associated with threats, such as illegal trade, the spread of infectious diseases, and the moral degradation allegedly caused by “unnecessary” and “excessive” consumption.

The need for security measures, that is, the need to protect the local society against the perceived threats posed by mobile traders, was often linked to alleged economic risks that peddlers represented. This need was usually voiced by established Swedish and Finnish merchants, the segment of the local society whose interests peddling was most likely to harm. The merchants' argument centered on the allegation that itinerant trade caused financial loss both locally and nationally. Foreign peddlers, in particular, were accused of utilizing their position in the gray zone of legality in a manner that made them unjust competitors to "honest" local merchants. The dishonest competition included the selling of contraband commodities and the evasion of taxes and other trading fees that the merchants had to pay.³⁷ In both Sweden and Finland, contradictory legislation and its inconsistent application made it difficult for merchants to keep peddlers out. The obscurities surrounding the regulations were reflected in short notices in the newspapers, which contained questions about whether specific traders (for instance, Jews or Tatars) were allowed to peddle at all.³⁸ Merchants also criticized the authorities' lax attitude toward illicit trade, blaming them for evading their responsibility as guardians of law and order. In 1900, for instance, merchants in Gothenburg notified the county governor that Polish Jews were illicitly conducting large-scale ambulatory trade in the Bohuslän archipelago.³⁹ In the Finnish coastal town of Kotka, local merchants in the 1880s and 1890s repeatedly complained about unfair treatment, as the town authorities failed to banish Tatar traders like their colleagues in neighboring Hamina had done.⁴⁰ Similar complaints occurred in other Finnish towns; for example, in an editorial letter in the Tammisaari local newspaper in 1892, merchants provocatively asked how long the town administration intended to allow Tatars to wander from house to house, selling their "Russian rags and cloths."⁴¹

Influencing trade legislation was another strategy that merchants utilized to enforce the rejection of peddlers. Swedish merchant associations criticized the Swedish Trade Law of 1864, which allowed foreigners to peddle. While recognizing the benefits of freedom of trade, the merchants drew attention to the "obvious nuisances" that foreign peddlers caused. The "flood of complaints" that had allegedly been voiced around the country was presented as proof of the regrettable fact that foreigners had transformed peddling into a "distorted picture" of what it had once been.⁴² The association's goal was to revise the law in a more

protectionist direction. The first revision, made in 1879, stated that non-Swedish citizens had to acquire special permission to practice peddling. In 1886, a motion to further revise the law was submitted to parliament. Containing explicit anti-Semitic rhetoric, the new law from 1887 prohibited foreigners from pursuing peddling. As most Eastern European Jews lacked citizenship, some of them decided to leave Sweden.⁴³ Others continued peddling, albeit illegally.⁴⁴ In Finland, the law prohibited peddling to foreigners, but the question of whether it should be legalized was repeatedly discussed in the Diet.⁴⁵ Like their Swedish colleagues, Finnish merchants vehemently opposed the more liberal regulatory approaches to peddling. While opinions on the matter were divided in the Estates, the prohibition remained in force in the otherwise liberal Trade Act of 1879. Those who opposed a more liberal stance commonly referred to contemporary transnational debates that stressed the economic and sanitary harm caused by peddling.⁴⁶

The sanitary threat that foreign peddlers allegedly posed became especially topical toward the end of the nineteenth century. The increased mobility of people and goods brought with it the risk of diseases spreading faster. In particular, the cholera epidemics that regularly occurred in Russia, spreading westward from the Empire's interior, provoked fears that peddlers from the affected regions would act as vectors. In light of this, the authorities in Finland, like in many other European countries, took securitization measures that aimed to restrict the spread of disease. One important measure was to cancel fairs that attracted large crowds and were visited by traders with networks stretching between Finland and Russia. For instance, following news of a cholera outbreak in Russia in 1892, fairs in several Finnish towns were canceled by Senate decree.⁴⁷

The securitization measures were promoted by campaigns in Finnish newspapers, which urged people to refrain from contact with mobile traders from Russia. In 1892, the inhabitants of Turku were warned that Tatars and other traders from cholera-infested regions in Russia would arrive at the town's autumn fair in large numbers with commodities such as leather goods, furs, and textiles potentially constituting vectors of disease transmission. Demands were made that these items should not be allowed into town, or at least not until they had been thoroughly disinfected.⁴⁸ The news about the securitization measures that had been taken in Finland were also reported in the Swedish press.⁴⁹ In the next two decades, similar campaigns recurred in Finland. In times when the threat of cholera was high, the press encouraged people to avoid contact with

all “strangers, especially mobile traders,” and not to allow peddlers from Russia to enter their homes.⁵⁰ In this context, itinerant traders and their goods were commonly equated with dirt and poor hygiene.⁵¹ Dirt—real or imagined—was typically associated with the “other” in late nineteenth-century society, and was commonly used to justify exclusionary practices and ethnic class distinctions.⁵²

As these examples illustrate, the newspaper sources, representing the views of the local merchants and authorities, primarily stressed the threats posed by the peddlers and the security measures needed to address them. However, the fact that peddling prevailed—despite the picture of the trader as a threatening element—suggests that the measures were not completely accepted by the customers and that demand for the peddlers’ goods and services must have continued to exist.

AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PEDDLERS AND THE HOST COMMUNITIES

In responses to the ethnographic questionnaires, the threats usually associated with peddlers in the press are largely absent. Here, the arrival of a peddler to the village is mostly described in neutral terms. Some responses even convey a sense of positive anticipation, describing the peddlers as eagerly awaited guests.⁵³ In such contexts, the peddler’s visit represented a welcomed break from the monotony of everyday life—a “breeze from another, more eventful, world,” or, as one respondent puts it, a virtual “feast.”⁵⁴

The emotions of joy and excitement that respondents express are linked to the reciprocal gains that the encounter with mobile traders could bring about, such as the access to new and exciting goods, entertainment, and information that peddlers brought from the outside world.⁵⁵ Like other mobile groups, itinerant traders played an important role as intermediaries of news, rumors, and gossip in an era in which communication technologies remained underdeveloped. Although the telegraph, telephone, and railway network reduced distances in the late nineteenth century, such novelties reached the peripheries of the sparsely populated rural regions of Sweden and Finland with significant delay.⁵⁶ One respondent from the secluded southwestern Finnish archipelago maintains that the peddlers, in a sense, substituted for the still rare telephones.⁵⁷ Peddlers also conveyed news and private letters between relatives and acquaintances residing in other villages along their routes. Such messages

could contain, for example, news of a child being born or of someone having died.⁵⁸

One respondent relates that upon the peddler's arrival, coffee was served, and maids and farmhands were allowed to take a break from their tasks to come in for a chat.⁵⁹ The accounts generally reflect hospitality in general, but also the itinerant traders' dependency on their hosts' hospitality for sheer survival. The market for eating out, especially in rural regions, was underdeveloped in the late nineteenth century, and providing visitors with food was perceived as a social obligation.⁶⁰ The same applied to lodging. While peddlers sometimes stayed overnight at inns along the road, or slept outside in the warm season, they mostly found shelter in private homes. Mobile traders tended to follow the same routes every year, and responses to all three questionnaires reveal that they returned to specific households year after year.⁶¹ Although showing hospitality toward guests was considered a social obligation, the peddler-host relationship was based on reciprocity. The peddlers paid for food and shelter with money or commodities,⁶² and respondents mention that hosts even accepted as payment news, gossip, or the exciting stories that peddlers recounted about their journeys.⁶³

Establishing friendly relationships within the host community was important for peddlers, as people were less prone to offer quarter to unknown travelers.⁶⁴ Responses to the questionnaires imply that peddlers could be received as "old acquaintances," even as a "kind of kin," and that long-term friendships based on mutual trust were established between traders and their hosts.⁶⁵ However, it must be noted that the anticipation of guests and the long-lasting friendships mainly refer to *knallar* in the Swedish case and to "Rucksack Russians" in the Finnish, while Jews and Tatars are seldom or never mentioned as guests. The absence of these groups of peddlers in the sources is partly explained by the fact that the questionnaires did not contain separate questions about them and that their number was relatively low. Another observation is that, compared to *knallar* and "Rucksack Russians," who commonly appear in the responses with personal names and positive characterizations,⁶⁶ Jews and Tatars are not mentioned as individuals but as a collective associated with anti-Semitic or Oriental stereotypes. Thus, while *knallar* and "Rucksack Russians" are described more positively in the questionnaires than in the newspapers, Jews and Tatars are depicted pejoratively in both.⁶⁷

Relationships between peddlers and hosts also contained a gendered aspect, as many respondents imply that young girls and women especially welcomed peddlers warmly.⁶⁸ Love relationships that sometimes formed between mobile traders and local women occasionally resulted in marriage. For instance, a “Rucksack Russian” ended up marrying the daughter of one of the well-to-do families on the Åland Islands, while a *knalle* became a wealthy and influential man in the local parish after marrying a propertied farmer’s daughter.⁶⁹ Such relationships could also bring reciprocal gains. Before the 1879 Trade Act allowed foreigners to open rural shops in Finland, non-Finnish citizens could only get involved in the local business by opening shops in the name of a local acquaintance or by marrying a local woman. This opportunity was important for the “Rucksack Russians,” some of whom in time abandoned their itinerant lifestyle to become stationary shopkeepers in Finland.⁷⁰

While many residents welcomed peddlers with hospitality, relationships within the host communities could also be troublesome. As foreign peddlers’ trade was illegal for most of the period under study, the mobile traders came into conflict with the local police forces that occasionally chased them out of suspicion of conducting illicit transactions. Swedish newspapers repeatedly contained short paragraphs informing about peddlers who had been detained. For instance, one article reported on a group of Polish Jews from Stockholm, Lund, and Malmö, three of whom were Russian subjects, who were arrested near Uppsala in 1901.⁷¹ Likewise, the Finnish press reported on the detainments of “Rucksack Russians” and Tatars.⁷² Moreover, Finnish newspapers urged locals to denounce to the police any instances of itinerant traders engaging in illicit trade or selling fake goods.⁷³ If found guilty, the peddlers would be fined and their commodities confiscated.⁷⁴ However, both the newspapers and responses to the questionnaires contain evidence of the local consumers commonly siding with the peddlers, hiding them and their goods from the authorities.⁷⁵

At the same time, the peddlers’ mobile lifestyle always encompassed an element of danger for them. Newspapers in both Sweden and Finland contain portrayals of peddlers being physically harassed while selling. In some stories, a peddler enters a house, in which only the children or the women are at home, only to later be confronted by returning husbands, brothers, or parents of the “victims,” who then mishandle the peddlers and chase them away.⁷⁶ This type of rejection could also be collective, as in the story of a “mob” of locals that took the law into their own

hands, threatening a group of Jewish traders spotted near the Swedish coastal town of Hudiksvall with violence if they were ever to return.⁷⁷ Such narratives reflect a patriarchal ideal, but must also be viewed in light of negative ethnic stereotyping. Collective action was usually taken against Jews, which suggests that these sorts of attacks were directed toward those groups of peddlers that differed most from the host community in terms of ethnicity and confession.

In the most extreme form of rejection, peddlers were robbed or even murdered. The fact that they carried money and valuable goods with them while journeying alone or in small groups in remote regions made them tempting prey for potential malefactors.⁷⁸ Both the newspapers and responses to the questionnaires contain examples of peddlers from all the groups under study falling victim to robbers and murderers. Newspapers also report on court cases and sometimes convey detailed depictions of the committed crime.⁷⁹ In one such story, a peddler caught a local youngster's attention while selling at a farm. The youngster followed the trader and attempted to rob him of his valuables, which resulted in a fight, in which the peddler was killed. The accounts of how the criminals were caught follow a pattern as well. Usually, suspicions were evoked when the perpetrator began to spend more money than he was reasonably thought to possess or handed out gifts to relatives and acquaintances.⁸⁰ Accounts of violent crime also appear in responses to the questionnaires, where they reflect the local society's oral tradition and collective memory. Many respondents recount that they heard stories of peddlers being robbed or murdered in a specific place.⁸¹

The above examples show that responses to ethnographic questionnaires describe gestures of hospitality within informal encounters between peddlers and host communities that are absent in the newspapers, such as the long-term friendships based on mutual trust or the hosts' willingness to protect the peddlers from the local police. These gestures were based on reciprocal gains that hospitable relations brought to both the peddlers and the hosts. On the other hand, not all host-guest relationships were characterized by hospitality. At times, locals took collective action to expel peddlers, but such examples are mainly found in the newspapers and reflect a normative measure to secure the local community. Furthermore, Tatars and Jews in particular were associated with pejorative stereotypes found in the newspapers and the ethnographic questionnaires alike that reinforced rejection.

HOSPITALITY AND AMBIVALENT ENCOUNTERS AROUND COMMODITIES

Reciprocal relationships between peddlers and hosts evolved around the exchange of commodities, which provided the bedrock for interactions between locals and strangers. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were eventful times for retail trade and consumption: distribution networks improved and the amount of new consumer goods on the market increased. At the same time, advertising and falling prices kindled new dreams and desires for commodities, and placed the novelties within reach of more people on Europe's northern periphery.⁸² Although new shops were opening, many consumers, especially those in sparsely populated areas, still depended on older forms of retail, such as fairs, auctions, and peddling.⁸³ Thus, the hospitable receptions that peddlers often received in Sweden and Finland can be partly explained by the traders' capacity to fulfill the customers' desires for goods, especially in remote regions. On the other hand, as Simmel states, the peddler was commonly viewed as a "stranger" because he arrived with goods that were produced outside the host community.⁸⁴ In this respect, his visit also posed a potential threat often met by securitization practices.

As potential consumers, the hosts had several motives in welcoming itinerant peddlers. Mobile traders carried with them a wide assortment of lightweight commodities. The "Rucksack Russians" mostly sold industrially manufactured textiles, and from the mid-nineteenth century, also ready-made clothes. In addition, they offered smaller items, such as pins, needles, ribbons, and foodstuffs.⁸⁵ Textiles were the main commodity of *knallar*, too, although in previous centuries they had carried a wider assortment of goods. As the *knallars'* trade started to wane from the 1860s onwards, their textile trade was partially replaced by that of the Eastern European Jews, who also sold ready-made clothes of foreign production, and minor goods like pins, needles, and buttons.⁸⁶ The Tatars also carried a wide assortment of goods, including furs, carpets, handkerchiefs, and toys.⁸⁷

In the ethnographic questionnaires, respondents reminisced that they made better and more affordable purchases from peddlers than they did in the local stores.⁸⁸ Others maintained that the peddlers could procure new and exciting items that were not found locally. In particular, the peddlers from Russia utilized their transnational trading networks, which

stretched all the way to Russian trading centers such as Arkhangelsk, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan.⁸⁹ Research in the field of consumption history has shown that commodities have the capacity to evoke positive emotions. Hosts receiving peddlers in their homes probably found pleasure in looking at and examining new, beautiful, and exotic items. Especially for the lower social strata, access to new objects also opened an opportunity to feel involved in modern consumer society.⁹⁰ Furthermore, trading encompassed a performative element that in itself could attract spectators. The peddlers' vivacious display of their goods, not to mention the lively haggling that characterized trading, had the potential to turn the encounter into an amusing spectacle.⁹¹ One Swedish respondent maintained that it was all the talking that made the exchanges happen, rather than the items as such.⁹²

Other reasons why the hosts would receive peddlers hospitably was the option for flexible payment that they offered. While customers often paid for goods in ready money, they could also exchange them for commodities that had a resale value, such as furs, skins, rags, bristles, and hair. Barter was a common practice in petty trade at a time when ready money was scarce.⁹³ Another option was credit, a system that by nature depended on mutual trust. Sellers had to trust that customers would pay for the goods during their next visit.⁹⁴ At the same time, offering credit was one method of strengthening relations with the hosts.

While these examples point to the reciprocal benefits that trade offered to both sellers and buyers, the encounters between them appear in a more negative light in the newspapers. Here, the mobile traders' goods were without exception described as being of low quality or fake; for instance, Tatars allegedly sold "authentic Siberian skins" that turned out to be rabbit skins, and Jews sold fake linen ware and pocket-watches of poor quality.⁹⁵ To make matters worse, peddlers were accused of distributing harmful substances—such as alcohol, medicines, and poison—that they sometimes diluted to lure customers.⁹⁶ The fraudulent practices that the peddlers allegedly used are described with a strikingly stereotypical rhetoric. In a typical story, the peddler from outside utilized his "well-oiled tongue" to lure inexperienced local customers into buying low-quality goods that they did not even need.⁹⁷ In light of all these menaces, newspapers occasionally published warnings that encouraged prospective consumers to reject peddlers and to refrain from buying their goods.⁹⁸ The trading methods by Tatars and Jews were usually described as trickier than those of *knallar* and "Rucksack Russians."

Such warnings in the press represented the views of authorities and local merchants, who had an interest in applying security measures to keep peddlers out. Adopting a superior perspective, the press' rhetoric reflects a general derogatory attitude toward the consumption by the lower classes of society and by women.⁹⁹ The male consumer was usually portrayed as naïve and wasteful, while his female counterpart was condemned for her vanity and desire for novelties.¹⁰⁰ One form of trade that evoked extreme resentment and moral indignation was the booming hair trade of the 1870s, spurred on by the chignon, a trendy coiffure fashion that required false hair and encouraged peddlers to accept long braids in exchange for their goods.¹⁰¹ Many newspaper correspondents warned that girls and women who fell for the alluring words of the peddlers would lose their pride and shame their family.¹⁰²

This form of rejection not only represents the ambition of certain social groups to keep peddlers out by presenting both them and their customers in a negative light, but also represents a patriarchal society as reflected in the responses to the questionnaires as well as in the newspapers. For instance, a Swedish respondent maintained that women had to be "watched over" when peddlers arrived, as they were easily lured into buying their gaudy headcloths and fine textiles.¹⁰³ Other examples refer to the threat that the "Rucksack Russians" posed with their tendency to try to seduce their female hosts.¹⁰⁴ Thus, it was not only local authorities and merchants who had an interest in applying security measures to keep peddlers out, but so too did husbands and fathers.

The ambivalent encounters around the commodities both fostered hospitality gestures and gave rise to security measures. The ethnographic questionnaires illustrate how hospitality toward peddlers provided hosts with access to new exciting and affordable goods and entertainment. The newspapers, in turn, reinforced rejection by stressing low-quality and fake goods, the traders' delusive selling methods, and the demoralizing effects that the encounter could have on the allegedly naïve and vain hosts. Again, the fact that peddling prevailed despite such warnings and security measures illustrates the ambivalence inherent to the reception of peddlers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study of host–guest relations between mobile peddlers and receiving communities on the northern shores of the Baltic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveals that the sources largely determine the

degree to which these relations were characterized by hospitality or rejection. In the newspapers, the peddlers' mobile lifestyle was associated with preconceived notions of economic and sanitary threats requiring security measures. The threats were often voiced by local merchants who saw the peddlers as unjust competitors, or by local authorities who were responsible for maintaining order and protecting local society from perceived outside threats. The security measures were promoted through newspaper campaigns, in which the local population was urged to reject itinerant traders by refraining from contact with them and their goods, or by denouncing them to the local police for conducting illicit trade. This form of normative rejection was particularly harsh when the authorities tried to hinder the spread of cholera epidemics; especially in the 1890s, fairs in Finland were repeatedly restricted or canceled to keep out peddlers who arrived from cholera-infested regions in Russia. Newspapers represent a superior perspective, one in which the authorities applied security measures to protect "ignorant" consumers, especially women, from allegedly dishonest peddlers.

In contrast, responses to ethnographic questionnaires suggest a more hospitable attitude toward peddlers. In these reminiscences, the arrival of a peddler is viewed neutrally or positively as a welcomed break from a monotonous everyday life, and as a "fresh breeze" from the outside world that evoked positive emotions. In a manner that is characteristic of hospitality, the relations between peddlers and host communities were based on reciprocity. The peddlers depended on their local hosts for lodging and food, and it was, therefore, essential for them to establish friendly relations and mutual trust with the people who resided along their routes. Some relations are described as friendships of long standing, and some even ended in marriage and integration into the host community. While showing hospitality was considered a social obligation, receiving peddlers was also beneficial for the hosts insofar as they gained access to new, exciting commodities, entertainment, and news and personal messages from the outside world.

However, local relations were always ambivalent. Peddlers were in constant danger of being robbed, mishandled, or even murdered, and the police occasionally arrested them on suspicion of illegal trade. Regarding hospitality and rejection, we can discern a graded scale where peddlers that differed most from the host communities in cultural and ethnic terms were met with a stronger degree of rejection than those who were culturally closer. The scale stretches from *knallar*, who were Swedes and

whose trade was legal, to the other three groups of peddlers who all originated from the multiethnic Russian Empire and who were met with negative preconceived notions due to their geographic origin, appearance, ethnicity, and confession. As the “Rucksack Russians” were perceived as culturally and linguistically related to the Finns, they were in many ways received in a similarly friendly way as *knallar*. The hosts’ relations with the Eastern European Jews and Muslim Tatars, however, are described with a pejorative and stereotypical rhetoric in both the newspapers and the ethnographic questionnaires.

The ambivalence that the sources reveal underlines the situational and relational character of hospitality and rejection, which is explained by intersecting and conflicting interests among individuals and groups in the host society. It is important to note that neither the newspapers nor the ethnographic questionnaires represent the peddlers’ own experiences of hospitality and rejection. Still, by combining the two different types of sources, we can create a more nuanced view of the reality that peddlers faced in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Northern Baltic than an analysis of a single source type would make possible.

NOTES

1. Simmel (1971 [1908]: 144).
2. Fontaine (1996: 5).
3. Selwyn (2001: 19, 33).
4. Lashley (2017: 3).
5. Conze (2012: 458–459).
6. See, e.g., Mikkola and Stark (2009: 4–6), Wassholm and Östman (2021: 17–19).
7. Wassholm (2020: 10–1), Wassholm and Sundelin (2020: 119–120).
8. Mikkola and Stark (2009: 5), Stark (2011: 40–42).
9. The questionnaires are hereinafter referred to as Nm 48, ULMA M148, and KIVÅ 9/9b.
10. Lilja (2016: 21–25).
11. Lilja (2016: 25–26), Hagström and Marander-Eklund (2005: 16–20), Korkiakangas et al. (2016: 20–21).
12. Jones (2002: 33), Mikkola and Stark (2009: 4–6), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018a: 203), Söderberg and Magnusson (1997: 7).
13. The exception is a short overview of peddling in the Nordics by the ethnologist Göran Rosander (1980).
14. On *knallar*, see Sterner (1970), Boger and Larsson (1985), Lundqvist (2008). On “Rucksack Russians,” see Nevalainen (2016), Naakka-Korhonen (1988), Storå (1989, 1991), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018b).

15. On Eastern European Jews, see Stare (1996a, b), Carlsson (2004: 126–144), Hammarström (2007, 2016), Wassholm (2017). On Tatars, see Wassholm (2018, 2020), Elmgrén (2020).
16. Lundqvist (2008: 19–20), Rosander (1980: 21–22).
17. Brinkmann (2013: 6).
18. Hjerpe (1989: 81–82).
19. Wassholm (2020: 13–14).
20. Lundqvist (2008: 138).
21. In this chapter, we use the term *knalle* to refer to Swedish peddlers in general.
22. Lundqvist (2008: 43).
23. Nevalainen (2016: 84).
24. Brinkmann (2013: 3–5), Lüthi (2013: 29). Finnish law prohibited Jews from settling in Finland. In 1858, a Russian decree stated that soldiers of the Russian army who finished their service could stay permanently in the town where they had been stationed. Civil Jewish communities were established in Helsinki, Turku, and Vyborg, but as their livelihood was restricted to petty trade in their towns of residence, Finnish Jews rarely peddled in rural regions. See Wassholm (2017: 593–596), Ekholm (2019: 77–79). Jews did, however, visit fairs around Finland. See Wassholm (2021).
25. Bredefeldt (1997: 34–35), Hammarström (2007: 96).
26. Cwiklinski (2016: 3).
27. Leitzinger (1999: 25), Baibulat (2004: 14), Wassholm (2020: 14). A few Tatar traders also moved to Sweden, but they were too few to form a community: see Sorgenfrei (2020: 82–84).
28. Gjernes (2012: 148).
29. Carlsson (2013: 57–58), Nevalainen (2016: 84).
30. Wassholm (2020: 16).
31. Storå (1989: 34), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018b: 145–147).
32. For early mentions of Tatars in the Finnish press, see *Tammerfors Aftonblad* Sept. 8, 1882: 2; *Kaiku* July 7 28, 1883: 2; *Satakunta* Sept. 12, 1883: 3; *Åbo Tidning* Sept. 23, 1885: 3. See also Elmgrén (2020: 27–29).
33. Carlsson (2004: 141).
34. Wassholm (2020: 14), Bredefeldt (1997: 34–35), Hammarström (2007: 96).
35. Runefelt (2011: 183–184).
36. Häkkinen (2005: 226–227), Stare (1996b: 32).
37. *Smålandsposten* Feb. 16, 1886: 2; *Dalpilen* Oct. 22, 1886: 1, *Höganäs Tidning* Jan. 17, 1899: 2; *Ny Tid* Dec. 14, 1900: 3; *Östgöten* Jan. 11, 1902: 4.

38. Wassholm (2020: 16). On contradictory regulation, see Lindberg (2018: 207–209), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018a: 199).
39. *Ny Tid* Dec. 14, 1900: 3; *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten* Dec. 17, 1900: 2. For similar examples, see, e.g., *Blekingeposten* Mar. 13, 1868: 3; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* June 8, 1886: 2.
40. *Kotka* July 15, 1885: 3; Apr. 24, 1886: 3; *Kotkan Sanomat* Nov. 29, 1892: 2. For similar complaints, see *Åbo Underrättelser* Dec. 10, 1898: 2; *Perä-Pohjolainen* Aug. 20, 1898: 4.
41. *Vestra Nyland* Sept. 23, 1892: 3.
42. *Smålandsposten* Feb. 16, 1886: 2; *Helsingborgs Dagblad* June 8, 1886: 2.
43. Carlsson (2004: 134–144, 2013: 57–58). For instance, the lost opportunity to continue peddling was mentioned as the reason behind the emigration to the United States of a group of Jews residing in Lund in 1888. *Korrespondenten* May 3, 1888: 2; *Trelleborgstidningen* Aug. 21, 1897: 2.
44. Hammarström (2007: 111).
45. The prohibition caused tensions between the Finnish and the Russian administration, culminating in 1900 when a Russian decree made peddling in Finland legal for all Russian subjects. Tommila (1999: 255–256).
46. Lindberg (2018: 215–218).
47. Pesonen (1980: 382–383), Nygård (2004: 214–216), Wassholm (2018: 225–227).
48. *Åbo Underrättelser* Sep. 14, 1892: 2.
49. *Smålandspostens Veckoblad* Aug. 18, 1892: 1; *Södra Dalarnes Tidning* Aug. 19, 1892: 3.
50. *Åbo Underrättelser* Sept. 14, 1892: 2. For similar warnings, see *Vestra Nyland* Sept. 9, 1892: 2, Oct. 3, 1893: 2; *Ekenäs Tidning* Oct. 7, 1893: 2; *Hämäläinen* Sept. 23, 1893: 1; Sept. 27, 1893: 3; *Turun Lehti* Aug. 25, 1894: 2–3.
51. *Östra Finland* Sept. 7, 1892: 3; *Turun Lehti* Aug. 25, 1894: 2–3.
52. Masquelier (2005: 6–7), Häkkinen (2005: 226–227).
53. See, e.g., Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5568; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 695: 2, 709: 3, 715: 1–2, 719: 3, 764: 3.
54. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2075: 2, 2093: 5–6, 2302: 1, FM 960: 10; ULMA M148: 13556.
55. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2079: 1, 2093: 7, FM 977: 2; Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5647; ULMA M148: 13556, 13572.
56. Rosander (1980: 84), Häkkinen (2005: 250).
57. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2143: 3.
58. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2128, 2140: 3, 2143: 3.
59. Nm 48: E.U. 5568.

60. Beardsworth and Keil (2002: 101, 104).
61. Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13663, 13668; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 722:3, FM 980: 3, 985: 4.
62. Nm 48: E.U. 3991; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 722: 3, 734: 2, 737: 1, FM 844: 4.
63. Nm 48: E.U. 5695.
64. Nm 48: E.U. 5695.
65. Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5568, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13572, 13663, 13668; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 722: 3, 985: 4.
66. Positive descriptions include, for instance, “good-natured” and “joyful;” see, e.g., Nm 48: E.U. 459; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 729: 1, 734: 2, FM 988: 2.
67. Jacqueline Stare, however, has found examples of hospitable reception and friendships in interviews with and in letters written by Jewish peddlers. Stare (1996a: 22, 24–25, 29).
68. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 695: 2, 727: 2, 747: 4. See also Naakka-Korhonen (1988: 176–177).
69. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2165; Nm 48: E.U. 5650; ULMA M148: 32776.
70. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 699: 1,709:2, 2076, 2140, FM 916: 2.
71. *Tidning för Skaraborgs Län* Jan. 18, 1901: 3.
72. *Hämeen Sanomat* Dec. 7, 1886: 2; *Päivälehti* May 4, 1898: 4; *Wasa Tidning* May 7, 1898: 2; *Kotka* Apr. 14, 1898: 3.
73. *Fäderneslandet* Aug. 22, 1860: 2; *Figaro* June 2, 1888: 2.
74. *Jämtlandsposten* Aug. 1, 1902: 4.
75. See, e.g., KIVÅ 9/9b: M 691: 2, 698: 3; *Aura* Apr. 20, 1888: 10; *Wasa-Posten* May 5, 1899: 2; *Åland* May 12, 1899: 1. See also Nevalainen (2016: 119–120).
76. *Fäderneslandet* July 26, 1871: 2. For other examples of violence against Jews, see, e.g., *Nerikes Allehanda* Feb. 26, 1875: 2; *Trosa Tidning* Dec. 11, 1880: 2.
77. *Göteborgs Annonsblad* Apr. 4, 1871: 2.
78. See, e.g., Sterner (1970: 199), Blom (1996: 95–103), Lamm (1996: 104–109), Nevalainen (2016: 125–131), Diner (2015: 127–130).
79. *Hufvudstadsbladet* Apr. 22, 1871: 2; May 28, 1875: 2; *Blekinge Läns Tidning* Feb. 14, 1874: 2; *Wiipurin Uutiset* May 15, 1880: 3; *Borgåbladet* Aug. 23, 1882: 1; *Mikkelin Sanomat* May 16, 1888: 3; *Rauman Lehti* May 19, 1888: 2; *Östra Finland* Oct. 9, 1888: 2.
80. See, e.g., *Morgonbladet* Jan. 19, 1882: 2.
81. Nm 48: E.U. 5618, 5666; ULMA M148: 13745, 15607, 19104; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 781: 5, FM 910: 8.
82. Stearns (2001: 47–49), Trentmann (2016: 37–39).
83. Furnée and Lesger (2014: 1–3), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018b: 136–137), Alanen (1957: 206–207, 229, 275).
84. Simmel (1971 [1908]: 144–145).

85. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2053; 2054: 1, 2056, 2059: 3–4, 2076; 2107, 2140: 2.
86. Lundqvist (2008: 244–245).
87. *Norra Posten* Oct. 31, 1888: 3; *Nystads Tidning* Feb. 5, 1896: 1; *Fredrikshamns Tidning* Oct. 7, 1896: 2. See also Wassholm (2018: 220–221).
88. Nm 48: E.U. 459; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2077; 2165: 2.
89. Naakka-Korhonen (1988), Wassholm (2020).
90. Bowlby (1985: 1–2), Mikkola and Stark (2009: 4), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018b: 141–142).
91. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 2136: 2, 2070. On the performative element of trading, see Fontaine (1996: 81), Storå (1989: 3).
92. ULMA M148: 13556.
93. Lundqvist (2008: 185), Wassholm and Sundelin (2018b: 138).
94. On credit in the questionnaires, see Nm 48: E.U. 3991; KIVÅ 9/9b: M 775: 1, M 951: 1; 959: 2; ULMA M148: 19104. See also Lundqvist (2008: 185), Kaukiainen (2006: 138–142).
95. *Turun Lehti* Sept. 15, 1888: 2; *Fäderneslandet* Aug. 22, 1860: 2; *Söderhamns Tidning* Nov. 24, 1883: 3; *Veckotidningen Tiden* Dec. 6, 1884: 1; *Skåningen Eslöfs Tidning* Dec. 6, 1900: 2. Similar descriptions also appear in responses to the questionnaires, but they are relatively few. In one such example, a “Rucksack Russian” tore off the original mark on a cloth, falsely maintaining that it was manufactured by Finlayson in Tampere, a brand that signaled good quality to his Finnish customers. KIVÅ 9/9b: FM 814: 1.
96. *Wasa Tidning* Aug. 3, 1886: 3.
97. Wassholm (2020: 14–15).
98. *Folkets Röst* Aug. 22, 1860: 3; *Wasa Tidning* Aug. 3, 1886: 3.
99. Trentmann (2016: 27–39), Ahlberger (1996: 59), Runefelt (2011: 140–141).
100. See, e.g., *Carlsclrona Weckoblad* Apr. 10, 1867: 3.
101. Wassholm and Sundelin (2020: 5).
102. *Folkvännen* May 18, 1870: 1; *Tapio* Apr. 27, 1872: 1; *Helsingfors Dagblad* May 1, 1872: 2; *Lounas* Nov. 13, 1893: 3.
103. Nm 48: E.U. 5618. See also KIVÅ 9/9b: M 675: 3, 676: 1–2, 751.
104. KIVÅ 9/9b: M 675: 3, 676: 1–2, 751.

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Hufvudstadsbladet

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Hämäläinen

Höganäs Tidning

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Kotkan Sanomat
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Södra Dalarnes Tidning
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Tammerfors Aftonblad
Tapio
Tidning för Skaraborgs Län
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