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20560 Oñati - Gipuzkoa (Spain)
opo@iisj.es / http://opo.iisj.net

Everyday (in)security and transnational family relationships in the lives of young forced migrants

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JOHANNA HIITOLA*

Abstract

This article examines how the (in)security of transnational family members influence the sense of security of young migrants who have initially moved to Finland as unaccompanied minors. The concept of everyday security sheds light on the everyday lives of people who are often presented as a threat in mainstream media and discourses. The data consists of interviews with sixteen young forced migrants who are attempting to bring family members to the country via family reunification. The results show that securities and insecurities narrated by the interviewees in relation to transnational family are material, interpersonal and existential. Material securities include the embodied symptoms of stress and relief and different economic circumstances. Interpersonal securities manifest through comparing one's situation to others. Existential (in)securities are related to a sense of continuity and predictability. The results show that supporting family life through policy and welfare practices is important for young migrants' well-being.

Key words

Everyday security; unaccompanied minors; family reunification; transnational family

Resumen

Este artículo examina la influencia de la (in)seguridad de familiares transnacionales en el sentido de seguridad de jóvenes migrantes que se habían mudado a Finlandia como menores no acompañados. El concepto de seguridad cotidiana arroja luz sobre las vidas diarias de personas que, en medios y discursos mayoritarios, son presentadas como una amenaza. Los datos consisten en entrevistas con dieciséis migrantes jóvenes forzosos que están intentando traer a miembros de su familia al país por la vía de la reunificación familiar. Los resultados muestran que las seguridades e

* University Lecturer, Gender Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Oulu, Finland. Contact details: P.O.Box 8000, FI-90014 University of Oulu. Email address: Johanna.Hiitola@oulu.fi

inseguridades narradas por los entrevistados en relación con la familia transnacional son materiales, interpersonales y existenciales. Las seguridades materiales incluyen los síntomas somatizados de estrés y alivio y diversas circunstancias económicas. Las seguridades interpersonales se manifiestan a través de la comparación de la situación propia con las de otros. Las (in)seguridades existenciales están relacionadas con un sentido de continuidad y predecibilidad. Los resultados muestran que es importante para el bienestar de los jóvenes migrantes apoyar la vida familiar con prácticas políticas y de bienestar.

Palabras clave

Seguridad cotidiana; menores no acompañados; reunificación familiar; familia transnacional

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1. Introduction

Research into the meaning of the everyday lived realities of young migrants' family relationships – either in the form of separation or transnational relations – is rare (see Anis and Esberg 2018). Nonetheless, separation from family is often mentioned as an aspect of well-being in different studies concerning unaccompanied minors or young migrants (e.g. Wray *et al.* 2015, Chase *et al.* 2020). Several scholars also suggest that adults separated from family members suffer from stress, anxiety, and many other difficulties in their daily lives, affecting their sense of security in profound ways (e.g. Rask *et al.* 2016, Leinonen and Pellander 2020). Research has also found that the fear of separation from family, or the worry about loved ones in precarious or dangerous situations, is one of the main sources of distress among migrants (Sourander 2003, Simich *et al.* 2010, Wilmsen 2013). Thus, separation from family is undoubtedly an important factor also in young migrants' lives. This article examines how the (in)security of transnational family members influence the sense of security of young migrants who have initially moved to Finland as unaccompanied minors.

Some scholars do touch upon the issues of family relationships of young migrants. For example, Belloni (2020) discusses the role of family relationships in the migration decisions of young Eritreans. Importantly, it is shown that many young migrants make migration decisions on their own, although migration may also be a crucial survival strategy for the whole family. Aytar and Brunnberg (2016) note in their analysis that young migrants are often frequently in contact with their parents and other family members through social media. However, Chase and Statham (2013) find that young migrants in their new countries worry greatly about the well-being of the transnational families they have left behind.

Previous scholarship has also considered the psychological impacts of indefinite migration processes, including depression and trauma (e.g. Mansouri and Cauchi 2007, Laban *et al.* 2008). This especially concerns minors who are seeking asylum (Lähteenmäki 2017). The detrimental effects of waiting on the mental health of refugee children are not only tied to the result of the process, but also to the length of waiting time (Vitus 2010, Kohli and Kaukko 2017). Recent research on adult migrants has found that waiting for family reunification has similar effects (Leinonen and Pellander 2020). It is thus assumed that the young refugees in this study experience hardships while waiting for the results of their family reunification applications.

Much of the research on the everyday realities of unaccompanied minors and young refugees has portrayed these youth as lonely and isolated (see Kohli and Mather 2003, Groark *et al.* 2011). However, critical research on young forced migrants, and especially those who have migrated as unaccompanied minors, sees young people as having agency over their own lives, while simultaneously also being vulnerable and in need of protection (e.g. Belloni 2020). Migration without one's parents is a large global phenomenon, and not all young migrants seek asylum in their destinations (see Mai 2010, Bhabha 2019). However, in Finland almost all unaccompanied minors go through the asylum process, as did all the migrant youth in this study. The analysis in this article explores one aspect of these young people's lives – that of family relationships.

This paper proceeds in the following way. I start by discussing the legal context of young migrants' family reunification in Finland and proceed to explaining the theoretical frame

of everyday (in)security. Following that, I discuss the data and methods of the study. I then present the empirical findings by going through the three themes found in the data. I conclude by examining the findings in the context of earlier literature concerning everyday security and migration.

2. Young forced migrants in the asylum process in Finland

This study focuses on sixteen young people's views on their family relationships. The young migrants in the study had initially moved to Finland as unaccompanied minors, but have already received continuous residence permits through the asylum process. Many of the uncertainties related to asylum seeking are thus in the past in these young interviewees' lives. However, the interviewees are now in the process of trying to reunite with their families or have looked into the possibility of doing so.

It is also important to note that definitions of what constitutes as "young" may vary. Many young migrants have felt responsible for their families since a very early age (Schuster 2011) and they themselves might not feel that they fit into the narrow definition of an "unaccompanied minor" (Wernersjö 2012). Being labelled "unaccompanied" may even produce isolation and loneliness (Herz and Lalander 2017, Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019). This is also the reason why I have chosen to not use the concept of "unaccompanied migrant" in this article. Nonetheless, according to both international and national law, the age at the time of seeking asylum is decisive as to which rights young people hold in the asylum process. It is relevant that those children who are under the age of eighteen at arrival have the right to reunite with their parents (after gaining residency) under current EU legislation, including Finland (*A and S v Staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie*, 2018). The experiences of forced migration as a young person are also often even more intensely frightening and traumatizing than migration as an adult (e.g. Hart 2014).

I use the term "forced migrant" to describe the young interviewees who have all acquired their residence permits through the asylum process. Research on forced migration often refers to the categories of internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless people (e.g. de Haas *et al.* 2014). The term is used in this article to highlight the specific group under study, who – regardless of their residency status – are not privileged migrants and thus have limited choices for advancing their lives. All of the interviewees in this study have had to leave their countries of origin under pressing circumstances, either because of persecution, war, or inability to otherwise sustain life.

The process of family reunification often proved to be lengthy and difficult for the young migrants. In principle, once a forced migrant receives a residence permit in Finland, he or she is eligible for family reunification. However, at the time of the interviews, Finland had just extended the income requirements for reunification. The limits were already strict even before this, but the new extension – applied regardless of the sponsor's age – made family reunification nearly impossible for most.

At present, and at the time of the interviews, forced migrants are granted one of four different categories of residency in the asylum process in Finland: refugee (asylum); subsidiary protection; compassionate grounds. Additionally, as the fourth category, some may apply residency based on being a victim of human trafficking. Some forced

migrants also apply for residency because of work or study as the categories of forced and voluntary migration often overlap (e.g. Erdal and Oeppen 2018). In Finland most unaccompanied minors receive the "compassionate grounds" status (see Finnish Immigration Service 2020a).[1] This is unfortunate, since according to current Finnish legislation, migrants receiving their residency based on subsidiary protection or compassionate grounds have to prove a high level of income in order to successfully apply for family reunification. Furthermore, those with refugee status (asylum) on the grounds of persecution also need to demonstrate a high income, if their application is not submitted within three-months of receiving residency. The monthly income requirement for a migrant under eighteen years of age, to bring parents and two siblings to Finland, is 2,900 euros after taxes, which corresponds to a monthly salary of approximately 4,000 euros. This figure is more than the average Finnish income, and is the highest income requirement in comparison to other Nordic countries (see Hiitola 2019).[2]

So, while according to the Finnish Immigration Service statistics (2020b) 84 percent of unaccompanied minors receive residency via the asylum process in Finland, most unaccompanied minors do not have any real possibility of reuniting with their families. The Immigration Service statistics show that only 15 percent of minors gain the category of asylum that allows them to reunite with their families without meeting the income requirement. The remaining 85 percent of minors are granted a status with which they must fulfil this very high requirement. It should also be noted that those migrants who do receive the status of asylum, and would not need to meet the income requirement, still experience great difficulties in applying for family reunification. There are often issues, for example, in enabling the family's travel for immigration interviews and gaining visas for the family's interviews, obtaining funds to cover application fees, or other delays which cause the three-month time limit to pass, meaning that they then have to fulfil in the income requirement (see Hiitola 2019). Consequently, only a small number of unaccompanied minors have been reunited with their family members in recent years in Finland (e.g. Kuusisto-Arponen 2016). Out of the sixteen unaccompanied minors interviewed in this study, only three (from two families) have succeeded in their family reunification.

3. Everyday (in)security and transnational family relationships

The concept of *everyday (in)security* sheds light on the everyday lives of people who are often targets of various security tactics, or who are presented as a threat in mainstream media and discourses (see Bondi 2014, Philo 2014, Waite *et al.* 2014, Crawford and Hutchinson 2015). Thus, the concept is exceptionally well suited to analysing forced migrants' everyday realities (see also Leinonen and Pellander 2020, Tiilikainen 2020). This viewpoint makes a much needed contribution to security studies discussions on the everyday, which is less present in current mainstream security studies (see Philo 2014).

[1] 1.1.2015–30.9.2018, after which statistics are not offered as the number of applicants is so low.

[2] Also based on the websites of the Swedish Migration Agency (https://www.migrationsverket.se), the Danish Immigration Service (https://nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/You-want-to-apply), the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/), Finnish Immigration Service (https://migri.fi/en/) (October 2019).

Feminist security scholars have investigated "geopolitics of fear" from the perspective of everyday life and shown that certain discourses, such as the threat of terrorism, are globally used to legitimize more punitive and restricted societies (see Pain and Smith 2008, Butler 2016). In migration studies, the everyday and "recognition of the ordinary" has been seen as "a way of getting beyond generalised understandings of globalisation and transnationalism" (Ho and Hatfield 2011). In this analysis, the everyday serves as a methodological lens into broader meanings of intimate relationships that produce insecurity and instability.

Many studies, which are not framed in terms of security studies, do address (in)securities in young migrants' lives. Sometimes securities may be linked to surprising aspects in everyday lives. For example, Honkasalo (2017) found that smartphones were important artefacts for unaccompanied minors; they increased the possibilities for participation through connections with friends, and produced security through enabling connection with family members. Kauko (2015) found that insecurity in the lives of unaccompanied minors was connected to boredom. It was important for the youth to have meaningful activities to maintain a sense of security.

The concept of everyday (in)security has shifted scholarly attention from state-level security to everyday encounters (Innes 2014, Botterill *et al.* 2019). For example, Bloch *et al.* (2009) finds that undocumented young migrants use a variety of strategies to improve their sense of security and to develop their lives, and thus they claim that agency can be found in these attempts. By analysing the case of one irregular migrant, Innes (2014) shows that security is performative. One may produce security in everyday life even in very uncertain situations. Other research finds that migrants (both adults and the young) use a variety of coping strategies to survive precarious lives (von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2000, Sigona and Hughes 2012). This research strand of everyday security in connection to irregular migration comes very close to discussions on everyday bordering, (e.g. Tervonen *et al.* 2018). This research strand suggests that different everyday street-level practices act as gatekeeping and bordering devices, and dictate who has the ability to fully exercise their (everyday) citizenship and who does not (see also Johnson *et al.* 2011). The issue of who feels a sense of security in a given environment is at the heart of these question about belonging, citizenship and bordering practices.

Some studies on security and insecurity also discuss racialized minorities or youth. Botterill *et al.* (2019) concluded that racialized youth used both pre-emptive and pro-active strategies to preserve or construct secure selves. The pre-emptive strategies involved ways of taking precautions, such as ignoring racism. The pro-active ways of producing security meant, for example, trying to be better behaved than other youth to deflect instances of racism and stigmatization. Similarly, Tiilikainen (2020) suggests that although Somali parents in Canada experience many kinds of injustices and powerlessness in legal and societal structures and practices, they are not passive in the face of these difficulties. Instead, the parents in Tiilikainen's study "acted in many ways to support and protect their children from the dangers that they identified both inside and outside Somali and/or Muslim communities" (*ibid*., 149). The young people who participated in this study actively sought ways to feel secure through yearning for "regular" everyday lives; having jobs, houses and families of their own.

Everyday (in)security can also be understood in connection to the concept of well-being/ill-being, comprising material and physical, relational and ethical dimensions (see Al-Sharmani *et al.* 2019). Welfare theorist Martha Nussbaum (2003) lists security as one of the ten core capabilities required for well-being. Among the other capabilities are the possibility to live a life of normal length, and being adequately nourished and sheltered; all issues which fall under experiencing mental and physical securities. Well-being has also been conceptualized as a relational phenomenon connected to transnational families (see Turtiainen *et al.* 2020). These relationships are maintained through emotions and affects, which stretch across borders (Wise and Velayutham 2017).

Many studies also deal with issues of migrants' security framed as "feeling at home" in new surroundings. Feelings of home are linked to the sense of continuity amidst change, which can be achieved by, for example, creating new relationships with other migrants who share similar social backgrounds and memories (Cook *et al.* 2011, Ho and Hatfield 2011). Dudley (2011) describes how "an important part of feeling 'at home' is the cultivation of a sense of spatiotemporal continuity of place and of emplacement". In security studies this possibility to "predict one's fate" has been called "ontological security" (Innes 2014, Waite *et al.* 2014, 316, Botterill *et al.* 2019). The concept derives from psychology, but it has been used in social science research to describe a need for predictability (Waite *et al.* 2014).

This study will draw from the above described scholarship on everyday (in)security and the related themes of belonging. However, instead of aiming to grasp all the possible aspects of young migrants' lives, the analysis will centre on the meaning ascribed to family and the relational aspects tied to living family life across borders.

4. Methods and materials

The interviews in this study were conducted over 2018 and 2019,[3] with sixteen young migrants in total being interviewed. These refugees had arrived in Finland alone as minors when they were between 12 and 16 years of age, but were around 18 years old when interviewed. Only one of the interviewees was still a minor at the time of the interview. The interviewees had lived in Finland for between one and eight years.

Most of the young interviewees were from Afghanistan (thirteen) and three were from Somalia, Ethiopia and Iraq. The interviews were done in Finnish, English, Dari, or Arabic,[4] depending on the participants' language skills. Four of the interviewees were young women, while the rest were young men. This represents the gendered phenomenon; most unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe are boys (UNICEF 2019). The interviews were done either in Finnish or English with only myself and the young interviewee, or in one of the other languages with a translator/research assistant who would accompany me at the interview. One young interviewee participated in a group

[3] The interviews are part of a larger on-going research project *Family Separation, Migration Status, and Everyday Security: Experiences and Strategies of Vulnerable Migrants* funded by the Academy of Finland and led by Senior Researcher Marja Tiilikainen. The sub-project where the data was collected was led by the author. During the project we have collected altogether 45 group and individual interviews with 55 unaccompanied minors and adult refugees, all of whom are struggling to reunite with their families.

[4] The Dari language interviews were conducted with research assistants Zeinab Karimi and Edris Bayan Shenwarai. The interviews in Arabic were conducted with research assistant Ahmed Zaidan.

interview with her father and one interview was done with two young interviewees, who were siblings.

In the interviews with the research assistant working as a translator, the interaction also depended on the assistant. Often assistants asked additional questions in Dari or Arabic to bring the issue into focus, so their ability to steer the conversation was as relevant as mine, if not more so. The interview questions were often framed a little differently in the interviewees' mother tongue. In the quotes from the interviews, I will use the translator's choice of words when applicable, since they will be more accurate presentations of what has actually been said.

I was significantly older than the young interviewees, and I felt that my age helped me to build trust with the interviewees, although it may also have intensified power inequalities. However, unequal distribution of power in research interviews can never be fully erased. There is also a real danger of colonizing the experiences of research participants (e.g. Maggio 2007) in research conducted by a white middle-class woman with racialized youth. I have attempted to create an encounter with the research participants as a (vulnerable) human being myself, instead of enforcing a researcher identity or authority.

Many researchers have suggested that an ethnographic framework is needed when doing research with unaccompanied minors (e.g. Herz and Lalander 2017, Kaukko *et al.* 2019). This research was conducted as interviews, but the need for a continuity of relationship for the young was taken into consideration. I and one of the research assistants kept in contact with most of the young interviewees after the interviews (see also Düvell *et al.* 2010). It was of great importance to do this, as many of the young were in the midst of difficult family reunification processes when we met. However, it should be noted that all but one of the interviewees were already young adults, several being over 20 years of age. Had the subject of the interview been something other than their migration history, they would have not been defined as vulnerable "unaccompanied minors" (see also critique by Wernersjö 2012). In a sense, any research ethics with sensitive subjects apply to these situations.

The main guiding ethical principle in this study is "do no harm", following the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre's (2007) guidelines. However, recent refugee scholars have brought up the need for a more reciprocal relationship with research participants. Instead of "stealing stories", the emphasis should shift towards aiming to benefit the vulnerable groups themselves (Mackenzie *et al.* 2007, Krause 2017). These issues have been addressed in this study on the micro level by guiding the participants to NGOs and officials who can help them in their often-complicated family reunification processes. On the macro level, the project team has actively engaged in the societal discussion about family reunification policies by stressing the negative effects of tightened policies on refugees' lives. In addition, formal ethical procedures have been taken, such as approval for the Ethics Committee of the University of Turku before the data collection (in Spring 2018). For interviewing minors still living at a group home for youth, a separate research permit (in addition to their own consent), was applied for from the group home. Other participants, who were already over 18 years old, were asked for their own consent. Details of the project were carefully described to the participants before the interview and information was also handed to the participants in writing, if they were able to read.

Carefully avoiding any pressure has been especially important since the participants are young, one being still a minor. We also emphasized that we cannot influence the informants' family reunification applications or appeals in any way.

The data is arranged thematically to represent different ways of producing or understanding everyday security in connection to family relationships. The hands-on analysis was formed through reading and organizing the parts in the interview transcripts that described transnational family life. As a result, the spheres of material, interpersonal and existential (in)securities connected to family were formed. The results are presented in the following section, where all the names are pseudonyms.

5. (In)security and transnational family

5.1. Material (in)securities

The first realm of (in)security that young migrants expressed in regard to their transnational families was connected to material circumstances. In migration scholarship the discussion on materiality has referenced the importance of artefacts such as mobile phones (Honkasalo 2017), clothes (Dudley 2011), food (Conlon 2011) or religious texts (Tse 2011). Wise and Velayutham (2017) discuss affective experiences of transnational relations, which attach themselves onto different artefacts (phones, remittances, pictures), or become embodied in, for example, intensified expressions such as slapping the table, or are experienced as temporal shifts due to traumatic memories. All of these material objects and bodily experiences are connected to securities. The artefacts carry specific emotional meanings, which often result in embodied experiences.

The young migrants' securities in this study were often wrapped up in the economic insecurities of their transnational families, much as previous scholarship has also found (e.g. Baldassar and Merla 2014, Tiilikainen 2017). A 20-year-old Ethiopian woman, Kia, had arrived in Finland when she was 16 years old. She had tried to apply for family reunification, but the decision from the Immigration Service was negative as she was seen as "not being dependent" on her family as, by then, she would shortly be turning eighteen. Unfortunately for her, the decision had come before the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that the date of the asylum application (and not the decision) is decisive when determining a minor's right to family reunification (*A and S v Staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie*, 2018). Kia described how her family had to survive in a refugee camp with very few resources. Thus, she often sent them her own money.

> Kia: Sometimes I send 100 euros, sometimes 50 euros, what I can. And it is difficult, since it takes almost two weeks for it to arrive there. They live in the countryside, there is no store there. And then when they get the money, they have to travel with a car to another city. It takes almost four hours to travel and it costs money to get a car.
>
> Interviewer: Yes, so it doesn't make sense to send 50 euros, since the travel is almost the same, huh? Crazy.
>
> Kia: Yes, it's four hours to travel to get food or medicine if they need. But there is nothing where they live, nothing.
>
> Interviewer: Yes, nothing. Are food packages distributed? Too little?

> Kia: Yes, it's too little. It's only given once a month, on the fifteenth, maybe twice. And if there is a family of four, they don't get for everyone. (20-year-old woman from Ethiopia, arrived when 16 years old)

The economic insecurities and precariousness of Kia's family are reflected in Kia's life in Finland. As demonstrated in Kia's example, material insecurity is a matter of economic capital related to social class, although this issue is rarely framed as such in security studies (for a notable exception, see Turner 2015). The tightening of family reunification policies across Europe has intensified even further the significance of social class in being able to live with one's family, as Kofman (2018) argues. In Kia's life, the failed attempt at family reunification produces continuous insecurity, which she describes becoming materialized in the event of the phone ringing. The following is an answer to a question about how Kia would imagine her life if she could live with her family:

> Kia: I wouldn't think what if they don't pick up the phone, something has happened. If for example something happened to my mother. You know, it's really difficult when the phone rings at midnight. Hello, hello, I say. Sometimes my mother calls me. I quickly say hi and has something happened. Every time she calls, I worry that something has happened to my family. My heart goes 'boom, boom, boom'. That's what I think would change if they came here. My life would be very different.

Kia describes her insecurity as embodied in her mother's phone calls. The sound of the phone ringing instigates her heart racing. Knowing that her family is living in extreme poverty, for Kia, the phone ringing might at any time bring her bad news.

A young Afghan man, 21-year-old Babak, also described providing for his siblings. Babak was raised in Pakistan by Afghan parents, but he and his sisters were orphaned when his parents were killed. He left to seek security, because of their poor chance of survival as a child refugee in Pakistan. He felt financially responsible for his sisters, and this also brought him financial insecurities.

> Interviewer: How often did you send money to your family?
>
> Babak: Oh, it depends [laughing] I was collecting (…) and now I have student loans so I can't send so much. Every three or four months.
>
> Interviewer: How much did you send at once?
>
> Babak: Well, sometimes 300, sometimes 500, sometimes 1,000.
>
> Interviewer: Ah, how did you manage to save that much?
>
> Babak: Because I never bought clothes, I didn't eat enough [laughs]. And then when I was in school I didn't eat at all other than eating at school. And then at home I ate noodles.
>
> Interviewer: Oh my goodness.
>
> Babak: Well, then yes, I saved. Because I thought, there was no one who was able to work in my family. (21-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 16 years old)

Babak's life was occupied mainly with trying to find a way to support his surviving family members. He, like many other interviewees, had to make choices which endangered his own health and well-being. Babak saw his family's situation in Pakistan as being even worse than his own limited situation in Finland. He was still able to get a daily meal for free at his school, which was a better situation than that of his family

members who had no means of support. Nonetheless, he was still often in a situation of feeling hungry through lack of food, a very material consequence of his family's insecurity.

Most of the young migrants in this study did not receive material support from their transnational families. Only one interviewee had a family that was able to support him financially. His family was clearly upper middle class and he had fled his country of origin due to the persecution of his father, who was highly positioned politically. As material security is clearly a matter of social class, it should not be concluded from the analysis that the families of the interviewed young migrants would not want to materially secure their children lives. Rather they were most often unable to do so, as many were struggling to survive. It is apparent from the analysis that the material circumstances of the young migrants' transnational families did influence their security in profound ways. Although material circumstances, such as having enough food to eat, are concrete, the young migrants also experienced their material securities as embodied. Furthermore, as Ho and Hatfield (2011) also claim, it is hard to separate the "material" and "social" elements of everyday life, as many of the examples above show. Material often becomes visible through the interpersonal aspect of securities, such as keeping in contact with family members. Nonetheless, some (interrelated) aspects of interpersonal securities are significant for understanding transnational family relationships. Those will be discussed in the next section.

5.2. Interpersonal (in)securities

Much work has been done on the social networks and support systems which unaccompanied minors create in their new destinations (e.g. Wahlström 2010, Wells 2011, Aytar and Brunberg 2016). Scholars agree that young migrants are often well connected and skilful in finding supportive networks and friends. However, as noted earlier, not much has been said about the role that family relationships play in young migrants' lives, other than noting that transnational family relationships are significant sources of worry for them (Chase and Statham 2013). Although it is important to note that their transnational family's situation may cause worry for young migrants, it is crucial to also consider the ways in which those relationships are lived and experienced in everyday life. Here I turn the focus on experiences of (in)security in the young interviewees' lives interpersonally. The interpersonal aspects of security were experienced in two ways: in connection to ideas and examples of family life in one's surroundings and in relation to one's own family relationships.

19-year-old Qasim, originally from Afghanistan, had arrived in Finland when he was 15. Before this, he had been living in dire circumstances as a child labourer in Pakistan. He described how his sense of insecurity is intensified when witnessing Finnish children getting attention from their parents at school events.

> Interviewer: So, how does it affect your security that your family is away, and you are unsure how they are?
>
> Translator: How do you feel secure emotionally when your family is away and that you are unsure about their safety and that they are away from you?

> Qasim: There are a lot of problems. I get headache. Sometimes I feel like killing myself. When I was 12 years old, I was working, but Finnish kids are kissed by their parents and sent to school. (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 15 years old)

Interestingly, in the above quote, the translator asks about "emotional security" to clarify the question of security. Thus, Qasim's answer to the question leads him to think about his emotions. He describes bodily symptoms, such as having a headache, and that his desperation in separation from his family is so great that he even feels like killing himself. He makes a comparison: when he was 12 years old, he had to work for a living every day. Now he sees children of that age being taken care of by their parents and being able to go to school. The comparison between the circumstances of oneself and those around you was one of the causes for insecurity and ill-being in the young migrants' narrations.

Another interviewee, a 19-year-old man also from Afghanistan, Alavi, describes a similar situation. After he found out that his family will not be permitted to live with him in Finland, he said:

> Alavi: It was quite sad. And I got really sad, because, you know, I couldn't see my family for many years. I would have had to move there if I wanted to see them, I mean travel to Iran and see them only for one month or less.
>
> Interviewer: Ehm…
>
> Alavi: It is not like I wake up every morning and see my mom making us breakfast and stuff. Eee… it was quite disappointing. And I was like okay, I cannot get my mom here, what is the point of living. Yeah. (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 15 years old)

Alavi's insecurity is connected to an imagined mother making breakfast. This insecurity is, as Alavi points out, perhaps strongest at the time when one learns of the possible permanent separation. Both Qasim and Alavi tell the interviewer that not being able to be with their parents has caused them to contemplate suicide. In these instances, the young would really need strong support, but most of the interviewed youth had already moved out of the group homes when they received the negative decisions on their applications for family reunification. The period after leaving the group home and moving to one's own apartment were also the times in the young migrants' lives when they described being the most lonely.

Research on close relationships of unaccompanied young migrants suggests that missing one's parents affects how much "like home" the new country will *feel*. However, after living in the new country for longer, the feeling of home may strengthen (Hopkins and Hill 2006). Of course, over time, these young migrants grow up and become adults. However, it should be noted that being able to live with one's family members when a child is a strong need, and this need should not be minimized by stressing adaptability of the young as they grow up. Some researchers, such as Kuusisto-Arponen (2016), state that the young are "protected from family life", suggesting that the immigration policy restricting family reunification portrays the transnational family as a threat to "integration" and that this view may also be held by some of the people working with unaccompanied children.

Interpersonal securities were also connected to keeping in contact with one's transnational family members. Ali, a 19-year-old Afghan man describes his relationship with his mother as follows:

> Interviewer: So how often do you talk to your mother? Or with your siblings? Do you talk?
>
> Ali: … At first they called, because my mother was missing me so much. She wanted to talk every day, every minute. She always wants to talk and I don't know about what. She says that 'when I hear your voice, I become calm'. And then I say, 'I am your God'. I tease her. She says, 'don't say that'. She is religious and that's why she says like that. I say, 'I was just joking'. And then I was not speaking to her so much (…). When I went to Iran she said that 'I am your mother, I shouldn't have to ask when you have time to talk to me'. I said that of course I want to talk to you, but I can't. Here I have to go to school, have to do this and that. I can't. (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 15 years old)

As Ali's example shows, interpersonal securities are reciprocal. While maintaining family ties incites both securities and insecurities for young migrants, their families also both worry about and rely on them. Thus, interpersonal securities cannot be viewed as being only located in one place. Instead, family relationships are lived and maintained transnationally.

An important detail in Ali's story is that he had to learn to assert independence. While the interview situation with Ali contained much laughter, as he often brought issues up jokingly, the narration about explaining to his mother that he had other commitments as well as speaking to her was significant. Ali had a strong sense of agency in his own life. He had finished his studies to become a licensed guard and was working in this field. In his interview he talked about his thoughts on romantic relationships and about the tensions this caused, as his ideas differed from those of his mother. Like many other interviewees, Ali had had to learn how to live his everyday life on his own, and he had undergone extreme difficulties and traumatic incidents. Nonetheless, the survival strategy of independence was helpful for him in building up his new life. Other researchers have also found similarly that unaccompanied young migrants may have a strong sense, and even need for, independence and agency, and this may help them to survive in different stressful situations (e.g. Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan 2010, Chase and Statham 2013). At least in Ali's case, his interpersonal security was formed in a reflexive relationship with his mother. In fact, it might be that many unaccompanied minors, if they stay in contact with their families, undergo similar processes of growing into adulthood as any teenagers and young adults do. While it is important to stress the significance of parental care or the lack of it in interpersonal (in)securities, the young migrants should not be overly pathologized (see also Wernersjö 2012, Herz and Lalander 2017). Analysing transnational family relationships of young migrants is necessary to be able to understand them as children and young people, whose interpersonal ties are as complicated as anyone else's.

5.3. Existential security

The third type of (in)security which the young migrants described in connection to their family was existential. In security studies, this type of security has been described as a

"psychological need for a sense of predictability and continuity" (Waite *et al.* 2014). Insecurity would, then, mean a state of not knowing what the future holds (*ibid*.).

Many young migrants brought up how their family was a source of inspiration for them to keep going – to continue on with their lives. This type of meaning given to family ties suggests that the security which family offers is existential by nature. Hasan, a 19-year-old Afghan man describes his motivation for trying to continue his life in Finland despite difficulties.

> Hasan: My family was the only thing, the only reason why I have tried and am still trying and I won't stop, because, how do you say it, this is my way. I want to continue this until the end without stopping. That is why I am here and studying as hard as I can so I could go a little forward (…). Eight years ago I decided that I will continue.
>
> Interviewer: You are really important.
>
> Hasan: Really, I have forgotten myself. I have forgotten who I am (…). (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 15 years old)

In the quote above, I respond to Hasan by reaffirming his worth. This strategy was not a planned choice but, rather, I adopted it during the interviews, where people shared with me extremely difficult memories. Hasan describes how his relationship with his family is "the only reason" why he is trying to go on with his life. While Hasan's precarious life as an undocumented migrant in Iran had caused him to forget his own needs, his family relationships are helping him move forward with his new life. I interpret this as a type of security of connected to a sense of continuity, purpose and meaning for one's life which family relationships represent.

Several interviewees mentioned that their family relationships carried similar meanings to their securities as religious practises did. This is further proof of the place of family in producing existential security. 19-year-old Alireza, whose parents had gone missing during the family's journey as refugees, explains:

> Alireza: But I have strength from my father and mother. Or from my religion I get a lot of strength. I use those. I try and I read a lot. Reading helps me a lot. When I read one word or one sentence, for example, in Finnish books, I then think about what it means and where it was said and it helps me. It gives me strength. (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 15 years old)

Even the memory of family seems to have a place in producing existential securities, as Alireza explains. This is not surprising as we know from literature that family relationships play a crucial role in building one's identity (e.g. Lawler 2000, Bek-Pedersen and Montgomery 2006). Alireza was an exception among the Afghan interviewees, as he was also accustomed to reading from a young age. Unlike many Afghan boys, Alireza had been able to go to school in Afghanistan. His parents had been educated and, before having to flee, they were living quite comfortably as a well-to-do lower middle-class family. Thus, for Alireza, reading provided a continuum in his life. He explained in his interview that he wanted to carry on his parents' values of education.

It is also noteworthy that family and religion often seemed to be intertwined in the narrations. All the unaccompanied minors who mentioned religion as a source of strength self-identified as Muslims. However, many of the interviewees mentioned religion only when I enquired directly about it. Religion did not come up in the

conversations otherwise. Also, sometimes previously religious children had turned away from their faith because of difficulties and sorrow. Jansher, a 19-year-old Afghan man, had previously abandoned religion but started practicing again after learning that his family had not been killed and were instead alive and living in Iran.

> Translator: She says that you went through very difficult situations. Everyone has something to overcome the difficulties. What did you do? For example, if you thought of your mother, or prayed or something to overcome the difficulties?
>
> Jansher: I thought of my family. The time that I left, I was weaker. I could not tolerate. Sometimes I was crying by myself for example, or I was very depressed. When I got older, when I became 16, 17, I learned that everything could happen. Especially when I found my family, I became stronger. Then I started to study and exercise. And to believe in something. I pray. I pray that good things happen. I think humans must have hope for everything. Everything will go well. (19-year-old man from Afghanistan, arrived when 14 years old)

Jansher's hopeful attitude was connected to finding his family, who had gone missing after he departed on his journey towards Europe. Instead of having to live with constant anxiety about his family's whereabouts, even knowing that his family was living in precarious circumstances in Iran was better than not knowing anything at all. Getting information about his family gave him the strength to start building his own life as well. Jansher had adopted a very positive outlook on life. He also produced everyday security though hoping for the best, and praying was an integral part of this process.

This study shows that family is an important factor in producing both security and insecurity in young migrants' lives. However, the role of family relationships in maintaining a sense of existential security is perhaps the most significant finding in this study. In this section, I have shown that existential security taps on to three important aspects of the young migrants sense of security. It is connected to purpose and meaning of life, values and guidelines to according to which one lives one's life as well as to faith and hope for a better future. Supporting young migrants transnational family relationships even across borders, and crafting family-centred immigration policies, would be instrumentally important for creating secure environments for young migrants.

6. Discussion

In this paper I have examined the sense of security and insecurity connected to transnational family relationships of young forced migrants. I found that transnational family ties and even memories of family life were important in producing securities and insecurities in young migrants' lives. This research offered much needed information about the importance of family ties to young migrants who have initially migrated to Finland as unaccompanied minors (also noting the need for research, see Anis and Esberg 2018). While young migrants' parents were not often able to support their children materially due to being extremely poor or living amidst conflict, different interpersonal and existential aspects of security connected to family were important in the lives of the young.

Instead of receiving material support, the young migrants in this study often themselves supported their family members financially, even if it endangered their well-being.

Materiality was also present in the lives of the young through embodied experiences of worry about their families (see also Wise and Velayutham 2017). Interpersonal insecurities were connected to comparing one's life to other young people in Finland and to imagined futures with parents, who the young knew they could never live with. Nonetheless, the young migrants in this study had a strong sense of wanting to be independent and even offered support for their parents, especially to single mothers (also Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan 2010, Chase and Statham 2013). This strong wish to be independent and in charge of one's own future was undoubtedly also a factor in producing security. Interpersonal securities related to family relationships were also reciprocal; the young also offered security for their transnational families. Despite of this, and perhaps because of it, the young interviewees were not devoid of agency. They actively sought to better their lives and autonomy, and thus the hardships they or their families encounter should not be viewed in a simplistic way as (only) vulnerability (see also Wernersjö 2012, Herz and Lalander 2017).

The strong need for independence may be related to the high degree of dependency on state systems and resulting lack of control in young people's forced migration. The young may need to carve out a space for autonomous agency somewhere. Being independent may also help to protect oneself from the difficult and hurtful feelings of loss or other dynamics involved in transnational relations with family members. To cut oneself from the ties that cause pain and to reserve one's scarce emotional resources may be one of the strategies that the young apply for producing more security for themselves. This would be an opposite strategy to that of trying to stay in touch as much as possible.

This study also found that family plays an important role in existential security of the young migrants, who view their family relationships as sources of continuity in their lives. Family served three different functions in producing existential security. First, it provided purpose and meaning for life. Second, family was a source of values and guidelines for one's life. Third, family provided faith and hope for the future. Existential security also provided the possibility to see a positive in the midst of bureaucratic violence (see Leinonen and Pellander 2020) of failed family reunification processes. For the young migrants, producing existential security through memories of family may be considered a strategy of creating everyday securities (see also von Benda-Beckmann *et al.* 2000, Sigona and Hughes 2012).

The findings suggest that establishing a more humane family reunification policy would be important for young migrants' securities. Perhaps group homes and other institutional structures hosting unaccompanied migrants, before and after they gain residency, should develop ways of encouraging the recalling of memories of their family to strengthen the youth's sense of existential security. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the family relationships of young migrants are like any other young people's relations, and they may also be messy and even abusive. The findings which suggest the importance of family do not mean that all young migrants' needs are similar.

Unaccompanied minors in this study inhabited different social positions before migration, although the majority of the young were from poor families who had no access to education. The young men and women who had lived with single mothers, or only had siblings in precarious circumstances, all felt responsible for providing for their families who were left behind. Many disregarded their own well-being when

desperately trying to collect money to send to their families. The few interviewees whose fathers were alive and with the transnational families, did not feel the same financial responsibilities towards their families. These patterns follow the patriarchal policies in global forced migration. Single women are most at risk and, in many societies, also unable to work and provide for themselves and their families. The young refugees' responsibilities should thus not be treated as individual obstacles, but rather as signs of global inequalities, which present themselves in the everyday insecurities of unaccompanied minors.

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