The Governance of Transnational Islam: Introduction

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This is a special issue in connection with the four-year research project *The Governance of Transnational Islam – The Case of Finland, Ireland and Canada*, funded by the Academy of Finland from 2010 to 2013. Finland and the Republic of Ireland are both EU Member States and post-1980 immigration societies where multicultural issues have gained increasing attention only since the beginning of the 1990s. Canada serves as a point of comparison as a major non-European immigration country with a federal policy of multiculturalism in place since 1971. In Finland and Ireland, Muslims in the main are fairly recent arrivals and, with the exception of the hundred-year presence of Finnish Tatar Muslims, consist of the first-generation immigrants and of the emerging second generation of their offspring. In comparison with many other European countries, the numbers of Muslims in Finland and Ireland are rather small, amounting to some 50,000–60,000. The small numbers notwithstanding, Muslim populations of both countries are ethnically very heterogeneous, coming from North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In Canada the number of Muslims is estimated to be well over 900,000 and is expected to nearly triple in the next 20 years as a result of a large number of immigrants from South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. In all three countries covered by the project,

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1 The project (Grant no. 1132479) was based at the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki. See http://blogs.helsinki.fi/governance/ (accessed 18 August 2014).
Muslims tend to inhabit the metropolitan areas of the largest cities, such as Helsinki, Dublin, and Toronto respectively.

The project investigated different means by which the state aims at accommodating the needs of Muslim populations and hence paid attention to various modes of minority governance. It also studied how Muslims react to and take part in the governance of Islam in the respective countries. What the articles in this issue demonstrate is that the state is not a unitary whole and neither are Muslims as targets of or collaborators in various state policies. Moreover, even though the individual studies might focus on a particular country, it is obvious that it is not just the national context that needs to be taken into consideration. Both the state policies and the lives of Muslims are very much affected by globalization and transnational networks linking both institutions and individuals. Transnational connectedness may influence ethnic, religious, and national identity construction and related practices in complex ways.3 In the articles that follow, transnational Islam is approached, on the one hand, as an object of governance by Western nation-states4 and, on the other hand, as an organizing social, religious, gendered, and political dimension of the lives of Muslim immigrants.5

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of recent years around the world, Islam has very much become associated in the public eye with conflict and with violence; it is seen as a threat to the national security of Western countries.6 Instead of perceiving transnational networks of migrants as a resource, there is an increasing concern for ‘unhealthy transnationalism’ which entails engagement in country-of-origin issues, dual political loyalties, and the importation of previously existing religious or political conflicts into receiving

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5 Vertovec, “Transnationalism and Identity.”