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Shelter from the storm: Somali migrant networks in Uganda between international business and regional geopolitics

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the Somali population in Uganda. This spike reflects a new development in the history of Somali mobility in East Africa, shaped both by crises and by opportunities, from which sophisticated transnational and translocal strategies have emerged. In this article, we draw attention to these strategies to understand continuity and change in Somali migrant networks in Kampala, highlighting the dual significance of Uganda both as a safe haven and as a stepping stone for upward social mobility and business expansion across the region and beyond. By describing the entanglement of needs and aspirations driving the mobility and livelihood strategies of Somali refugees, students and entrepreneurs, we argue that the historical trajectory of the Somali community in Uganda over the past 30 years has been shaped by the interaction of pre-existing linkages and an institutional framework defined by a mix of donor-oriented policies and presidential patronage. We identify three moments in which Museveni's ability to 'manage donors' perceptions' has had implications for the economic, demographic and political configuration of the Somali diaspora in Uganda: the economic liberalisation of the 1990s; the 2006 Refugee Act; and the 2007 deployment of UPDF in Uganda.

On 11 July 2010, 74 people were killed as bombs ripped through two venues in Uganda's capital Kampala where football fans had gathered to watch the World Cup Finals.[1] The attacks were soon claimed by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, better known as Al-Shabaab, a Somali Islamist armed group. The militants had confronted the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) in Somalia since Ugandan troops were first deployed there in May 2007 as part of the African Union (AU) Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to support the internationally recognised Transitional Federal Government (TFG). It was not the first strike Al-Shabaab had carried out on Ugandan soil, but the impact of the World Cup bombing was maximised by both its death toll and its timing. The bloodshed occurred two weeks before the opening of an AU summit in a venue in Kampala not far from where the bombs went off.[2] Following the attacks, Ugandan and

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international media put the spotlight on Kisenyi, an area of the Ugandan capital known as Little Mogadishu because of its high concentration of Somali-owned businesses. In media reports, Kisenyi residents aired concerns of racial profiling and collective punishment.[3] However, Ugandan officials carefully avoided to conflate security and refugee issues, with President Yoweri Museveni personally reaffirming both his country's open-door policy and the commitment to defeating Al-Shabaab in Somalia.[4]

The 2010 terror attacks did not stem the Somali flows to Uganda. On the contrary, the Somali presence in the country has continued to grow at a steady pace ever since. According to Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), between 2008 and 2017 the number of registered Somali refugees in the country soared from 8239 to 41,234, with 43% of the total registered in Kampala and the rest in Nakivale refugee settlement.[5] This figure does not account for Somalis with passports – foreign or Somali – based in or regularly travelling to Uganda. This increase coincided with the deterioration of the security situation of Somalis in neighbouring Kenya, the main recipient of Somali refugees and home to a sizeable Kenyan Somali population, but did not represent a radical shift in the epicentre of the Somali diaspora in East Africa, which remained in Kenya. In fact, the spike in the Somali population in Uganda reflects a new development in the history of Somali mobility in East Africa, shaped by both crises and opportunities and from which sophisticated transnational and translocal strategies have emerged.

In this article, we draw attention to these strategies to understand continuity and change in Somali migrant networks in Kampala, highlighting the dual significance of Uganda as both a safe haven and a stepping stone for upward social mobility and business expansion across the region and beyond. We argue that the historical trajectory of the Somali community in Uganda over the past thirty years has been shaped by the interaction of pre-existing linkages and an institutional framework defined by a mix of donor-oriented policies and presidential patronage. Somali transnational networks in Uganda have consolidated and expanded in a setting in which Somali entrepreneurs with access to capitals have been able to take advantages of business opportunities, drawing from a growing number of trusted workforce and eventually forging synergies with the Ugandan security apparatus.

We identify three moments in which Museveni's ability to 'manage donors' perceptions'[6] has had implications for the economic, demographic and political configuration of the Somali diaspora in Uganda: the economic liberalisation of the 1990s; the 2006 Refugee Act; and the 2007 deployment of UPDF in Uganda. Against an institutional backdrop strongly influenced by the personalist style of government of Museveni, we thus describe the entanglement of needs and aspirations driving the mobility and livelihood strategies of Somali refugees, students and entrepreneurs. We also suggest that the freedom of movement, within the country and across the border, afforded by the Ugandan refugee law has been a major pull factor for young refugees.

This article engages with the literature on African diasporas in Africa and on Somali capitalist networks, taking stock of the complexity of intra-African migratory flows.[7] It addresses the 'complex intertwining of cultural institutions, social agency and political authority'[8] that sheds light on how diasporic networks emerge, consolidate and adapt to a changing scenario. In doing so, we embrace a framework that integrates the institutional practices embedded in particular networks; the strategies used to restructure

networks in response to changing circumstances and informing both power and solidarity relationships; and the role of institutional interactions in shaping networks' organisation.[9]

The data on which this article is based were collected in Kampala, Nairobi, and Hargeisa, Somaliland in two separate spells between 2013 and 2015. During a total of 5 months, we interviewed 40 Somali entrepreneurs, workers in various Somali and non-Somali-owned businesses, and students with different legal status (refugees, Ugandan nationals and passport holders from Somalia, Kenyan and other countries).

We begin by reviewing the current scholarship on Somali mobility in Africa, identifying the gaps we want to address in this article. We then provide an historical overview of the Somali diaspora in Uganda since colonial times and through Independence, until the implosion of Somalia. The next section delves into three major turning points in the trajectory of the Somali community in Uganda: the economic liberalisation policies of the 1990s, the approval of the 2006 Refugee Act and the deployment of UPDF troops to Somalia in 2007. We then discuss the emergence of synergies between Ugandan security and Somali diaspora associations and trace the transformations brought about to Kisenyi by the growing influx of Somali refugees. The following section focusses on the changing demography of the Somali community in Uganda and on the rise of Somali youth population in Kampala. We then examine the development of trading linkages between Kampala's and Nairobi's Little Mogadishu and eventually look at Somali business networks radiating from Uganda and across East and Central Africa.

Reviewing Somali mobility in East Africa

Despite an enduring academic tendency to focus on African diasporas outside of Africa at the expense of the ones within Africa,[10] recent years have seen empirical and theoretical strides addressing this bias. A number of contributions have traced the formation of diasporic identities and the development of transnational practices in African cities, emphasising contextual peculiarities. These differences affect how migrants interact with local populations and institutions, eke out a living, cultivate social mobility aspirations and negotiate their sense of belonging with the need to embrace, at least tactically, cosmopolitan discourses.[11] For instance, while the diasporic experience of Somalis, Zimbabweans and Mozambicans in South Africa stand against a background characterised by xenophobic tensions stemming from economic insecurity,[12] ethnographies of Malians in Senegal and Congo Brazzaville illustrate the transformations of economic ties in less fraught contexts.[13] In general, there is an agreement on the fact that migrant networks are shaped by the contours of the local political and economic landscape, as Bakewell and Binaisa suggest in their study of Nigerian, Malian and Somali migrants in Lusaka, Zambia, and Kampala.[14] These studies have also identified common patterns, starting with the role of pioneer migrants in helping family members afford the journey and the initial phase of resettlement and the search for a job while benefitting from the 'supply of "trustworthy" labour'.[15] As businesses initially catering to an ethnic market branch out, new opportunities attract more diverse typologies of migrants. Transnational exchanges intensify, with the deployment of multi-site strategies.[16] These dynamics often lead to the emergence of migration hubs, 'location-specific forms of social capital'.[17] Here, a migration industry, made of hospitality structures, money transfer operators, travel agencies and forged identity papers brokers, develops.[18] Recent works on displacement economies[19] and refugee

economies[20] have shown how social capital and access to financial resources allow some groups of migrants not only to better cope with volatility, but also to turn crises into sources of opportunities. There are thus processes of social stratification at work in migrant networks, which, although understudied, are key to understand mobility patterns and decision making.

The Somali diaspora has enjoyed more attention than any other African diaspora in Africa, mostly because it maps, at the same time, onto issues of protracted displacement, migrant capitalism, transnationalism, state security and, in Kenya, citizenship.[21] However, there are two main gaps in the existing literature on Somali migrant networks in Africa, which this article seeks to address. The first one is geographical. Most studies focus on Kenya and South Africa. Because of its porous border with Somalia and its large population of ethnic Somali citizens, Kenya has been the country most exposed to the repeated mass displacement crises that have followed the collapse of the Somali State in 1991.[22] Ethnographies of humanitarian spaces, such as Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, and Nairobi Eastleigh's estate, commonly known as Little Mogadishu, have extensively explored the human infrastructure through which trust relationships are reproduced and translated into business partnerships and support networks.[23] Similar dynamics, although on a smaller scale, are observed in South Africa, where Somali entrepreneurs have occupied risky market niches in the post-Apartheid economy.[24] The second gap refers to the institutional and social context in which Somali networks are embedded. In Kenya, the relationship of the Somali population vis-à-vis the state is defined by the legacy of the irredentist insurgency that broke out after Independence in the mostly Somali-inhabited north-east of the country and by current state security anxieties due to Kenyan armed intervention in Somalia.[25] A view of Kenyan Somalis as a fifth column has imbued the public discourse on ethnic Somalis at large, shaping policies and practices in both humanitarian spaces and cities[26] and rendering Somali refugees particularly vulnerable to harassments by security forces. In South Africa, xenophobia and crime mostly frame the Somali experience, forcing migrants to navigate an insecure environment where they are likely target of violence. The Somali community in Kampala has figured in studies on consumption of *khat*, a mild stimulant popular in the Horn of Africa[27] and diasporic identification,[28] but remains an understudied subject. Demography and lack of shared borders with Somalia lay at the roots of the diverging historical trajectories of state-diaspora relations in Kenya and Uganda. Also, unlike in South Africa, Somali networks in Uganda have thrived in a political context which is mostly the by-product of a personalised presidential engagement with groups endowed with economic and political capital,[29] coupled with the appeasement to international donors

The next section will trace the genesis of the Somali community in Uganda.

Askaris, pioneers, refugees

Although the past twenty years have seen an intensification of outward migrations from the Somali territories, the development of Somali migrant networks across East Africa actually predates the outbreak of the civil war.[30] The Somali presence in Uganda traces back to the early 1900s, when Somali *askaris* from Northern Somalia serving in the British Colonial Army settled in the surroundings of Jinja and Tororo with their families. Mostly engaged in small trade and hauling across the Kenyan border, this small

community of veterans preserved cultural and commercial ties to Somalia.[31] While in Kenya irredentist tensions between the central government and Somali pastoralists in the North East of the country escalated into a 5-year-long insurgency, Somalis in Uganda enjoyed a relationship of benign neglect vis-à-vis the state, carving an inconspicuous socio-economic niche for themselves on the margin of Uganda's post-colonial polity. In the 1970s, Sheikh Abdiwali, a Imam from Puntland, started raising funds among Somali oil workers in the Gulf States[32] for the construction of a large mosque in Kisenyi, at the time a shabby and ill-famed area of Kampala's Mengo neighbourhood, mostly inhabited by menial workers at the nearby Owino market.[33] Leveraging his prestige and linkages to Northern Somalia, Sheikh Abdiwali was able to funnel Somali capitals to Uganda, where former Somali oil workers invested in small commercial enterprises. These businesses expanded during the 1980s, when, driven by foreboding, Somali entrepreneurs stepped up investments in transport and fuel distribution by opening offices in Kampala and Jinja[34] and creating agent networks in strategic locations such as Ariwara, a market town right across the Zairian border and a gateway to Sudan.[35] During this period, the patriarchs of what would become successful Somali Ugandan capitalist families, such as Ahmed Omar Mandela and Hussein Shire, consolidated their businesses. The former started with a car and truck spare parts shop before establishing the Mandela Group, the parent company of the City Oil distribution network and of eight subsidiaries with operations in Kenya and Uganda. The latter gradually expanded a family-run shuttling service between Tororo and Malaba, on the Kenyan border, into a 100-bus fleet bus company, Gateway Bus, finally branching out into fuel transportation and distribution (Shire Petroleum), convenience stores (Hussein Stores), sugar production and real estate development.[36] The significance of these Somali-owned transport businesses for the Somali population not only in Uganda, but also in the broader region, was made plain in 1989, when Gateway buses shuttled to Uganda almost 15,000 Kenyan Somalis fleeing a screening exercise rolled out by the government of President Daniel Arap Moi to determine citizenship status. Uganda granted these Kenyan Somalis temporary political asylum until 1991, when most of them returned to Kenya.[37]

In the same year, the collapse of the Somali state triggered a mass refugee crisis in the region. Between 1991 and 1994, over 400,000 displaced Somalis sought shelter across the Kenyan border fleeing the outbreak of large-scale violence at home. Most refugees settled in Kenya, where the Kenyan government ultimately adopted an 'abdication and containment' policy[38] ordering refugees to reside in camps.[39] Only a minority continued the journey to Uganda. Both in Kenya and Uganda, the existence of transnational and translocal connections[40] allowed those who could rely on diasporic linkages to move directly to urban areas, such as Nairobi's Eastleigh estate, while the others were forced to depend on humanitarian aid. In 1994, the Ugandan government allowed the UNHCR to settle recently arrived Somali refugees in Nakivale refugee camp, excluding urban centres.[41] Most refugees from the Darood Harti and Isaaq clans, historically rooted in Northern Somalia and linked to the pioneers who first arrived in Uganda during colonial times, used their connections and resources to settle in Kampala and Jinja while retaining their registration in Nakivale (at the time, resettlement to a third country was only possible via registration at a refugee camp). That same year, Sheikh Abdiweli inaugurated a larger mosque with an annexed *madrasa* in Kisenyi, further establishing the reputation of the neighbourhood as Kampala's 'Little Mogadishu'.[42] However, while in Kenya, the presence

of a large Somali Kenyan population, and a steady stream of Somali capitals, boosted local Somali businesses, as it was evident through the momentous 'malling' of Eastleigh, which attracted customers from all across Kenya and beyond,[43] in Uganda the Somali community grew at a much slower pace. Daily bus connections between Eastleigh and Kisenyi sustained a Somali refugee community earning a living by trading a range of goods, from camel milk to clothes, within their own ethnic market. Over the next two decades, though, this market transformed under the combined effect of regional dynamics and national policy decisions. These turning points will be discussed in the next section.

Turning points

In the early 1990s, as Somalia imploded, Uganda was consolidating its reputation as an international donors' pet in the region. In exchange for economic assistance (IFI and bilateral donors transferred to the country around USD 500 million per year between 1992 and 1998), Museveni's government launched a series of measures to liberalise the economy and attract investors.[44] Although controversial because of widespread mismanagement and corruption,[45] the privatisation of state-owned enterprises and assets created investment opportunities for businesspeople with capitals. At the beginning of the 1990s, Sheikh Abdiwali had opened the first branch of Amal, a money transfer operator from Puntland, in Kisenyi, allowing resourceful Somali businessmen to funnel capitals to Uganda to invest in capital intensive businesses. Somali entrepreneurs fleeing the war at home and with linkages to Ugandan Somalis promptly seized these opportunities, investing in capital-intensive businesses with high growth potential, such as fuel supply, distribution, hospitality and real estate. Among the most prominent of these successful businesspeople was Amina Moghe Hersi, a Kenyan Somali who built a portfolio of several multi-million-dollar investments in Kampala and across the country spanning shopping malls, supermarkets and luxury apartments.

Although the introduction of the East African passport in 1999 eased border crossing for East African citizens, facilitating the transit of suitcase traders from Eastleigh, the high fees of commercial licenses restricted the number of those able to rent a shop. Throughout the 2000s, given the limited employment possibilities for Somali refugees with no external support, Uganda continued to attract mostly refugees with connections. In 2006, the Ugandan parliament approved a new Refugees Act. Ugandan MPs thus repealed the previous Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA), criticised as 'oppressive and archaic'[46] by national and international advocacy organisation and including provisions that restricted refugees' movements.[47] The debate leading to the new law took stock of the specific geopolitics of Uganda, since long at the centre of a major region of displacement.[48,49] Praised by international donors, the new Refugee Law embraced a development-based approach promoting the 'self-reliance' of refugees, granting rights 'to an identity card or travel document, to remain, to non-discrimination, to administrative assistance, to freedom of religion, to freedom of association, to access the courts, and to freedom of movement.[50] Moreover, the law recognised rights to own and transfer assets, to public higher education, to work and own commercial activities, and to join or create non-political and non-profit associations and trade unions.

The approval of the new refugee law coincided with fresh mass displacements from Somalia, triggered by the US-backed Ethiopian invasion against *al-Itihaad al-Mahaakim*

al-Islaamiyya (Islamic Courts Union – ICU) and the rise of Al-Shabaab as a leading militant group. A month after the AU authorised AMISOM in January 2007, Uganda's parliament approved the dispatch of troops to Somalia and, in early March, 1600 UPDF units arrived in Mogadishu. Museveni government's commitment stemmed from a combination of factors, including attracting Western donors' military aid,[51] boosting its image abroad as a stalwart partner against terrorism in the region[52] and leveraging its leading role in AMISOM to counter international criticisms. Until November of that same year, Uganda remained the only troops contributing country to AMISOM.[53] This commitment, however, came at a cost. On 7 November 2008, following threats from Al-Shabaab, a bomb detonated in Kisenyi, killing two.[54] This event drew media attention to the local Somali community, raising questions on the risks that a growing influx of refugees from Somalia might pose to Uganda.

Reaching out

For the first time, Ugandan security reached out to Somali refugee leaders and elders, mostly residing in the hotels clustered around the Kisenyi mosque and hailing from Darood Ogaden groups from South-Central Somalia. These notables used their contacts in Southern Somalia, where UPDF were deployed, to position themselves as an interlocutor of the government, and formed an organisation, the Somali Community Association in Uganda (SCAU). Led by a council of eleven elders, the organisation was outspoken in supporting the government's policy in Uganda and UPDF in Somalia, as the chairman Hussein Hassan Hariire made clear in several occasions.[55] In October 2009, after fresh threats from Al Shabaab, during a public meeting with Somali elders, Hariire was adamant in acknowledging that any attack on Ugandan soil would have repercussions on the Somali community as a whole and renewed the pledge 'to stop these terrorists from entering the country'.[56] SCAU liaised with Ugandan intelligence and security services to screen Somalis crossing the border from Kenya at the Ugandan ports of entry of Busia and Malabo as they arrived in Kisenyi.[57] Somalis previously registered as refugees in Kenya were required to declare their status to the border authorities and register within 30 days to the Old Kampala police station or at the Office of the Prime Minister's Department of Refugee Affairs. Initially, the refugees were allowed to reside in a city only if they had a sponsor; otherwise they would be referred to Nakivale refugee camp. However, this provision was dropped after a few months. SCAU played both a support and advocacy role for Somalis arriving in Kampala, collaborated with the Ugandan city authorities and police to solve disputes between refugees and Ugandans in the area and conveyed official communications to the Somali community (such as during the national census, when the SCAU chairperson mobilised Somalis in Kisenyi and all over Uganda to collaborate).[58] While using a network of informants in Somalia to warn Ugandan intelligence of possible attacks to UPDF troops, SCAU helped members of the local community to get jobs as 'cultural awareness consultants' for training courses aimed at Ugandan troops being deployed in Somalia and funded by the US Embassy in Uganda.[59]

The SCAU successfully leveraged its capacity to collect intelligence both in Uganda and in Somalia on potential threats to Ugandan civilian and military targets. At the same time, it became the public face of the Somali support for Uganda's leading role in AMISOM. For instance, in November 2012, Uganda threatened to pull its troops out of Somalia in

retaliation for a UN report that claimed that its government was supporting the M23 rebel group in the DRC. In the following days, the Ugandan media reported the concern of Somali refugees in the country – particularly those affiliated to the SCAU – over this possibility.

The gatekeeping role of SCAU was, however, not undisputed. In order to consolidate its position as the voice of the Somali community, SCAU leaders fended off competition from rival Somali organisations, including the Somali Embassy. This power struggle drew public attention in 2014, when leaders of the association, together with representatives of the Global Association of Somali Youth in Uganda (GASYU), a student organisation, accused the First Secretary of the Somali Embassy in Kampala of nepotism and embezzlement of funds raised among elders to support a Somali woman charged of terrorism by the Ugandan police. The dispute was brought to court and ended with the recall of the official to Somalia.[60] One year later, SCAU chairperson was accused of charging Somali refugees a fee to help them register.[61] This infighting to represent Somali interests and control access to Ugandan authorities intensified as the Somali population in Uganda increased and diversified.

'Wait and see'

The new law attracted Somalis arriving as refugees from Kenya and re-applying for refugee status upon reaching the Ugandan border.[62] Somali entrepreneurs from Somalia and the diaspora used Uganda as a regional foothold. After the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as president on 10 September 2012, Uganda became the first country since 1991 to accept the Somali blue passport at its borders. The document was issued either in the Somali capital or at the Somali Embassy in Kampala. On July 2013, Air Uganda began operating between Entebbe and Mogadishu, becoming the second national airline – after Turkish Airlines – to re-establish direct flights to and from the Somali capital.[63] This new route provided an alternative to the one from Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Airport, served by six Eastern African companies and several erratic and pricey charter flights, all with a bad reputation for safety,[64] and to the intimidating (to many Somalis) Kenyan passport control officers. Air Uganda flights soon became very popular among many in the diaspora, now keener to travel to Mogadishu for the first time in many years via Uganda, often to visit relatives, check on family properties and scout for business opportunities as improved security and growing economic expectations started to fuel a building boom across Mogadishu.[65] Yet, as the situation on the ground remained volatile, most Somali businessmen were still reluctant to move back permanently to Somalia with their families.

The greater ease of travel back and forth between Entebbe and Mogadishu benefited Somalis based in Kenya, who were able to travel to Uganda as refugees, to Somalia as Somali citizens and then cross the border back into Kenya. When re-entering Kenya became more difficult, some decided to resettle in Kampala with their families. New shops and venues were established in Kisenyi. A restaurant such as the New Maka guest house recreated in Kampala's Little Mogadishu the ambiance of Nairobi's Eastleigh, serving Somali delicacies like camel meat and milk to an almost completely Somali clientele. Here it was possible to meet refugees such as Hussein,[66] a Somali from the Medina district in Mogadishu who had spent ten years in Nairobi before travelling back to his

native city again in 2012 on a reconnaissance trip. This was an expensive endeavour: beside the cost of the travel, it entailed the arrangement of security measures, mostly with clan members in the country, who provided logistical assistance. Hussein secured the support of Kenyan Somali relatives and began scouting for real estate opportunities in Mogadishu. Given his frequent commuting via Entebbe, he decided to move his entire family to Kisenyi, where they were able to afford a spacious flat at a cheaper rent than in Eastleigh.

The deteriorating security situation in Kenya provided to many a further reason to consider Kampala as a valid alternative for themselves and their families. In 2012, a spate of terror attacks hit the Kenya-Somalia borderland areas and Nairobi, in response to the Kenyan government's anti-Al Shabaab operation *Linda Nchi* (Protect the Country), fuelling anti-Somali sentiments in the media and the securitisation of refugee policies. Amidst reports of profiling, harassments and extorsion by Kenyan security forces,[67] in December 2012 the Kenyan government issued a directive ordering the cessation of all kind of support to urban refugees and the relocation of Somali refugees to Dadaab. Ahead of 2013 Kenyan elections, concerns of a repeat of the violence that marked the previous elections in 2007–2008 drove many Somalis from Eastleigh to Kampala to wait and see. The security crackdown escalated between March and April 2014 following renewed attacks by Al-Shabaab, with the government launching Operation *Usalama Watch* (Peace Watch). In a large-scale security sweep across Kenya, the police arrested over 4000 Somalis, restricted the movement of refugees to camps and began the *refoulement* of many more back to Somalia.[68] The operation proved ineffective to curb violence as attacks by Al-Shabaab continued, again in June, and then in November and December 2014.

Changing demography, new aspirations

During this period, a growing number of Somali youth (mostly males) arrived from Nairobi, drawn by a mix of drivers. Perceived police profiling was a major push factor. Most young Somali refugees interviewed for this study had directly experienced at some point during their stay in Eastleigh harassment by security forces, or knew someone who had. Often portrayed by the Kenyan media as at risk of radicalisation by Al Shabaab. young Somalis, and male refugees in particular, were often arrested by the police or by agents of the General Security Unity (GSU) during security operations, detained at the Pangani police station, just outside Eastleigh, and allegedly extorted money. On the pull side, the affordability of higher education opportunities made possible by the 2006 Refugee Act, capping fees in both public and private universities, was a powerful magnet. Somali clusters formed in Kasanga, Mengo Rubego and Kabalagala – areas of Kampala where the number of private universities have bulged since the late 1990s. Kampala International University, Cavendish University and St. Lawrence University gained a significant Somali presence. The lower cost of living in Kampala and less likelihood of harassment by the police than in Nairobi were also an incentive for young Somalis with Kenyan passports and family ties in Kampala. The story of Abdi,[69] a 20-year-old born in Kismayo but with a Kenyan passport, brings to the fore the reputation of Kampala as a safe, yet dynamic environment in which one would be able to pursue career aspirations. Abdi moved to Kisenyi in 2013 from Eastleigh where he was working as a clerk in the mattress shop of his uncle, to enrol in Kampala International University. His family had

already lived in Kisenyi in the 1980s, when his father – a Darood Dulbahante – was importing sugar from Brazil to Somalia and then across East Africa before moving to Kenya, where he established a construction company in Thika, a town 40 Km north-east of Nairobi. Abdi cultivated the aspiration to study medicine and then move to China, but, after un unpleasant encounter with Kenya police, his father had decided to have him hosted by relatives to Kampala.

A number of Somali youth from the diaspora were sent by their parents living in Northern Europe or the US to relatives in Kampala for *dhaqan celis*, a term commonly translated as 'cultural re-education'.[70] In Kinsenyi they could settle among a tight-knit community to properly learn the language and live a 'Somali styled life', cultivating ties with the homeland and other Somali communities in East Africa and overseas in a safe environment.[71] Moreover, as Bakewell and Biniaina point out, Somali youth in Kampala have been active in 'expanding their diasporic sphere'[72] through student organisations based in the universities in which Somali students were enrolled. In the Somali context, student associations have historically had a key role in animating Somali political life since colonial times.[73] The first student unions in Uganda were established after 2006 by Darood Harti students with ties to Ugandan Somali businesspeople with the purpose of helping prospective and current students, mostly from the same clan, to get practical information ahead of relocation to Uganda and university enrolment and coursework. These unions also proved crucial to establish connections with Ugandan Somali employers, who would sponsor special events (such as Student Unions' Elections and Graduation Parties) and offer scholarships to Somali students in need. Sponsorship would also highlight trustworthy students to later employ, and create loyalty bonds to groom future political leaders.

Student associations also facilitated access to INGOs operating in Uganda and working with entrepreneurs and international donors funding programmes in Somalia. The links of student groups to either the Somali Embassy in Uganda or SCAU also reflected the rift between the two main intermediary Somali organisations in the country, with students hailing from Hawyie clans linked to the Embassy and students from Darood clans referring to SCAU.[74] Student associations' elections held in the various Kampala's universities were major political events. There, ambitious young refugees would display their oratory skills and political adroitness by evoking the enduring links with the homeland, exhorting their fellow students to get an education to rebuild Somalia, and acknowledging the contribution of the sponsors, in front of an audience waving the Somali flag.[75] These associations had also a presence online on Facebook and Whatsapp to stay in touch, exchange information about education and job opportunities, and claim old and new allegiances, not only to their Somali identity and to their clans (mostly disguised as support for a specific political faction in Somali politics), but also to their own university or a football team.

Neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood linkages

This article has hitherto charted the transformations of Somali networks in Uganda by unpacking the adaptation of Somali networks to a changing regional landscape and to a new refugee framework. The increase of the Somali population in Kisenyi did not drain people from Eastleigh but rather strengthened the linkages between the two neighbourhoods, highlighting the importance of mobility and access to economic opportunities

for refugees. The remainder of the article focuses on the livelihood strategies deployed within Uganda and beyond.

Despite sharing the same nickname, Kisenyi still lags behind Eastleigh in terms of size, added value to the national economy and scale of transnational business going in and out of the neighbourhood. The only mall in Kisenyi at the time of this study, the Lucky Complex, a one-story building hosting a few shops selling textiles, housewares and perfumes, fades in comparison with Eastleigh's landmarks. However, the growth of the Somali community in Uganda indeed increased the demand for goods catering to Somali-specific clientele. Neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood trade links[76] developed and were sustained by improvements in transport, telecommunication and financial infrastructures.

The following cases studies clearly illustrate the expansion of cross-local ties between Eastleigh and Kisenyi. The first one refers to Ferdowsa,[77] a 25-year-old who arrived to Kisenyi from Eastleigh after leaving Galkayo in Somalia's Galmudug region and spending two years first in Dadaab and then in Kakuma with her mother, four sisters and a little brother. Despite lacking support from the diaspora, she gained the patronage of a Somali tradeswoman originally from her same area in Somalia, who vouched for her with a group of camel milk sellers. Borrowing camel milk from them, Ferdowsa started eking out a living selling tea (camel milk is a key ingredient of Somali tea) to the clients of the stalls in the Eastleigh's shopping mall where her patron was based. In the while, she strengthened her bond with her patron and built a reputation for trustworthiness and reliability that helped her being accepted into an *ayuuto*, a Somali self-help group, from which, after one year, she secured a loan to start a textile business. At the end of 2012, she partnered with a Somali man living in Kampala to sell textiles in Kisenyi. She received the orders via mobile phone and the payment through *hawala*, a trust-based money transfer system, upon shipping the rolls by bus. She decided to relocate to Kampala in 2014, when she started to trade textiles and a wide range of women clothes directly from home. She regularly sent money to her mother and siblings, who remained in Eastleigh, via the mobile money service Safaricom M-Pesa which, in her view, allowed greater flexibility than hawala.

M-Pesa was the service of choice also for Abdicadir,[78] another young refugee from Baidoa, in Somalia's Bay region, who gained a reputation among Somali students in both Kenya and Uganda as very good at fixing electronic devices. Author 1 first met Abdicadir in Eastleigh and tracked the route of a laptop that was sent to him for repair on its way back to its owner in Kisenyi, who, in return, sent the payment to Abdicadir through M-Pesa. Although, at the time of the fieldwork in 2013, Safaricom did not have a license to operate in the country as a mobile money operator, the service was managed by some resourceful Somali students catering to the needs of their fellows. Hassan,[79] a Somali Kenyan student from Eastleigh, had partnered with two university colleagues at the Kampala International University to perform M-Pesa transactions 'over the counter'. His phone number circulated among students, but he could often be found in a phone repair shop in Kisenyi or on the university premises in Kabalagala. He had a dual SIM mobile phone, one of which was a Safaricom SIM card. The Safaricom SIM card allowed him to store Kenyan Shillings in his M-Pesa account. He was handed cash in Ugandan Shillings (UGX), including a small fee for the transaction, and then calculated the amount in KSh (the currency in his M-Pesa account) and sent the payment to the

recipient in Kenya in roaming. At the same time, he could receive payments from Kenya on his M-Pesa account associated with his Kenyan phone number and then pay the corresponding amount, minus a fee, to the recipient. Hassan travelled regularly across the Kenyan border to top-up his M-Pesa mobile wallets, often bringing back to Uganda over 100,000 KSh in a handful of SIM cards. This practice required a strong level of interpersonal trust between him and other students because, in the case of misplaced payment, there was no way to complain to Safaricom. Often, for many young refugees, these bootstrap activities were opportunities to gain a reputation for trustworthiness, get noticed by Somali entrepreneurs and eventually move to more lucrative businesses involving operations across the region.

A growing network

The availability of trusted workforce is thus one of the factors, along with a greater diaspora involvement from the West and Kenya, in terms of capital and knowledge, that has made possible the development of far-flung Somali business networks centred on Kampala. Kampala-based entrepreneurs operate in neighbouring countries, such as Burundi, Zambia, DRC, Rwanda and South Sudan, mostly on logistics and fuel distribution. The Somali dominance of the fuel distribution sector deserves a closer look. Fuel was initially purchased by clusters of clan-linked entrepreneurs who arranged to ship alone or through other Somali-run companies from the Persian Gulf to the port of Mombasa. These deals were typically guaranteed by Somalis with Saudi passports based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.[80] From Mombasa, the fuel was funnelled to Eldoret through the Western Kenya Pipeline Extension (WKPE)[81] and shipped by truck to Uganda, from where it was sorted to DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. These firms successfully pursued strategies of vertical integration, securing the control of the entire fuel supply chain. The list of Somali companies that dominated the fuel sector included Hashi Impacts, a Somali-owned company that managed fuel storage depots in Mombasa and a fleet of trucks; Ainu Shamsi, whose core business was the shipping of refined oil from the Gulf; and Banoda Petroleum, a freight company that managed an average of 50 trucks a day from the port and a few stations across the country. Fuel suppliers such as City Oil, Hass and Shire Petroleum became major employers of Somalis working as truck drivers or in gas stations.

After Independence in 2011, South Sudan became a major destination for Somali logistics companies, keen to tap into the tender opportunities offered by aid organisations and foreign companies. In the capital Juba and in Bor, Jonglei State, Somali businessmen invested in construction, transport and trade, using Kisenyi as a transit point for the trucks coming from Mombasa through Nairobi. Before the outbreak of the civil war in 2013, some Somali-owned financial institutions were granted banking licences with the help of Somali Sudanese businessmen. Mostly supplying fuel, foodstuff and building material, these firms were also contractors for road construction and had secured lucrative contracts with Somali and other African embassies in South Sudan. Somali passport holders used to fly directly to Kampala to obtain a South Sudanese visa and work as truck drivers for domestic fuel services and heavy machinery operators. Since only Kenyan-Somalis with Kenyan driving licenses could drive fuel trucks across the South Sudanese border, they earned more than Somali passport holders who were limited to

courier services inside South Sudan. However, the economic opportunities came with risks. In June 2013, the South Sudanese Central Bank limited the provision of hard currency to commercial banks, prompting many Somali businessmen to reduce their investments in the country. The decision was subsequently reversed in November 2013, but, after violence broke out in South Sudan the following month, the flight of Somali businessmen accelerated. Following death threats and extortion, 500 Somali citizens were repatriated to Mogadishu by the Somali government.[82] Most Somali entrepreneurs, though, moved to Kampala, managing their businesses in South Sudan from afar but ready to return there as soon as the security situation improved.

Conclusion

The expansion of a Somali space in Uganda builds upon linkages tracing back to colonial times and cultural institutions enshrined in these linkages, and steeped into values of clanship loyalty and obligations. The trajectory of the socio-economic networks that have developed in this space has been influenced, on the one hand, by national policies inspired by the need to cultivate, at the same time, patronage ties and donors' favours; on the other, by regional dynamics shaped by historical legacies and geopolitical transformations.

In our article, we have described the mutual influence of agency, structure and political authority suggesting that, by leveraging clan relationships and trust-based institutions such as hawala, Somali entrepreneurs have carved a job market attracting, and eventually benefitting from, a growing pool of trusted labour, mostly sourced through family and clan ties. With this article, we sought to bring an empirical contribution to the discussion on migration networks, and their relation to immigrant entrepreneurship and state-diaspora interactions in Africa.

While studies on Somali migrations and livelihoods are dominated by an emphasis on crisis as a major driver of regional displacement, we have stressed the need to consider the complex set of factors creating not only constraints but also opportunities amidst these crises. In doing so, we have focussed on organisational structures as they accommodate to a changing political and economic scenario at a regional level. By calling into question assumptions on displacement and exile that inform humanitarian policies, we have highlighted the critical role of agency for Somali opportunity-seekers against a volatile scenario, with the caveat that some groups are better positioned than others to take advantage of these opportunities. For instance, during Usalama Watch, moving to Uganda was not an option for young Somali refugees with no support from the diaspora or in Kampala to find employment or enrol in a university.

A further takeaway from our case study, and with policy implications, is the importance attached by refugees not only to safety, but also to freedom of movement as both an expression of agency and a resource to broaden the range of possibilities and explore alternatives. Despite being among the rights enshrined in the 2006 Refugee Act, this freedom was largely attributed by the Somali refugees interviewed for this study to the president's personal protection of the Somali population in Uganda. Following the 2010 World Cup bombing, Museveni's reassurances contributed to strengthening this widespread perception. We have repeatedly stressed the stark contrast in dealing with state security concerns between the Ugandan synergic approach to the Somali diaspora organisation in the country and the Kenyan scapegoating of the local Somali population,

emphasising that this divergence is the result not only of different histories, geographies and demographies, but also of Museveni's peculiar style of government. That this personal connection to the president is a double-edged sword appeared clear to the Somali participants to our study. While crediting the presidency for the unwavering support showed so far for both the peacekeeping efforts in Somalia and Somali grassroots organisations in Uganda, many Somali interviewees expressed the concern that the end of the Museveni era, whether through the ballot box or otherwise. could bring to an abrupt end the current Ugandan sanctuary.

Acknowledgements

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