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Pragmatic inattention and win-win narratives: How Finnish eldercare managers make sense of foreign-born care workers' structural disadvantage?

1. Introduction

In Northern Europe, care providers increasingly employ foreign-born workers, but mainly in lower-level jobs that are relatively underpaid, overburdened and unattractive to native-born workers, especially in care for older persons (e.g. Dahle and Seeberg 2013; Wrede and Näre 2013; Cangiano and Walsh 2014). Consequently, critical social science has expressed concerns over emerging 'ethnic hierarchies' in the labor market and the field of care work (Laurén and Wrede 2008). In these hierarchies, racialized minorities, foreign-born persons and other people in generally disadvantaged labor market positions (Hellgren 2015) are overrepresented, if not blatantly 'exploited' (Näre 2013), in societally undervalued and burdensome employment settings. Misra and colleagues (2006, p. 318), for example, write about the 'international division of care work that places the [heaviest] burden for care on the least powerful (immigrant women workers)'. The emerging 'migrant division of care labour' (Näre 2013) is fueled by the politics of economic austerity, due to which the attractiveness of eldercare jobs has decreased in Northern Europe. These developments add to the pre-existing recruitment problems deriving from the persisting low level of recognition of eldercare work in Northern Europe and globally. In circumstances where austerity has become institutionalized as the central mode of public governance, organizations have applied new recruitment and employment practices to manage alarming labor shortages (e.g. Cangiano and Walsh 2014; Wrede et al. 2020). This chapter focuses on how local eldercare managers discursively engage with the emerging workforce constellations.

Recent research has examined the complex ways in which employers in formal (e.g. Näre 2013; Cleland-Silva 2018) and informal (e.g. Gavanas 2013; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016) care participate in the prevailing, austerity-driven recruitment and employment practices. However, this research on employers and their representatives, such as managers, who are responsible for recruitment and contracting, remains relatively limited. According to Cangiano and Walsh (2014, p. 373), ‘theory on hiring migrant [care] workers, particularly in terms of a sociological understanding, is not well developed’. According to Gallo and Scrinzi (2016, p. 367), ‘employers’ role in driving the demand for foreign-born [care] workers is considered a key issue in social sciences, [but] it remains largely under-researched and under-theorised’. This chapter targets this gap by shedding light on the discursive means through which local eldercare managers legitimate the prevailing recruitment and employment practices as solutions to the alarming labor shortages in Helsinki, Finland.

The chapter makes two contributions to research on the prevailing recruitment and employment practices in care work. First, most research on such practices has focused on care employers who are actively involved in hiring workers across national borders and from the ‘international’ labor market (Adhikari and Melia 2013; Hellgren 2015; Cleland-Silva 2018). Such employers are directly involved in the global care industry, contributing to global care chains, possible care drains in underprivileged countries, and the potential exploitation of global inequalities (Yeates 2009; Wrede 2010; Lutz 2018). The research focus on international recruitment is understandable, yet it may maintain the unintended impression that only international recruitment exploits structural inequalities and marginalized actors’ disadvantaged labor market positions. ‘Domestic’ recruitment, however, can also exploit racialized and migration-based labor market structures and inequalities, albeit in the national setting. In this

chapter, we focus on eldercare managers who recruit foreign-born workers mainly from the domestic labor market. However, we also question the categorical distinction between ‘international’ and ‘domestic’ recruitment and argue that actual recruitment practices can occasionally be more complex and ambiguous than this dichotomy implies.

Second, research on recruitment for eldercare and beyond (e.g. Waldinger and Lichter 2003; McGovern 2007; Anderson and Ruhs 2010) often ‘focuses more on why migrant workers are recruited than on how’ (Cangiano and Walsh 2014, p. 373). In this chapter, we shift the research focus to the study of how – with a specific focus on moral justifications in and around the prevailing recruitment practices (also Weicht 2011; Nordberg 2016; Torres 2017). In short, we ask: How can eldercare managers discursively counter the potential criticism according to which the prevailing recruitment practices exploit actors in structurally disadvantaged labor market positions and, among them, foreign-born workers? We pay particular attention to justification practices that mitigate the importance of structural improvements in the position of foreign-born workers and, ultimately, in austerity-driven eldercare work in general. Before we further introduce our analytical approach and analysis, we briefly discuss the context of Helsinki.

2. Migrant divisions of (care) labor in Helsinki

In global comparison, Finland relies heavily on formal, professional and publicly funded eldercare provision, despite international policy trends of privatization and marketization also have a growing impact in Finland. In Finland, the 1990s constituted a turn towards austerity policies as governments sought to control public expenditure for care services. Policies targeted eldercare in particular, with reforms outlined towards increasing emphasis on home care, together with aims to increase cost-efficiency in care work (Henriksson and Wrede 2012; Karsio

and Anttonen 2013). Further in line with international trends, the Finnish provision of eldercare increasingly relies on foreign-born workers. This reliance is particularly prevalent in the capital city Helsinki (Statistics Finland 2019), and especially at the lowest occupational levels. In 2016, the proportion of foreign-born workers in Helsinki's total workforce was 11%, whereas the proportion of foreign-born workers as care assistants was 24%, practical nurses 15%, registered nurses 10%, and head and ward nurses 1%. Foreign-born workers were also overrepresented in social care (17%) compared to health care (11%). In Finland, care work in social services is commonly regarded as less prestigious and more burdensome than care work in health services (Henriksson and Wrede 2012).

Among foreign-born care workers in Finland, the most common countries of birth are Estonia, the Philippines, Russia and Somalia (Koivuniemi 2012; Aalto et al. 2013; Ailasmaa 2015). In international comparison, the volume of recruitment from the Philippines has remained relatively limited in Finland (Näre and Nordberg 2016). By 2018, the two recruitment agencies that dominate this business had recruited circa 300 educated Filipino nurses to Finland, catering for their enlistment and placing, but not for the certification of their nursing degrees. Consequently, Filipino nurses primarily work in positions below their formal qualifications, mostly as carers in private care homes (Vartiainen 2019). The recruitment for City of Helsinki both targets foreign-born people living in Finland and pursues recruitment abroad. Within the city organization, international recruitment is delegated to the human resources department, which functions independently from care organizations. A particular focus lies on workforce from nearby regions, as the City continuously advertises job opportunities in the care sector in Estonia. The backgrounds of foreign-born care workers, and their recruitment routes in particular, are not well-documented in Finland. Most foreign-born care workers appear to have

migrated to Finland primarily for reasons other than to specifically work in care (e.g. as refugees, along other humanitarian pathways or for family reasons), but the available statistics do not offer detailed information on this matter. The lack of official documentation is not surprising, since the Finnish political authorities have also remained somewhat disengaged with questions concerning the ethics of recruitment and, in particular, of international recruitment, leaving considerations over ethics, including the potential care drains in the countries of origin, to individual employers (Vaittinen 2017).

How should one make sense of the recruitment and employment tendencies in Helsinki? Media presentations in Finland (Nordberg 2016), as in many other countries (e.g. Torres 2017), often present the prevailing recruitment and employment tendencies as serving multiple interests in tandem. In these narratives, the increasing employment of foreign-born workers in eldercare is a solution to the aging Finnish society's need for eldercare workforce, but it also caters for the needs of foreign-born workers and international job seekers to gain access to employment and income. According to critics, however, the lack of workforce in the Finnish eldercare sector is not only caused by the aging population but also by the low wages and unappealing working conditions in eldercare, caused by the prevailing austerity policies (Wrede 2010; Wrede and Näre 2013; Näre and Nordberg 2016). Currently, the number of Finnish-born eldercare workers planning to quit their jobs is soaring, mainly due to the under-resourcing and psychophysical overload in eldercare work (Olakivi et al. 2021). In Finland, the percentage of eldercare workers who were seriously considering leaving their jobs grew from 26% in 2005 to 41% in 2015 (Kröger et al. 2018). Critics thus argue that the prevailing recruitment and employment tendencies might serve Finnish employers and economically oriented policymakers better than they serve foreign-born workers (Näre 2013; Wrede 2010). Instead of fostering the quality of

care work, employers and policymakers hold on to austerity practices and focus on workforce who, due to unequal labor market practices, including racial discrimination in various employment settings (Wrede et al. 2010; Nieminen 2011; Larja et al. 2012), have limited options in other fields of employment.

3. Care managers' discursive-affective practice

How can eldercare managers negotiate their moral position in relation to the above developments, pressures, interests and critiques? To a degree, eldercare managers are accountable for their actions in and around recruitment (Shutes and Walsh 2012). To some stakeholders, eldercare managers may have to justify how the prevailing recruitment and employment tendencies serve Finnish-born care recipients (despite, for example, public concerns over foreign-born workers' language skills, see e.g. Dahle and Seeberg 2013). To others, critical questions relate to the potential exploitation of foreign-born workers and their disadvantaged labor market positions. In all cases, eldercare managers' justifications may require a degree of pragmatic inattention to critical counter-narratives. The empirical analysis that follows pays particular attention to such practices of inattention, and the consequences of these practices for eldercare organizations. Narratives can for example empower and disempower organizational reforms and social transformation programs. As Silverman (2017, p. 156) points out: 'Wars are fought and elections are won and lost in part on the basis of compelling narratives. The role of historians and social scientists is to unpick how stories are constructed whether in political speeches or qualitative interviews.'

Our empirical analysis builds on qualitative interviews of 14 eldercare managers (e.g. head nurses, ward managers, home care supervisors) working in one public sector nursing home

and in six different districts of public home care in Helsinki. The interviews were conducted by three researchers in 2011–2013 in a project entitled, ‘Shaping of Occupational Subjectivities of Migrant Care Workers: A Multi-sited Analysis of Glocalising Elderly Care,’ funded by the Academy of Finland (#251239). The interviewed managers were all women and had different responsibilities in and around recruitment. In the nursing home, the head nurses were formally responsible for enlisting permanent staff, including writing job advertisements and interviewing applicants. In home care, this formal responsibility belonged to a specific recruitment department. Ward managers and home care supervisors were responsible for recruiting temporary workers and fixed-term substitutes. In practice, however, they also participated in the recruitment of permanent staff, including interviewing applicants, alongside head nurses and the recruitment department. In general, all the participants highlighted human resource management as an important aspect of their work (Olakivi and Niska 2017). In the nursing home, about one third of the care workers were foreign-born. The home care units were selected for the study on the condition that they employed more foreign-born workers than home care units on average in Helsinki.

The interviews contained several themes, ranging from ethnic diversity and the recruitment of foreign-born workers to the future of eldercare in Finland (for a detailed description of the data, see Olakivi 2018). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The extracts provided below have been translated by the authors with some details omitted to protect the participants’ anonymity (in line with what we promised to the participants). The analysis is based on the original recordings.

We analyze the interviews as fragments of discursive-affective practice (Wetherell 2013). Through the interviews, we thus examine the discursive practices through which eldercare

managers can affectively ‘experience themselves as good, valuable, worthwhile people’ (Lamont and Swidler 2014, p. 159) despite the complex pressures they face in their work. In the interviews, we allowed the participants to choose their own words, tell the narratives they found affectively appealing and – if they felt a need – justify their actions and inactions in and around recruitment.

Interview narratives are not individual inventions but they draw on socially circulating discursive resources such as culturally recognizable identities and subject positions, impressions of personal agency, vocabularies of motive, and knowledge about socio-political structures (see Clarke et al. 2009; also Lamont and Swidler 2014). Although our analysis is based on research interviews, eldercare managers can – or have to – draw upon similar resources in other contexts, including interactions with care workers and care recipients. The power of discursive resources derives from their presence in public discussions. Therefore, critical attention must target the institutions that mobilize these discourses, including the media (e.g. Weicht 2011; Nordberg 2016; Torres 2017). Eldercare managers are merely the end users of publicly circulating discursive resources.

Our analysis was led by the following question: How can eldercare managers discursively counter the potential criticism according to which the prevailing recruitment and employment practices exploit the structurally disadvantaged labor market position of foreign-born workers? To answer this question, we analyzed all the interview extracts in which the managers discussed the recruitment of foreign-born workers. Below, we examine three qualitatively different discursive-affective practices: the mitigation of personal agency, the construction of win-win situations, and the distinction between domestic and international recruitment. The analysis

sheds light on the organizational background of these discursive practices, as well as their potential, unintended consequences for eldercare organizations.

4. Findings

No agency, no blame, no prestige?

Social science literature occasionally criticizes eldercare managers for strategically and intentionally recruiting workers in structurally disadvantaged labor market positions and, among them, foreign-born workers (Näre 2013; Cangiano and Walsh 2014). Discursively, however, eldercare managers have several ways to counter this criticism (also Olakivi 2020). In our interviews, eldercare managers were – often quite easily – able to point out structural limitations to their recruitment activities, and thus construct themselves as non-agents (see Clarke et al. 2009) in recruitment, as in the following extract.

Extract 1ⁱ

INTERVIEWER: Have you made conscious efforts to recruit people with foreign backgrounds here?

PARTICIPANT12 [home care supervisor]: Not consciously, but like... A normal search [for applicants], and then we of course interview a couple of competent, suitable [applicants]. Often the case in home care is that there is only one or two applicants ((laughs)).

In the above, the participant highlights the structural limits to her recruitment activities, namely, the limited number of job applicants. The participant does not explicate the reasons for this limit but assumes it to be self-explanatory. It is plausible to interpret that she relies on the common knowledge according to which the deteriorating working conditions in home care have

decreased the sector's attractiveness among care workers in Finland (Henriksson and Wrede 2012; Kröger et al. 2018).

In the above line of discursive-affective practice, eldercare managers are not personally responsible if foreign-born workers, or other persons in disadvantaged labor market positions, end up being overrepresented in care jobs that otherwise attract few applicants. This impression of non-agency, however, has a negative side effect. It constructs an image of recruitment as relatively routine and mechanical work that does not require high levels of specialization, skills or expertise from eldercare managers; anyone can do recruitment. To eldercare managers, this image may not be affectively appealing. In order to construct themselves as important and prestigious actors, eldercare managers may have to present recruitment as work that involves selection and decisions, as in the following extract..

Extract 2

PARTICIPANT9 [home care supervisor]: I always trust first impressions, I don't know if that's a good or bad thing. That's why I always want to see the person myself. Even if someone else, after interviewing the person, says how good they are and so on, I always feel that 'fine, but it was not my decision'. I want to influence it myself.

When eldercare managers construct a degree of personal agency in recruitment, they must ensure that this agency serves legitimate interests: those of care recipients and, ideally, also care workers. The following section examines the discursive-affective practices through which eldercare managers can, at least momentarily, a construct legitimate and affectively appealing versions of their personal agency.

Good workers, nice jobs

Eldercare managers have a variety of discursive resources with which they can legitimate their personal engagement with the prevailing recruitment practices. As many studies have noted (e.g. Näre 2013; Shutes and Walsh 2012; Walsh and Shutes 2013), eldercare managers can draw on ethnic and racialized stereotypes and construct foreign-born workers as ethnic others who are both skillful care workers and inherently interested in eldercare work. In the following extract, a ward manager highlights her personal agency in this way.

Extract 3

INTERVIEWER: Have you made conscious efforts to recruit people with foreign backgrounds?

PARTICIPANT5 [ward manager]: Well, we have indeed had these migrants who've been coming here... I've taken them as apprenticeship students. We've had NN1 and NN2 [anonymized] as apprenticeship students. [...] But I mean yes, yes I have, quite consciously.

I: Why?

P5: Because in my opinion, they have the kind of qualities ((laughs)) that they respect older people, and it's innate in them. I mean, the innate conduct they have. I have had a lot of [foreign-born workers], temps and all, and they've made very good impressions.

I: Yeah, and... So, in your view it relates to... Are there differences in respect to different origins, or do you see that it's in general... Although they come from different cultures?

P5: Yes I believe so. Although they come from different cultures, they still have stronger ties to older people. The respect. It's probably in the mother's milk, I think. It's totally different to us Finns, for example.

In the interviews, the managers constructed African and Asian workers in particular as actors who have ‘totally different’, culturally inherited traits and abilities – such as respect for older people. In the above, foreign-born employees are, moreover, constructed as inherently interested in eldercare work. Therefore, their overrepresentation in the eldercare sector can hardly be seen a tendency that exploits unequal labor market structures. The above line of discursive-affective practice can thus, intendedly or not, ‘morally legitimize and/or neglect new hierarchies and inequalities in working life’ (Nordberg 2016, p. 104).

Ethnic and racial stereotypes are not the only discursive resources through which eldercare managers can justify their personal agency in the prevailing recruitment practices and, ultimately, the emerging migrant divisions of care labor. In the following extract, a ward manager draws on another discursive resource to construct the prevailing recruitment and employment tendencies as win-win tendencies. The extract continues a broader discussion (not shown here) over inadequate economic resourcing in eldercare in Finland, and over the difficulties the participant has faced in finding skilled and motivated workers to enlist. In the extract, the participant constructs foreign-born workers as members of an international community of care workers who are ethically committed to serving older people, and who can serve Finnish care recipients irrespective of their language skills. The cited ward manager, for example, employs temporary workers with whom, according to her (not shown here), she does not share any common language.

Extract 4

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the importance of language has been overemphasized perhaps [in discussions about eldercare work]?

PARTICIPANT7 [ward manager]: Somehow I feel that it is sometimes. Because, at least here, we never receive feedback on this from the relatives [of the residents]. It's never been brought up as a problem in the discussions. The biggest problem that comes up is the lack of time [for care]. [...] Not the language. Of course, I do understand that it's [important]. [...] But if things continue the way they are, then I think we should loosen up the [language] requirements and not be so awfully strict in respect to certain applicants. We should somehow collect all resources together and see that whatever country we're from, it's certain that, as care workers, we all serve the same purpose and work here for the older people.

In the above, the ward manager draws on a variety of discursive resources to justify the recruitment of foreign-born workers for eldercare even if their language skills do not match the formal requirements. First, the need to recruit foreign-born workers results from a structural necessity. Second, the prevailing (or suggested) recruitment practices serve all actors in tandem: 'We all serve the same purpose.' Compared to the first interpretation that highlights structural limits, the latter interpretation seems more inspiring, optimistic and affectively engaging. In the above, the manager also positions herself as a care worker (see 'as care workers, we all...'), further mitigating potential hierarchies and conflicts of interest.

Whereas Extract 3 constructed foreign-born workers as members of their national and ethnic groups (and consequently skilled and motivated workers), Extract 4 constructs foreign-born workers as members of an international community of care workers (and consequently skilled and motivated workers). Eldercare managers thus have different ways of presenting the increasing employment of foreign-born workers in eldercare as a legitimate, if not desirable tendency. One can evaluate these discursive-affective practices in different ways. On the one hand, eldercare managers can, through these practices, justify the prevailing recruitment

practices to audiences who, due to racist or xenophobic sentiments, would prioritize the recruitment of Finnish-born (or white) workers. On the other hand, these discursive-affective practices limit the subject positions available for foreign-born workers in eldercare organizations. To support these narratives, foreign-born workers must appear as inherently motivated to work in eldercare, regardless of the sectors' increasingly austere working conditions. In this respect, the above lines of discursive-affective practice, in Extract 3 and 4, are relatively similar: they both turn attention away from structural disadvantages.

Previous research highlights how employers' or managers' stereotypical and essentialist constructions of foreign-born workers as 'ethnic others' can contribute to migrant divisions of care labor (Carter 2000; Näre 2013; Cangiano and Walsh 2014). These constructions reduce the opportunities for foreign-born workers to have their formal merits (e.g. education) recognized and, consequently, to achieve higher professional ranks. Ethnic othering constructs foreign-born workers as fit to work close to the recipients of care, but not in managerial positions (e.g. Dahle and Seeberg 2013; also Nordberg 2016). These concerns must be taken seriously. At the same time, these concerns may underestimate the *diversity* of discursive resources with which eldercare managers – and other stakeholders – can justify, and turn attention away from, the emerging migrant divisions of labor and the potential exploitation of actors in structurally disadvantaged labor market positions.

According to Burr (2003, p. 137), 'an important part of warranting one's actions, of making them appear reasonable and justifiable, is having the ability to present oneself in different ways according to the demands of the moment.' Evidently, eldercare managers occupy a morally precarious position (Shutes and Walsh 2012; Olakivi 2020): they have to justify their activities, including the activities they cannot change, in front of different audiences (e.g. care

recipients, care workers, other eldercare managers, municipal authorities). Ethnic stereotypes may work as viable resources in some contexts of justification, whereas adopting a ‘colorblind’ discourse, and constructing foreign-born workers as members of an international community of care workers, may satisfy other audiences. Both lines of discourse can mitigate the importance of systemic and structural improvements in foreign-born workers’ labor market position – and in the conditions of eldercare in general. Improvements are not needed, since all actors already receive what they authentically need: the care recipients receive good care and the care workers receive jobs that align with their interests. This alignment of interests is achieved, in part, by assuming that employment in eldercare serves foreign-born workers without the need to improve care workers’ wages or working conditions. This assumption is explicitly invoked in the following extract.

Extract 5

INTERVIEWER: Then what about immigrants?

PARTICIPANT2 [head nurse]: Immigrants. The way I see it, there’s an awful lack of workforce in this field of work, and it’s only getting worse. Soon it’ll be a real [issue]. Where are we getting employees from? And in my view, people with migrant backgrounds are one of those resources, and many [of them] are interested. This is a really nice workplace. A nice workplace. And it’s not the nationality. It’s a nice workplace [also] for a Finn. There are many opportunities to develop and... No opportunities to get a really good salary, but opportunities to proceed [career-wise] and develop the work and so on.

In the above, the head nurse first employs the resource of non-agency in the recruitment of foreign-born workers: foreign-born workers are an indispensable resource in the context of an

alarming lack of workforce. The possibility of tackling the lack of workforce by, for example, improving care workers' wages or working conditions, is not discussed in the extract. After highlighting the lack of alternatives, however, the participant constructs a different version of the role of foreign-born workers in eldercare. In this version, employment in eldercare serves the interests of the recruited workers: many of the workers are interested and can be offered good jobs, or at least jobs with career prospects. To make this narrative sound convincing, the manager ignores the overrepresentation of foreign-born workers in lower-level care occupations and, thus, their evident career stagnation. Evidently, the manager lacks the discursive resources with which she could construct contemporary, austerity-driven eldercare work as an ideal job (for anybody), but for a foreign-born job-seeker, perhaps one with fewer better alternatives or little interest in a good salary (in the Finnish standards), it is a decent job (also Torres 2017). The head nurse carefully manages the impression of a win-win situation, though not without a discursive struggle. As this struggle demonstrates, it is not always easy for eldercare managers to suppress potential counter-narratives.

Against international recruitment – or out of sight, out of mind?

In addition to the construction of non-agency and win-win situations, the interviewed managers had another discursive resource for justifying their participation in the prevailing employment tendencies, regardless of how these tendencies might exploit structural inequalities in the labor market. This resource constructed a sharp distinction between the 'domestic' and 'international' recruitment of foreign-born workers. Evidently, constructing international recruitment (from poorer countries) as a tendency that violates the interests of Finnish-born workers, care recipients, and occasionally also the recruited workers, is a pragmatic resource for local eldercare managers (also Olakivi 2020). With the help of this resource, eldercare managers

can construct their own, domestic recruitment practice as an unproblematic and respectable, if not desirable, alternative. In the following extract, Participant 7, who previously called for collecting ‘all resources together’ (Extract 4), argues against international recruitment.

Extract 6

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the international recruitment of nurses or care workers, what if the municipality would start doing it? Some private care companies do it already, but what would you think if the City of Helsinki would start doing it?

PARTICIPANT7 [ward manager]: I’m against it, as a matter of fact. They do recruit a lot of nurses from the Philippines, and it’s great that they can be offered jobs. But in my opinion, we should start to think... There are so many nurses without a job in Finland. We have so much educated care personnel, hiring them should be the priority, in my opinion. It cannot be the solution that the kind of cheaper workforce is recruited from the Philippines because they’re willing to work for these low wages.

In the above, the ward manager conceives problems in the employment practices that, instead of improving wages in care work, seek to recruit workers in disadvantaged labor market positions. The ward manager, however, relates these problems to ‘international’ recruitment, not ‘domestic’ recruitment. The manager thus externalizes the problems of austerity-driven recruitment to other recruitment agents. In reality, the employer of the interviewed ward manager, the City of Helsinki, already recruits care workers from, for example, Estonia to work in eldercare in Helsinki. In the interviews, the managers – and the interviewers – occasionally demonstrated a degree of inattention, amnesia or ignorance in respect to these practices of recruitment.

Extract 7

INTERVIEWER: What about direct recruitment from abroad, what do you think of that, when the private sector and also the Helsinki University Hospital has recruited directly? Would it be possible to do that here at some point?

PARTICIPANTI [nursing home director]: If you have to go there, then. But I'd rather start with having a vacancy, and then the person who wants it applies for it. There is always also the thing that... Sometimes with these foreigners, when they come from different cultures, their jobs may have been completely different there. When we really have informal work outfits and so on here, then maybe for some it has been a surprise, if they have been looking for a position as a clinical nurse, then this does not quite match [with their expectations]. But maybe that's in the future then. But I wouldn't go to recruit anyone at least now ((laughs)). But then again, for our work, the human resources department [of the City of Helsinki] is constantly going to, for example, Estonia to recruit. But it is recruiting for everywhere [i.e. all jobs in the municipality], not just for us. But I don't know if anyone has actually arrived here that way. But they go there to talk [about job opportunities] and share contacts.

In the above, the nursing home director argues against international recruitment that does not always serve the recruited workers. Instead of mentioning how the austere working conditions or limited career prospects in Finnish eldercare organizations might come as a surprise to the recruited workers, the director invokes another problem that, one might argue, turns attention away from the structurally disadvantaged position of the recruited workers: the recruited workers might expect the work to be more 'clinical'. Only after arguing against international recruitment does the director seem to remember that the City of Helsinki in fact

already does recruit internationally. At this point, the director demonstrates a degree of ignorance regarding her employees' routes to work: 'I don't know if anyone has actually arrived here that way'.

To managers who want to maintain a moral distance from 'international' recruitment, a degree of *ignorance* regarding the routes through which their employees have arrived can be a pragmatic strategy (see McGoey 2012). In this way, eldercare managers can maintain a sharp distinction between 'domestic' and 'international' recruitment and disengage themselves from the problems they associate with the latter. In Helsinki, this moral disengagement is institutionally managed by the City, which has delegated international recruitment to the human resources department, which continuously advertises job opportunities in the care sector in Estonia. The human resources department works separately from the care organizations. Consequently, eldercare managers can assume they are mainly participating in the affectively appealing practices of domestic recruitment, without always knowing their applicants' actual connections to Helsinki and Finland.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This chapter has shown how eldercare managers at the floor-level of care organizations can discursively and affectively participate in the prevailing recruitment and employment practices that, according to critics, have a tendency to exploit racialized and migration-based labor market inequalities and, ultimately, leave the root causes of labor shortages in eldercare intact. Our analysis demonstrates how the recruitment of foreign-born workers to eldercare employment, also from 'domestic' labor markets, is a morally complex practice to eldercare managers – that is, a practice that requires rationalizations and justifications in relation to various

(real or imaginable) counter-arguments (in research interviews, but assumedly also in other contexts) (also Olakivi 2020). Our analysis has further illuminated the different ways in which eldercare managers can discursively disengage themselves from the structural disadvantage of foreign-born workers and, ultimately, from the prevailing austerity policies.

Research has often focused on practices of ethnic stereotyping and othering that can justify the emerging divisions of labor in which foreign-born workers are overrepresented in lower occupational echelons and practically excluded from leadership roles. In this chapter, however, we have demonstrated how ethnic othering is not the only practice through which eldercare managers – and other stakeholders – can justify the emerging divisions of labor and, ultimately, downplay criticism against the austerity policies that exploit such divisions. Eldercare managers can end up justifying the overrepresentation of foreign-born workers in lower-level eldercare jobs also by discursively constructing an international community of care workers that shares an ethical commitment to eldercare work but has little interest in high (or even decent) wages or improvements in working conditions.

Eldercare managers thus have different discursive resources with which they can – often unintendedly – make the emerging divisions of care labor seem tolerable, if not affectively appealing – at least to themselves. Foreign-born workers, of course, do not always agree with their managers' win-win narratives (Olakivi 2017). Foreign-born workers may, for instance, express discontent over their wages, working conditions, career prospects or, simply, structurally disadvantaged labor market positions. Such expressions of discontent conflict with their managers' idealized narratives. This conflict, we argue, partly explains why foreign-born workers' expressions of discontent are so easily suppressed in eldercare organizations' internal

communications (Olakivi 2017; 2018). Expressions of discontent do not sit well with the win-win narratives that many eldercare managers find personally appealing.

Eldercare managers can also highlight their non-agency vis-à-vis the prevailing, austerity-driven practices of recruitment and employment. Regarding macro-societal divisions of labor, constructions of non-agency are easily available to floor-level eldercare managers who are hardly responsible for the exclusion of foreign-born workers from higher-status jobs. Regarding recruitment, however, impressions of non-agency may lack affective appeal in a context that values eldercare managers' personal ability to make a difference in their environment (also Gallo and Scrinzi 2016). It seems that eldercare managers are under institutional pressure to present themselves as agents who can serve Finnish-born care recipients (Olakivi and Niska 2017), but also foreign-born staff-members. This institutional pressure, we argue, partly explains why these managers are so eager to construct foreign-born workers as inherently interested in eldercare work. These constructions enable eldercare managers' themselves to adopt affectively appealing positions as 'agents for' (Niska 2015) several actors in tandem. To maintain their affectively appealing positions, however, eldercare managers may have to suppress counter-narratives that call for improvements in the position of foreign-born workers.

Local eldercare managers' criticism of 'international' recruitment can further help them justify their own, 'domestic' activities in recruitment. A sharp distinction between 'domestic' and 'international' recruitment helps eldercare managers maintain affectively appealing impressions of themselves as actors who simply recruit employees from the unproblematic labor market in Finland, in contrast to 'other' actors who are engaged with more problematic, and potentially exploitative, practices of international recruitment. The upkeep of this moral boundary may require, however, a degree of inattention from eldercare managers to their

employees' routes to Finland. Sometimes these routes can be more complex than implied in the sharp distinction between 'domestically' and 'internationally' recruited workers. Using a distinct human resource department as a proxy agent who is in charge of international recruitment, while eldercare managers maintain their moral distance from these recruitment practices, can be a pragmatic strategy for local eldercare managers.

Finally, we wish to highlight that our aim in this chapter has not been to problematize the inclusion of foreign-born workers in the care workforce, not even in the most underpaid, overburdened and austerity-driven eldercare jobs. The quality of these jobs does not get any better if eldercare managers stop recruiting foreign-born workers. Instead, our chapter calls for critical attention towards societally circulating, optimistic and affectively appealing win-win narratives that turn collective attention away from the austerity-driven devaluation of eldercare jobs *and* from the structural disadvantage of foreign-born workers. These win-win narratives, often mobilized in the media (e.g. Weicht 2011; Nordberg 2016; Torres 2017), can disempower alternative narratives – circulating in the margins of eldercare organizations and the media – that call for structural improvements in the quality of eldercare jobs and the position of foreign-born workers in and beyond the care industry.

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ⁱ In the extracts, brackets signal removed passages or added clarifications and underlining indicates that a word was emphasized by the speaker.