



MIGRATION INSTITUTE  
OF FINLAND

# Raising children of Somali descent in Toronto and in Helsinki

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# Islam and security revisited: Transnational Somali families in Finland, Canada and Somalia (Academy of Finland 2012-2017)



- experiences and organization of everyday security among Somali Muslim families
- 9 families in Toronto, 9 families in Helsinki:
- >> in total 18 mothers, 9 fathers
- >> 36 young people (20 women, 16 men; youngest 12, oldest 32)
- interviews with family members of 10 study families in Somaliland and Puntland
- focus group interviews with young women and men, mothers and fathers

# Everyday security & wellbeing

- Everyday security (e.g. Crawford and Hutchinson 2016) > understood as lived experiences related to (in)security as well as the mundane, often family-centred practices that people engage in to live with insecurity and foster security
- Three-dimensional model of wellbeing by Sarah C. Whyte (2008, 2010): material, relational and ethical dimensions
- Everyday security and wellbeing (good life) linked to each other (Tiilikainen 2019)
- Wellbeing and security are not static, but multidimensional processes
- Vulnerabilities, aspirations and agency of parents that are enabled or constrained by the material, relational or ethical dimensions of their lives

# Toronto Somali community's cry: 'Our kids are dying' (Toronto Star 21.9.2012)



# Material and physical dimensions

## Toronto:

- social housing projects in insecure neighbourhoods > increases the vulnerability of families (marginalization, crime, gun-violence, under-resourced schools, postal codes have impact on young people's opportunities and futures)
- many families lived in poverty

## Helsinki:

- mixed housing policies, housing segregation pretty small scale
- families seemed to manage better on social security compared to Toronto

# Relational dimension

- Family members and networks locally and transnationally
- Local networks e.g. in neighbourhoods (e.g. women's networks, peer groups)
- Religious communities
- Relationships and interactions with the institutions and structures of power (e.g. school, police and the justice system, organizations, mosques)
- In Toronto, wide mistrust on police and the legal system (criminalization of young Somali men); and educational opportunities (teachers don't assume they will be able to succeed)
- In Finland, trust on authorities still pretty high

# Ethical dimension

- Religious and their norms and values that that guide and empower Canadian and Finnish Somalis
- Racism, pathologization of black immigrants, public discourse on Muslims as extremists, securitization measures that impact the everyday life of Muslim families, emergence of radicalized groups that attract young people in particular
- Gendered experiences: In North America, young black men in particular have been criminalized, and are often targets of police violence. In Canada and Finland, many Somali children are raised by single mothers.

# Some publications

- Tiilikainen, Marja 2020. Finnish Somali Fathers, Respectability, and Transnational Family Life. In: Johanna Hiitola et al. (eds.), *Family Life in Transition: Borders, Transnational Mobility and Welfare Society in Nordic Countries*, 131-141. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Tiilikainen, Marja 2019. Raising children of Somali descent in Toronto. Challenges and struggles for everyday security and wellbeing. In: Marja Tiilikainen, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Sanna Mustasaari (eds.), *Wellbeing of Transnational Muslim Families: Marriage, Law and Gender*, 147-163. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Tiilikainen, Marja 2017. “Whenever the Mom Hands Over the Phone, Then We Talk”: Transnational Ties to the Country of Descent among Canadian Somali Youth. *Migration Letters* 14(1): 63-74.
- Tiilikainen, Marja 2016. Onko paikalla väliä? Somalialaisten perheiden turvallisuuden kokemuksia Torontossa ja Helsingissä [Does a place matter? Experiences on security among Somali families in Toronto and Helsinki]. In: Elli Heikkilä and Tuomas Martikainen (eds.) *Maassamuutto ja siirtolaisuus kehityksen moottoreina? : näkökulmia Suomen alueelliseen ja väestölliseen tulevaisuuteen: IX Muuttoliikesymposium 2015* [Report of the Migration Symposium 2015], 56-72. Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti.