

BATTLING FOR CITIZENSHIP

A case study of Somali settlement in Lieksa, Finland

Abstract

The article addresses the disjunction between the theory and practice of citizenship through a case study concerning the settlement of Somali refugees in Lieksa, a small town in eastern Finland. We use the concept 'acts of citizenship' to highlight how the Somalis in Lieksa have worked toward inclusion in the Finnish society. We also highlight how contested the citizenship position of even members of the Finnish society who, by law, are citizens and/or legal residents can be. The attempts to undo Somalis' acts of citizenship are presented as a continuum on which racist violence represents the most aggravated, and rare forms of resistance by locals, while more subtle forms of everyday racism, such as disparaging looks and Internet slander, represent the more common acts performed to prevent Somalis from constituting themselves and acting as citizens.

Keywords

Finland • Somalis • citizenship • rights • racism

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Introduction

Our research focusses on the experiences of Somali immigrants who reside in a small eastern Finnish town called Lieksa. In Finland, the municipalities are responsible for executing many rights, including economic and social rights, which is why it is essential to evaluate the realisation of such rights at the local level. When examining Somalis' citizenship positions in this context, we have come to understand the relevance of not only acting as a citizen, but also the social force directed towards the Somali residents to prevent them from constituting themselves as citizens. Our focus, therefore, includes attempts to undo their acts of citizenship and to deny them from the rights commonly associated with municipal residence.

Isin (2008) is among those scholars who claim that it is possible for people to constitute themselves as citizens regardless of their legal status. He (2008: 18) uses the concept 'acts of citizenship' to describe events during which 'regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due'. We follow in Isin's footsteps and share his interest in examining events during which one's citizenship status (or the lack of it) becomes politicised and is either asserted or called into question by the individual or the people around him or her.

The aim of this article is to look at the acts of (non-)citizenship during which the legitimacy of Finnish Somalis' claim for political

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and social citizenship is either affirmed or contested. We examine the experiences of Somalis who have settled in Lieksa and compare their situation with the legal framework provided by the Finnish Constitution (731/1999) and other relevant laws. We draw on our field work conducted in North Karelia in 2013–2015 that includes observation, interviews with people involved in the efforts to integrate Somalis, and media material from local, regional, and national newspapers as well as from the Internet. In what follows, we present a short description of the theoretical and methodological starting points for our work, after which we briefly contextualise the arrival of the Somalis in Lieksa and then discuss our findings in three parts.

Finnish Somalis and Acts of Citizenship

Finland, along with other Scandinavian countries, signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, and in doing so, took on a responsibility to receive and protect migrants who have been forced to flee their home country because of persecution, war, or violence. People who are given asylum in Finland can, therefore, expect the Finnish government to secure their basic rights, which, according to the Constitution of Finland (731/1999: Section 7), include the right to life, personal liberty, integrity, and security. Furthermore, the combination of the Nordic welfare state and a relatively inclusive

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residence-based social security system offers those granted permanent residence status in Finland a relatively stable social position. However, unemployment continues to be a major barrier to integration for immigrants (Koikkalainen *et al.* 2011).

The Somali Civil War, which began in the late 1980s, has forced more than one million Somalis and their descendants to seek refuge outside Somalia. Since the collapse of the central state more than 20 years ago, most of the country has been the site of intermittent conflict involving extreme violence, insecurity, and displacement (Hammond *et al.* 2011). Somalis began to arrive in Finland as asylum seekers in the early 1990s (Tiilikainen 2003: 49–57). They now form the third largest group of foreign origin ($n = 10,534$) in Finland and the largest national group that has arrived in the country as asylum seekers. Somalis are also the largest population group with an African background as well as the largest Muslim group in Finland. In 2014, 16,721 people spoke Somali as their first language in Finland, and 37% of them were born in the country (Statistics Finland 2015). It is estimated that around half of Somalis are Finnish citizens (Mubarak *et al.* 2015). In North Karelia, the easternmost region of the continental European Union, Somalis are the second largest group of foreign origin ($n = 478$) after Russians (Statistics Finland 2015).

The state-defined legal status categories establish configurations of rights for people who occupy these categories that, according to Goldrin and Landolt (2013: 3), include political rights, as well as civil, employment, and social rights. In addition, access to public services and state protection is based on the legal status, meaning that the status and rights have far-reaching effects on people's lives. However, we also know that citizenship status does not necessarily correspond to the citizenship practice, and a strand of research has emerged that highlights the fuzziness of the boundary between the citizenship and non-citizenship (Sassen 2002, 2006; McNevin 2011; Goldrin & Landolt 2013; Isin & Saward 2013).

Although the Nordic countries are often perceived as the most equal welfare states in the world, researchers have shown that immigrants in Scandinavia face a significant amount of discrimination and racism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009; Lehti *et al.* 2014). In particular, Somalis living in Denmark and Finland are susceptible to discrimination, threats, and violence in Finland even more so than in Denmark (Niemi & Kääriäinen 2012: 3). It has been argued that even if Finnish Somalis theoretically possess the same rights as native-born Finns, the execution of these rights is different. Somalis have claimed that acquiring the Finnish citizenship does not make a significant difference in how much they can participate in the Finnish society since belonging is based on ethnicity, not citizenship (Open Society Foundations 2013: 102).

Critical studies of citizenship confirm the assumption that what is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status, but that citizenship also involves practices of making citizens and non-citizens (Lister 2003; Al-Sharmani & Horst 2016). However, even as a status, citizenship is a complex concept, and non-citizenship may refer to a number of legal status categories, depending on the jurisdiction. The category of non-citizen may include the secure status of permanent residence as well as native-born residents without citizenship. More often, however, non-citizens are foreign-born individuals with temporary authorisation to work and/or reside in the country, or they are im/migrants who have entered the country through legal channels but were 'illegalised' later on, for example, students who remained in the country after their student residence permit expired (Goldrin & Landolt 2013: 5).

Many scholars now differentiate formal citizenship from substantive citizenship (Brubaker 1992). They also argue that the boundaries between citizenship and non-citizenship are not fixed and that these boundaries are permeable and potentially blurry. Boundaries may change over time, bringing additional people into the realm of citizenship; citizens may behave as non-citizens and non-citizens may, in some situations, resemble citizens (Bosniak 2000; Sassen 2006). Conversely, non-citizens with various forms of precarious status may participate in community mobilisation and organisations (Pulido 2007). As Bojadžijev and Karakayali (2010) argue, 'Many of the social conflicts initiated by migrants are, after all, not about becoming citizens, but about insisting that they are citizens already'.

Nyers (2010: 130) points out that in this line of thought politics comes across as a practice in which the use of voice makes it possible to perform certain acts, including acts of citizenship. Isin (2012: 13) also argues that a 'fundamental feature of an act of citizenship is that it exercises either a right that does not exist or a right that exists but which is enacted by a political subject who does not exist in the eyes of the law'. He (2008) claims that acts of citizenship can be authored or anonymous, intended or accidental, individual or collective. What counts is not the subject's status (citizen, refugee, non-status migrant), but the act itself. Thinking about citizenship in this way makes one attentive to the enactments of citizenship, that is, how it is performed and negotiated. Citizenship comes into view as an object of investigation that is distinct from (but related to) the status and habitus of citizenship (Isin 2008: 17–19).

We share Nyers's (2015) interest in analytically privileging the point of view of the migrants. However, for the purpose of this article, we chose an additional perspective as during the research process, we were constantly reminded that the process of constituting oneself as a subject is twofold. In our case, the attempts by Somalis to exercise their rights were met with discontent, if not with direct opposition by the native Finns.

To emphasise the dual nature of claiming citizenship, and to discuss the experiences of having one's legal rights denied or contested, we pair 'acts of citizenship' with acts that 'counteract' the acts of citizenship. By undoing or counteracting the acts of citizenship, we refer to practices, both physical and discursive, that deny a group of people that is either citizens or legal residents in Finland, namely, Finnish Somalis, their right to act and be treated as citizens. We find it important to highlight that it is not that one simply chooses to constitute or be constituted as a citizen, but that one finds oneself already positioned within discursive fields that are never fully of one's own choosing (Smith 1998, 56).

Researching Citizenship in Lieksa

From the 1990s onwards, newly arrived Somali refugees were initially settled in various municipalities across the country, but they usually moved from the rural areas to the more urban settings (Ahlgren–Leinvuo 2005). Approximately 70% of all Somalis currently reside in the southern part of the country in the capital region urban kernel surrounding Helsinki (City of Helsinki Urban Facts 2014; Statistics Finland 2014). In Finland, the immigrant communities have, however, been formed in rural municipalities that used to host refugee and asylum centres, and some are proving long-lasting. Lieksa is an example of a rural town that has traditionally not been a significant destination for immigrants, with the exception of the resettlement of Karelian evacuees after the Second World War.

Liekksa is remote, and for a long time, the proportion of people of foreign origin residing in the town remained under 1%. The majority came from Russia (Statistics Finland 2014).

The Somalis living in Liekksa today are either Finnish citizens' or have refugee status or a residence permit granted based on subsidiary or humanitarian protection. Some arrived through the family reunification process. They are residents of the Liekksa municipality, meaning that they are entitled to Finnish social security, health care, and education, and the adults have the right to vote in municipal elections. Thus, Liekksa Somalis constitute a group of people that, from a legal perspective, has a strong position in the Finnish society.

Liekksa presents a typical case of an industrial town whose economic structure has transformed and the population has reduced by half since the 1960s. On the other hand, it forms a specific case because within a short time period, the town experienced a significant influx of inhabitants of Somali background. In 2008, only a few Somalis resided in Liekksa, while in 2012, the number had increased to approximately 240. The interviewed local authorities (March 13, 2014) estimate that the total has now reached 400. The total population of Liekksa is around 12,100 (Statistics Finland 2015). The demographic changes occurred when Somalis, who had previously resided in a nearby refugee centre, began to move into the town. Although some locals welcomed this new vitality and the associated economic potential, the majority were suspicious of the newcomers. A small but vocal group also reacted aggressively and threatened the Somalis by picking street fights and vandalising their property. As of today, Liekksa regularly makes the headlines due to public displays of anger and resentment towards the Somali minority (Yle 2014a).

Although we acknowledge Liekksa is unusual in comparison to most Finnish rural towns that have significantly smaller proportions of foreign-born residents, we claim that the situation in Liekksa is comparable to the occurrences in several small towns, particularly in the United States, where settlements, such as Lewiston in Maine and Fort Morgan in Colorado, have recently become destinations for secondary migration and relocation of African refugee families (Huisman *et al.* 2011; Kusow & Bjork 2007; Voyer 2013). Within the European Union, similar cases can also be found in many countries, such as Denmark and the United Kingdom, although in many cases, refugees have been resettled in rural areas due to a conscious dispersal policy by the state, and not by choice, as in Finland (Bowes, Ferguson, & Sim 2009; Larsen 2011).

The media materials analysed for the study consist of news, articles, and features from national (*Helsingin Sanomat*), regional (*Karjalainen*), and local newspapers (*Liekksan Lehti*), as well as from the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle), published between 2009 and 2014. The material was selected by searching the archives or online databases of these media sources by using keywords, such as 'Liekksa', 'Somalis', and 'racism'. We also followed popular social media sites, such as Facebook and Suomi24, which have specific forums or groups for discussions about Liekksa.

We also utilised interviews that we conducted in 2014 with active members of the Somali community and individuals who are either professionally or voluntarily involved in integrating immigrants in North Karelia. Our informants included employees of civic associations, immigrant advisors to local authorities, a police officer, and an official in the state-run Employment and Economic Development Office. In Liekksa, we interviewed 10 Somalis and 11 officials and representatives of non-government organisations. Half of the Somali informants were female, while 9 out of 11 officials

were female. The informants were selected to cover all major organisations involved in immigrant integration in Liekksa and the interviewed Somalis who were active in civil society or who participated in integration efforts either by participating in civic activities or courses aimed at immigrants.

The topic of our study is considered sensitive in Liekksa, which is why many of the informants requested that we will not reveal details of their identities. Therefore, we do not provide the readers with many details of the informant group. Typically, the information provided by the informants was gleaned from hearsay: It may be difficult to identify the original source of the information, which is regarded as popular knowledge in Liekksa.

Obtaining Rights and Then Losing Them

We analysed the media and interview material by identifying episodes, that is, individual occurrences and acts, during which the citizen rights of Somalis were asserted and challenged, after which the acts were categorised according to the type of right they related to. We then asked whether these incidents were physical or discursive and compared the incidents that occurred with the Finnish legal framework.

We found the media and interview material was rich in descriptions of incidents in which Somalis' rights as citizens and legal residents were questioned or openly resisted. It also became clear that contestation came in various forms. In general terms, these included everyday examples of 'othering', such as instances of name-calling and intimidating staring as well as episodes of being treated with disrespect by locals or local authorities — all regarded as a consequence of being new and visibly different in a predominantly white environment. However, the media and a number of interviewees accounted also a series of appalling descriptions of racially motivated crime involving, for instance, attempted and actual physical attacks, damage to property, especially to the cars owned by Somalis, and even a bomb threat to the premises of the social services agency that provide assistance and guidance to Somali residents. The third type of contestation that came up regularly in the material was harassment in the traditional and new media. The local newspaper *Liekksan Lehti* was filled with frenzied outbursts and heated debates by local residents on the topic. Slander, rumours, and even criminalised hate speech were posted on social media.

At the same time, our analysis revealed that Somalis were active in local affairs. This came through in many statements. As an example, one of the interviewed civil servants (February 6, 2014) was somewhat annoyed as Somalis had complained about the quality of Islamic and Somali language instruction at the school, and another official told us (April 24, 2014) how pleasantly surprised she was when so many Somali youngsters approached her looking for summer jobs. These and other similar stories indicated that the Somalis in Liekksa are not just bystanders, but actual stakeholders in the direction of active citizenship.

As a result, we came to view the development of the Somalis' settlement process in Liekksa as a discursive boxing match between Somalis and long-term residents who acted on their behalf and a group of locals who vigorously protested against their presence in the town. A narrative emerged in which the attempts by Somalis to establish themselves as citizens capable of handling their own affairs were met with discursive or physical blows by their opponents. The majority of the town's inhabitants, however, seemed to be standing

in the circle, bearing witness to the struggle going on in front of their eyes.

Battling for a Sense of Security

While asylum seekers without residence permits usually stay in reception centres, those who have obtained a Finnish residence permit move away from the reception centre to a new home municipality, typically as soon as they have found an apartment there. It is a provision of the Finnish Constitution and other laws that Finnish citizens and foreigners legally resident in Finland have the right to freely move within the country and to choose their place of residence. Against that background, Somalis moving into Lieksa could be considered a normal state of affairs, but in our analysis, it appears as the first act of citizenship enacted in relation to our case study. By settling in Lieksa, first in dozens and then by hundreds, Somalis took a stand. They refused to be controlled by the authorities or by public opinion, which was largely against their arrival, but made it known that the right to choose one's residence belongs to them.

When the number of Somalis in Lieksa increased in 2010, the number of race crimes also increased alarmingly in the North Karelia region (Yle 2010a; Niemi 2011). In the media, Lieksa, in particular, became portrayed as a problematic special case, where the number of assaults against Somalis and vandalism of their cars increased dramatically within a short period (Yle 2010b). In 2009, the racist crimes committed in Lieksa totalled 1% of all in the country (Peutere 2010). Only 1 year later, the proportion was 4% (Niemi 2011).

In May 2011, the chairman of the local Somali association, however, asserted in the newspaper *Karjalainen* (2011c) that hostility against immigrants had, at least temporarily, decreased. He also stated that many immigrants residing in Lieksa were no longer afraid to live there. According to official statistics, the number of racist crimes had also decreased (Niemi & Sahramäki 2012). However, only a few months later, the media reported on a meeting held by city councillors and officials about the Somali settlers. The Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle (2011a) described the relations between locals and immigrants as tense again. The decision-makers voiced their concern about the increasing number of immigrants. One city councillor argued that the situation could lead to 'active opposition' among local residents towards immigration.

In October 2011, the newspaper *Karjalainen* (2011a) reported that the head of the Lieksa police force was astonished by the high level of racism and intolerance directed at the newcomers. In his opinion, the bias did not arise only from a specific small group in Lieksa. Instead, bias was present in every social class. The concern about the atmosphere in the town was also visible in another article published on the same day by *Karjalainen* (2011d). A journalist predicted that the bias would eventually escalate into large-scale violence between the locals and the newcomers. About a week later, an incident occurred during which a Somali man was stabbed, and a local resident suffered cuts (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2011d; *Karjalainen* 2011b; Yle 2011b). In November 2014, a Somali taxi driver was seriously beaten and threatened with death while working (Yle 2014a). In a small survey (n = 60) conducted in Lieksa in 2015, over one-fourth of the Somali speakers reported they had been threatened with physical violence in Lieksa (Sotkasiira 2015).

Not only are these acts of violence aimed towards individual Somalis, but they also open up more general discussions about what is allowed and what is not for Somali residents. When reporting on violence, one journalist, for example, raised a question about the

newcomers in the townscape: 'It seems that in Lieksa it is considered that an immigrant who hangs around at night time in the town is only looking for trouble' (*Karjalainen* 2011e). In a similar vein, the beating of a taxi driver opened up a debate on Somalis' right to work as it was argued that Somalis who work take up jobs from local Finns who suffer from unemployment. On the other hand, the critics argued that Somalis also do not have right to claim social benefits. In the media (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2011a), the causes of the violent atmosphere were sought from the misconceptions among the locals concerning the social security benefits granted to Somalis. It was stated by a journalist that poverty and the high unemployment rate among the locals in Lieksa have created the conditions for intolerance, establishing Somalis who work as well as Somalis who obtain social benefits as indirectly responsible for the violence they face.

The Somali man injured in the stabbing incident told the *Helsingin Sanomat* (2011c) that Somalis were too afraid even to go shopping in the evening. However, the chairman of the local Somali association stated he had not experienced racism. He thought Lieksa was a good place to live and argued that problems are experienced mainly by those who visit bars and drink. The chairman tried not to take sides by noting: 'We have also made mistakes. We have the same problems as the locals – family troubles and others'. In such a way, he agreed on the need for Somalis to compromise on the freedom of movement in the town's public spaces in order to stay safe and steer clear of violence.

In addition to physical integrity, the Constitution of Finland also guarantees everyone the right to privacy and the sanctity of one's home. In Lieksa, however, the immigrants' rights to privacy have been violated in several high-profile incidents. In November 2011, the police launched an investigation regarding a Facebook group founded by several local residents that featured threats and insults aimed at immigrants, including threats to shoot people (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2011b; Yle 2011c). A total of six locals were eventually sentenced for inciting hatred towards an ethnic group (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2012a). The case and trial received wide publicity at the national level and initiated a debate on legislation regulating hate speech on social media (Yle 2012a). Earlier in the same year, local young people were invited through Facebook to gather in a neighbourhood occupied by immigrants. The police interrupted the gathering because they suspected that the purpose was to agitate people to clash with the newcomers (Yle 2011d).

In 2012, two local residents published a Somali man's privation banking information on Facebook (*Karjalainen* 2012; Yle 2012b). The incident received much media attention, and the police investigated it as an invasion of privacy by distributing personal information. The case was classified as a race crime because the victim was a foreigner and the banking information was posted to a Facebook group that opposed immigration (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2012b). During the trial, the offenders argued that their intention was to stimulate debate on the social security benefits granted to the immigrants (*Karjalainen* 2013a).

In 2014, a similar incident occurred during which an invoice sent to the same Somali man was published on a private blog. Soon after, the police investigated an anti-immigrant Facebook page that posted photographs of Somalis taken in the streets of Lieksa, for example, of mothers taking their children to nursery school (Yle 2014b, 2014c). The site administrators also published images of buildings where immigrants lived. These actions were not illegal. The first incident was not regarded a crime by the prosecutor because the bill did not include individualised information, simply the names of a person who invoiced the bill and who it was directed at (Yle 2014d). In the

second case, since the photos were taken in public places, the act did not constitute the crime of illicit viewing (Yle 2014e). For Somalis, however, these incidents sent a message demanding they be aware of their actions in public spaces. The photos created an atmosphere of mistrust where one needs be mindful when, for example, disposing of one's garbage and carrying out everyday tasks and routines. One never knows who might be watching and where one's picture might end up.

Acting as a Political Citizen

Every Finnish citizen and every foreigner permanently residing in Finland, having attained 18 years of age, has the right to vote in the municipal elections and municipal referendums. The right to vote and stand for office in national elections belongs to Finnish citizens. In the municipal elections held in 2012, in Lieksa, among 109 candidates there were 3 of immigrant background. Two candidates were nominated by the Social Democratic Party and one by the National Coalition Party. The best result was obtained by a young Somali man, who received 50 votes, and currently is the first deputy local councillor of Lieksa. According to the interviewed members of the Somali community (April 17, 2014), Somali participation in local politics is likely to increase, and more candidates can be expected to stand in the next municipal election in 2017.

From the legal point of view, the ability of Somali immigrants to participate in the municipal politics is evident. The case of Lieksa also indicates that although the overall immigrant participation in elections in Finland is lower than that of Finnish nationals, it is possible for immigrants to enter politics and become politically organised (Pirkkalainen, Wass, & Weide 2016). However, when it comes to actual realisation of participatory rights, the situation is more complicated. An illustrative story was told by a civil servant (March 13, 2014) who believes that Somalis could form a political force:

[Within 10 years], I think we will have immigrants as decision-makers. You never know. I have always told them, the politicians... they always get scared when I bring this issue up. We have four hundred immigrants, soon 600, and they are very active voters. When they choose one candidate, it means that soon the chair of our city council will be someone of Somali background.

The resentment towards the immigrants who organise politically was openly voiced, for example, during the aftermath of the 2012 municipal elections. At the time, the chair of the Lieksa chapter of the Social Democratic Party stated in the media that his party may have been shunned by voters because it included immigrants in its list of candidates. He stated: 'We had immigrants with us, and many Lieksa people don't accept that yet. A lot of voters complained to me saying that if they give their vote to me or another Social Democrat, the vote also goes to immigrants' (Yle 2012c). Finland's open-list d'Hondt voting system means that voters choose one candidate, but their vote also supports others on the same list, and the argument ran that some voters were unwilling to vote if it could benefit immigrant candidates.

The freedom of association gives every citizen the right to form associations without a permit and to become members (or not) and participate in activities. Somalis in Finland have actively participated in civic life by setting up civic associations (Pirkkalainen 2013). The Somalis in Lieksa are no different, and an organisation was formed to help Somali families. According to the interviewed organisers

(April 24, 2014), the aim is to provide assistance especially to single mothers and arrange cultural activities and language-learning opportunities for children.

The Lieksa authorities responded positively to these kinds of initiatives. For instance, the authorities offered meeting rooms and assisted the immigrant associations in publicising their activities. The organisations may also apply for financial assistance just as any local association. Furthermore, the former mayor of Lieksa called together a Somali affairs council to function as a liaison for officials to communicate with the Somali community and vice versa. During interviews, the municipal officials (March 13, 2014; April 24, 2014) stated that they find the council very helpful. The council holds regular meetings at city hall and works in close cooperation with many official bodies. The chairman of the council also explained (February 6, 2014) how they had informed authorities about several issues, including misunderstandings and complaints related to social services or day-care arrangements. Together, the authorities and the council have searched for answers to questions that have troubled the Somalis in Lieksa.

However, the positive atmosphere around this type of activity has been frequently challenged by local politicians. Especially, representatives of the Finns Party, a populist and nationalist-oriented political party, have been active in this respect. Their views became public when a member of the city council, the chairman of local section of the Finns Party, apparently 'joked' about the issue. During a council meeting, he stated a need for a new place to hold meetings because the room that they usually used was contaminated by the presence of Somalis, who also held meetings there (Karjalainen 2013b). The news (Yle 2013a) stated that his fellow party member requested the meeting room be treated with pesticide. The event sparked a heated debate, and while the speaker's position was denounced by the leading members of the Finns Party (Helsingin Sanomat 2013; Yle 2013b), on social media, many commentators aligned themselves with those making racist commentary. Once again, the work by Somalis and municipal officials was publicly invalidated by racist slander. The Finns Party activists have not been able to prevent Somalis from entering politics, but they can make the process very difficult. At the same time, they make it harder for those local politicians who did not see any problems with newcomers entering politics to be involved in the debate and to stand up in their defence.

Contested Social Rights

One of the main reasons stated by Somalis for moving to Lieksa was the availability of affordable rental accommodation (Yle 2012d). Kiinteistö Oy Lieksan Vuokratalot is a real-estate company fully owned by the City of Lieksa, and the company owns, manages, rents, and builds rental houses and apartments. Before Somalis began to move to Lieksa, plans had been made to raze the rental buildings owned by the municipality. As few inhabitants required rental apartments, town officials decided it was cheaper to raze the buildings than keep them empty or renovate them. The immigrants' arrival, however, made the town officials change their plans.

In principle, housing is well-organised: Rental apartments are relatively cheap, and many are available. However, on social media, a movement emerged campaigning against renting to foreigners, especially Somalis. They argue that it is better to tear down the houses than rent them to newcomers.

The issues related to housing have also caused controversy in everyday life. The locals complain about Somalis not knowing how to

clean properly or to do laundry, and for example, about having visitors stay late. The real estate company responded to the complaints by hiring a housing counsellor who guides and assists new tenants and works on-site in order to step in as soon as a problem arises. The opinions differ as to how serious the problems related to housing really are. Although some claim that it has become impossible for Finns to live in rental housing, others argue that the issues have simply been blown out of proportion (interview February 6, 2014).

The discussion about housing is a typical example of the debate over the social rights of the Somalis in Lieksa. By law, there is no question about their entitlement to social security and rental housing. In reality, the rights are frequently questioned, especially on social media. The comments by the local and national politicians and public interest in the social benefits allocated to Somalis has, in many ways, come to equal to harassment. According to the head of the Lieksa Social Services agency (April 24, 2014), her department frequently receives e-mails and phone calls in which people question the decisions concerning benefit claims. The locals have complained that Somalis in rental apartments receive better equipment, such as new electric cookers or refrigerators than Finns who live in the same type of housing. The informants have reported of a group of 'self-made detectives' who gather evidence of wrongdoing by social workers and their Somali clients. The residents report to the social services agency how much the clothes worn by Somalis cost in local shops. The social services are also notified when a Somali has been seen driving a car or a new bicycle. In addition, receipts for various goods have been collected from trash cans and published online to demonstrate how much 'public money' Somalis spend on their daily purchases. A persistent rumour is that social workers favour Somalis over local clients despite the constant assurance by social services that this is not the case.

To deal with these types of accusations, the City of Lieksa informed the public in 2011 that, in fact, the town had received around 200,000 Euros from integrating the immigrants, thus far (Yle 2011e). This statement, although a logical response to the worries that circulated among the residents, raised a new debate in which the settlement of refugees and their service provision was described as 'refugee business' (Karjalainen 2014). The argument ran that places like Lieksa campaign to attract refugees in order to claim state subsidies for integrating refugees while the money actually goes elsewhere; it is used to overcome the declining financial circumstances and the high expenditure on the social sector and healthcare in general.

The discourse, which stigmatises Somalis, is produced partly by the local big mouths and partly on the national level by politicians who wish to capitalise on the anti-immigration sentiments that have become increasingly popular in Finland (Yle 2014f). The Somalis who reside in Lieksa find this kind of attention disturbing and hurtful. They have voiced their concern about the matter and during interviews explained how the discursive othering affects their positioning in society:

It affects us because we are directly labelled. They say we are given a lot of money, we receive cars, we get money to travel overseas, and these things. You know how I talked about how much more difficult it has become to us, how the social workers do not have time to meet us. Still we are blamed, that they buy us things and give us money. When people talk about these things, it creates pressure, and this is threatening to us. (Interview April 24, 2014)

It is evident that that although legally many rights are provided to people who are citizens and for those who have refugee status, in

reality, the Somalis in Lieksa do not fully benefit from the existing legal frameworks due to the questioning and harassment prevalent in their everyday lives.

Conclusions

Isin (2009) makes a distinction between the active citizens and activist citizens and claims that the acts of citizenship are conducted by the latter. He argues that active citizenship is the conduct of those who are already considered as citizens, while activist citizens are those who make new claims to justice, and thus bring something 'out of ordinary' into the world.

In this article, we have addressed the disjunction between the theory and practice of citizenship, through a case study of the settlement of refugees from Somalia in North Karelia. We applied the concept of 'act of citizenship' to highlight how the Somalis in Lieksa have worked, and how they are compelled to work, towards inclusion in the local community. Setting up associations, liaising with authorities, participating in local politics, contacting municipal officials about their concerns regarding various everyday challenges, and thus not accepting their given role as silent bystanders are all examples of acts through which their citizenship is constituted. By adopting an understanding of citizenship as a political subjectivity, we have shifted attention from fixed categories and statements, such as 'fifty percent of Somalis are Finnish citizens', to the struggles through which these categories are constituted in complex everyday situations.

For the Somalis in Lieksa, regardless of their citizenship status, citizenship is something they must struggle towards. Even the most mundane acts, such as taking one's child to day care or disposing garbage, may turn into a negotiation on the use of public space and services available for them. Therefore, to illustrate how contested the citizenship position of even members of the Finnish society who, by law, are citizens and/or the legal residents can be, we looked into the resistance that has emerged as a response to Lieksa Somalis' attempts to exercise their rights. In our minds, the pattern is clear. If Somalis enter politics, they are met with racist slander and blamed for political parties' election losses. When a Somali man finds a job as a taxi driver, he is beaten up as a consequence. Somalis are entitled to the same social benefits as other citizens and permanent residents, yet this topic is recurrently poked about by the media. The freedom of movement of a person is contested when he has to fear that by entering a bar or walking in the streets at night time he puts himself at risk of being physically or verbally violated. These acts, which form a continuum on which racist violence represents the most aggravated and rare forms of control, while more subtle forms of everyday racism are commonly experienced by many newcomers in Lieksa, should be considered as attempts to prevent Somalis from constituting themselves and acting as citizens. The Internet and media have emerged as arenas that bind together and enforce these acts taking place in face-to-face encounters.

In the article, we have demonstrated how acting as a citizen on the everyday level depends on other factors situated in various everyday and institutional locations. Particularly, in smaller towns, single individuals can have a decisive role in determining who can act as a citizen and who cannot. In Lieksa, for example, we identified a group of locals that actively propagates against the presence of Somalis. In fact, it seems that their way of life is tied with the destiny of the local Somali settlement. For us, they are an illustrative example of people whose own enactment of citizenship is

based on restricting the citizenship capacity of others. Rephrasing the argument by Bojadžijev and Karakayali (2010), we conclude with the statement that many of the social conflicts seemingly initiated by and related to migrants are, after all, not about becoming citizens, but about insisting that citizens are not in fact citizens. For many among us, rights to citizenship cannot be taken for granted, but have to be justified over and over again.

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Notes

1. If you have refugee status in Finland or you have been granted a residence permit on the basis of subsidiary or humanitarian protection, it is possible to acquire the Finnish citizenship after 4 years of continuous residence or for a total of 6 years after reaching the age of 15. Of these 6 years, you must have lived in Finland for the past 2 years without interruption.

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