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A Shelter or a Springboard?

Somali migrant networks in Uganda between crisis and opportunities

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Introduction

Although Somali displacement and migration within and from the Horn of Africa is a long-standing regional phenomenon, the flows of people intensified following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. Rooted in kinship, Somali migrant networks across East Africa have proven critical not only for coping with interlocking crises, but also for forging pragmatic economic partnerships. While the political, security and economic significance of these networks in Kenya - which is home to a sizeable population of ethnic Somalis since pre-colonial times - has been extensively scrutinised (Horst, 2006; Lindley, 2010; Carrier, 2016), less explored are recent changes in Somali mobility patterns across the region. This paper charts the emergence of Uganda as an increasingly popular destination for Somali forced and voluntary migrants. The recent rise in number has been prompted in part by the increased securitisation of refugee policies in neighbouring Kenya, which has been the largest recipient of displaced Somalis in East Africa. Transnational flows of Somali migrants, both from Somalia and the Kenya-Somalia borderlands, and investments have carved out a trade hub in Nairobi's Eastleigh estate, among other places. We argue that an historical perspective ought to be adopted to understand the interplay of pre-existing diasporic linkages, Uganda's policy framework and geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa. In so doing, we seek to challenge views of forced migrants as just reacting to adverse circumstances against a volatile scenario, suggesting instead that the cultivation of aspirations of upward social mobility through business and study plays a critical role in shaping drivers, trajectories and strategies. Our paper thus contributes to the recent literature on intra-African migratory flows which highlights their complexity (Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013; Bakewell and De Haas, 2007) and the difficulty of disentangling refugee and migrant flows (Linde, 2011; Martín and Bonfanti, 2015). By delving into the way migrants move between these two categories (Flahaux and de Haas, 2014), often mobilising resources through social networks, the discussion on transnational migrants' decisions and diasporas has extensively explored the dynamics behind the formation of clusters of ethnic economies in destination countries in which common cultural bonds are used "for economic survival and advancement" (Portes and Stepick, 1985: 499). Migrant networks can be seen as a location-specific form of social capital (Massey et al., 1993; Haug, 2008) which engenders endogenous feedback mechanisms such as network effects, the development of a migration industry and remittance corridors (Bakewell et al., 2012). Pioneer migrants (Ibid.) are equally critical for the emergence of a migration system by helping family members or country fellows afford the journey and the initial phase of resettlement, facilitating their access to the local labour market while benefitting from the supply of 'trustworthy' labour" (Weiss, 1987: 219). However, migrants' agency and contextual feedbacks should also be factored in to understand the conditions perpetuating mobility between places of origin and destination (de Haas, 2010). This perspective views networks as dynamic entities, simultaneously responding to a changing scenario and reshaping the initial conditions of migration (Bakewell et al., 2012), and seems fitting to explain how Somali networks in East Africa have striven to adapt to a condition of chronic uncertainty by drawing from a repertoire of practices, steeped in Islam and clanship as defining elements of its identity (Lewis 1994; Horst, 2006), while also aimed at the reproduction of safety nets (Lindley, 2010).

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This paper is based on research conducted through ethnographic methods of data collection by the authors in two separate spells between 2013 and 2015, for a total of 5 months. Over 40 Somali entrepreneurs, workers and students, including refugees from Somalia and others with different citizenships, were interviewed, mostly in Kampala but also in Nairobi and Hargeisa, Somaliland.

The paper begins by tracing the emergence of the Somali community in Uganda since colonial times and later through the 1990s. It then discusses the changes brought about by the approval of a new refugee law and the implications of Ugandan military intervention in Somalia for state security. After examining the significance of Somali student associations, it looks at the linkages with Somalia, neighbouring Kenya and eventually the broader region, to eventually discuss the value of the Somali diaspora in Uganda as a geopolitical asset.

In search of greener pastures

According to Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), between 2008 and 2014 the number of registered Somali refugees in the country soared from 8,239 to 41,515, with over 14,000 new arrivals in 2013 only. This figure did not account for Somalis with foreign passports based in Uganda or those with Somali passports regularly travelling to (but not basing themselves) in Uganda.

Although the increase in the number of arrivals in 2013 was precipitated by the deterioration of the security situation in Kenya, it is necessary to summarize the historical background of the Somali presence in Uganda. It traces back to the early 1900s and coincides with the arrival of Somali soldiers from northern Somalia embedded in the British army. After settling in the surroundings of Jinja and Tororo, these veterans and their families preserved a sense of belonging to the homeland based on the common language, religion and sporadic commercial linkages to the Horn of Africa[1]. Following Independence, irredentist tensions in the Kenya-Somalia borderland erupted into an insurgency that soured the relationship between the Kenyan state and its Somali citizens for years to come. In contrast, the small Somali community in Uganda blended into the variegated ethnic fabric of the country. A visible centre of the community emerged in the 1970s, when a large mosque was erected in Kisenyi, at the time a shabby and ill-famed area of Kampala's Mengo Municipality mostly inhabited by menial workers from the nearby Owino market (Iazzolino, 2014). The prime mover in the construction of the mosque was Sheikh Abdiwali, an Imam from North Eastern Somalia who succeeded in raising funds among Somali workers in the Gulf States, where many from Northern Somalia were employed in the booming oil industry (Kleist, 2004). He was also a central figure in helping Somali entrepreneurs set up activities in Uganda or using the country as a gateway to other regional markets.

During the 1980s, a number of entrepreneurs of Somali origin emerged in transport and fuel distribution, setting up offices in Kampala and Jinja and using a network of agents in strategic locations such as Ariwara, a market town across the Zaire border and close to both the Uganda and Sudan border (Meagher, 1990: 73). Among the success stories of early Somali Ugandan entrepreneurs were the ones of the Mandela Group and Hussein Shire. The former was established by the late Ahmed Omar Mandela, growing from a car and truck

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[1] Interview with Sheikh Mohamed Abdiweli, 12 October 2013.

spare parts business to later building the City Oil distribution network, controlling eight other subsidiaries under the Mandela Group across numerous sectors 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 company, the Gateway Bus Company, also branching out into fuel transportation and distribution (Shire Petroleum), convenience stores (Hussein Stores), sugar production and real estate development. The networks of entrepreneurs of Somali origin across East Africa, on which the success in the transport sector was built, proved helpful also during volatile times. In 1989, for instance, when a screening to determine citizenship status in Kenya prompted the flight of almost 15,000 Somalis to Uganda, Uganda granted them temporary political asylum until 1991, when most Kenyan Somalis returned to Kenya (Lochery, 2012).

Seeking refuge

Between 1991 and 1994, over 400,000 displaced Somalis sought shelter across the Kenyan border fleeing the outbreak of large-scale violence at home (Milner, 2009). While most refugees settled in Kenya, where the Kenyan government adopted an "abdication and containment" policy ordering refugees to reside in camps (Horst, 2006), others continued the journey to Uganda. In both cases, "pre-existing migrations and transnational and translocal connections" (Lindley and Hammond, 2014: 48) drew a line between the displaced Somalis who could rely on diasporic networks and move directly to urban areas, such as Nairobi's Eastleigh estate, and others who were dependent on humanitarian aid. In 1994, the Ugandan government allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to settle recently arrived Somali refugees in Nakivale refugee camp, excluding urban centres (Bagenda, Naggaga and Smith, 2003). Refugees from the Darood Harti and Isaaq clans who were historically rooted in Northern Somalia used any pre-existing connections and resources to settle in Kampala and Jinja while retaining their registration in Nakivale as, at the time, resettlement to a third country (which was their ultimate goal) 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 reinforcing the reputation of the neighbourhood as the Somali area of Kampala. In the wake of the popularity of Eastleigh as a successful Somali diaspora hub, Kisenyi thus became known across Uganda as Kampala's "Little Mogadishu".

In the 1990s, both Kenya and Uganda carried out reforms to liberalise their economies. While in Kenya the presence of a large Somali Kenyan population created a Somali market which became evident in the 'malling' of Eastleigh (Carrier, 2016), in Uganda the Somali community grew at a much slower pace. Daily bus connections between Nairobi's 'Little Mogadishu' and its equivalent in Kampala sustained a Somali refugee community earning a living by trading a wide range of goods from camel milk to clothes, yet lacking the resources to broaden their consumer market. Although the introduction of the East African passport in 1999 eased border crossing for East African citizens, thus facilitating the transit of suitcase traders, notably from Eastleigh, the high fees of commercial licenses slowed the proliferation of business activities, restricting the number of those able to raise the necessary capital to rent a shop. Through the 2000s, given the limited employment possibilities for Somali refugees with no external support, Uganda continued to attract

mostly refugees with pre-existing connections.

However, a combination of pull and push factors in the region prompted a gradual shift in the perception of Uganda's appeal vis-à-vis Kenya. On 24 May 2006, the Ugandan parliament approved a new Refugees Act to repeal the much-criticised Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) which restricted refugees to live in settlements outside of urban areas (Sharpe and Namusobya, 2012). To understand the context in which this law was introduced and approved, it is worth mentioning that Uganda geographically sits at the centre of what Crisp (2000) calls one of the two "principal sub-regions of displacement" (2) in Africa. In the past decades, Uganda has remained a place of asylum for refugees mostly from South Sudan, DRC and Rwanda. Because of this central position in a conflict-ridden region, refugee issues have remained very important in Ugandan internal politics. Therefore, Uganda has been the subject of numerous academic studies and policy papers on humanitarian spaces hosting refugees (Dryden-Peterson, 2006). The new Refugee Law embraced a development-based approach promoting the 'self-reliance' of refugees (Betts, 2013), 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' (Ibid.). Moreover, the law recognised 'rights regarding movable and immovable property, the transfer of assets, public education above the elementary level, self-employment, liberal professions, and wage-earning employment (Ibid.) and also "right of association as regard non-political and non-profit-making associations and trade unions' (Ibid.).

The Ugandan intervention in Somalia and its consequences

The approval of the 2006 law coincided with fresh mass displacements from Somalia triggered by the US-backed Ethiopian invasion against the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the rise of al-Shabaab as a leading militant group. In order to sustain the internationally recognised Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the African Union authorised a mission to Somalia (AMISOM) in which troops from Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) formed the largest contingent. On 7 November 2008, following threats from Al Shabaab, a bomb detonated in Kisenyi, killing two (Jaramogi and Wagamulo, 2008). The Ugandan government intensified the collaboration with local Somali organisations and in particular, the Somali Community Association in Uganda (SCAU) which became a key interlocutor of the government. Dominated by Somalis from South-Central Somalia, the SCAU was in charge of screening the growing number of Somali refugees who crossed the border from Kenya at the Ugandan ports of entry of Busia and Malabo as they arrived in Kisenyi[2]. On 11 July 2010 74 people were killed by three bombings in Kampala—one in Kabalagala's Ethiopian Village, a venue packed with football fans watching the World Cup Finals, and twin blasts in Nakawa's Kyadongo Rugby Club (BBC, 2010). The attacks, claimed by al-Shabaab, stirred fears of an escalation of police harassments of Somali refugees (Wesonga, 2011), but the impact was limited to stricter vetting procedures for new arrivals from Somalia and, in fact,

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[2] 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. If they had a sponsor in an urban area, they were allowed to reside in a city, or be resettled in Nakivale refugee camp.

gave new impetus to the cooperation between Ugandan security and the SCAU, which yielded a number of arrests on suspicion of terrorist activities. In the aftermath of the attacks, Uganda reaffirmed its commitment to defeating Al-Shabaab in Somalia with no repercussions on Somalis living there, followed by Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni rallying other African leaders to follow suit at an AU summit two weeks later – not far from where the attacks occurred (Aljazeera, 2010).

This stood in stark contrast to Kenya, where security forces have been accused of profiling and targeting Somali refugees and even its own Somali citizens (Teff and Yarnell, 2013). The security situation in Kenya deteriorated in the wake of Operation *Linda Nchi* (Protect the Country) launched by the Kenyan government in October 2011 to neutralise al-Shabaab strongholds in southern Somalia and prevent terrorist infiltrations. Examining the background of this intervention is beyond the scope of this paper (see Branch, 2015; Anderson and McKnight, 2015a; 2015b). However, the operation failed to achieve its declared aim, resulting instead in a spike in terror attacks in the Kenya-Somalia borderland areas and in Nairobi. The attacks awoke the never-completely-faded ghost of the Somali as the internal enemy of the Kenyan state, fuelling anti-Somali feelings across the country.

Increasingly vulnerable to harassment and extortion from the security forces (Teff and Yarnell, 2013), Somali refugees became the target of a directive issued by the Kenyan government in December 2012 (and shortly put on hold) ordering the cessation of all urban refugee operations and the relocation of Somali refugees to Dadaab. The security crackdown escalated between March and April 2014 when, following major security incidents the government launched the Operation *Usalama Watch* (Peace Watch). In the course of a massive security swoop across Kenya, the police arrested over 4,000 people, restricted the movement of refugees to camps and began the *refoulement* of many more back to Somalia (BBC, 2014). The operation was not only punctuated by gross violations of human rights (HRW, 2014) but also proved ineffective to curb violence as large-scale attacks were continued - allegedly by Al Shabaab in the NEP again in June and then in November and December 2014.

The role of Somali student associations

Particular pressure was placed on Somali youths living in Eastleigh, who were regularly searched and frisked, and often arrested and detained at the Pangani police station and released only upon the payment of a bribe. This encouraged many people to move towards Uganda if they could. But young Somalis were also attracted by the possibility to pursue higher education in Ugandan institutions instead of their Kenyan equivalents. Incoming refugee students were entitled to pay the same fees allowed to Ugandan nationals in both public and private universities. Somali clusters formed in Kasanga, Mengo Rubego and Kabalagala, this latter an area of Kampala where the number of private universities had steadily increased since the late 1990s. Kampala International University, Cavendish University, and St. Lawrence University gained a significant Somali presence. Many young refugees were particularly eager to acquire student cards, which had the same legal value of state- or UNHCR-issued ID Cards. The lower cost of living in Kampala and less likelihood of harassment by the police than in Nairobi were also incentives for young Somalis with Kenyan passports and family ties in Kampala.

The case of Abdi, a 20-year-old born in Kismayo but with a Kenyan passport sheds a light on the perception of Kampala as a safe, yet dynamic environment in which one would be able to advance career aspirations. He moved to Kisenyi in 2013 from Eastleigh where he was working as an assistant in the mattress shop of his uncle to enrol in the Kampala International University. His family had already lived in Kisenyi in the 1980s, when his father - a Darood Dulbahante clansman - was importing sugar from Brazil to Somalia and then across East Africa. Abdi had attended primary school in Kampala before his family moved to Kenya. Later on, his father established a construction company in Thika, a town 40 Km north-east of Nairobi but, given the deteriorating security situation in Kenya, he had come to the conclusion that the best solution for his son would be to study medicine in Kampala and then move to China.

While, in Abdi's story, Kampala stands out as a shelter from threats looming over young Somalis in Kenya, in other cases it appears as a defence against the risk of Somalis losing touch with their roots. A number of Somali youth from the diaspora outside Africa were sent by their parents to relatives in Kampala for *dhaqan celis*, a term commonly translated as 'cultural re-education'. They settled among a tight-knit community where they could practice the language and live a 'Somali life', cultivating ties with the homeland and other Somali communities in East Africa and overseas in a safe context. Moreover, as Bakewell and Biniaina (2016) point out in their comparative study on diaspora formation and reproduction in Uganda and Zambia, Somali youth in Kampala have been active in "expanding their diasporic sphere" (294) through student organisations based in the different universities in which Somali students are enrolled. In the Somali context, student associations have historically had a key role in expanding social networks, animating Somali political life since colonial times (Lewis, 2002). The first unions in Uganda were established at the end of the 2000s initially by Somali students from the Darood Harti clan 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. They also proved crucial to establish connections with the Somali business community, being supported by Somali businesspeople sponsoring special events (such as Student Unions' Elections and Graduation Parties) and offering scholarships to Somali students in need. Sponsorship would also highlight trustworthy individuals to employ, and create loyalty bonds to groom future political leaders. The fact that the most popular degrees were in business, development studies and public policy reflected the likeliest career trajectories for Somalis in Somalia and East Africa. Student associations facilitated access not only to potential Ugandan Somali employers, but also to international NGOs operating in Uganda and working with Somalis, or through the Somali Embassy in Uganda, with entrepreneurs or international donors funding programs in Somalia. Student associations' elections held in the various universities of Kampala became major political events in which 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. These spaces were expanded online, on social media such as Facebook, and used to stay in touch, exchange information that help decision making in education and career choices and to claim old and new allegiances: not

only to their Somali identities and to their clan (mostly disguised as support for a specific political faction in Somali politics), but also to their own university or to a football team.

A Gateway to Somalia

After 2006, most Somalis arrived as refugees from neighbouring Kenya, re-applying for refugee status upon reaching the Ugandan border, while others applied as refugees in Uganda for the first time after illegally venturing through Kenya from Somalia[3]. However, the last few years have seen a consistent growing influx of students and entrepreneurs travelling directly from Somalia. 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 Embassy of the Republic of Somalia in Kampala. On 8 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. This facilitated many in the Somali diaspora - with either Somali or foreign passports - to travel to Mogadishu for the first time in many years via Turkey as well as Uganda, to visit relatives, check on family properties and investigate or pursue business opportunities. Improved security and growing economic expectations started to fuel a building boom across Mogadishu (Hammond, 2013). Yet, as the situation on the ground remained volatile, most Somali businessmen were still reluctant to move back to Somalia with their families. This renewed inflow benefited Somalis based in Kenya mostly due to the greater ease of travel back and forth between Entebbe and Mogadishu, travelling to Uganda as refugees and then to Somalia as Somali citizens. When going back to Nairobi as refugees became more difficult, some decided to resettle in Kampala, moving their family members as well. A venue such as the Jazeera restaurant in Kisenyi reproduced the ambiance of 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[4], a Somali refugee 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 strategy because it entailed the arrangement of security measures, mostly with clan members in the country, who provided logistic 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 Jazeera restaurant had a few non-Somali staff. At the time of the fieldwork of author 1, one of the workers, in charge of menial kitchen activities, was referred to, by other Somali staff and patrons, as 'Mister Congo'. A refugee from DRC's North Kivu region, he had been referred to the job by another Somali he had met in the refugee camp of Nakivale and was a testament of the fact that, despite the pro-refugee law approved in 2006, not all refugees were afforded the same opportunities to improve their living conditions.

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[3] Personal communication from the representative of the Somali Community Association in Uganda (SCAU)
[4] Not his real name.

Neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood connections

Despite sharing the same nickname, Kisenyi lags behind Eastleigh in terms of its size, the added value to the national economy and the scale of transnational business going in and out of the neighbourhood. The only mall in Kisenyi, a one-story building, fades in comparison with the ones that have become the landmarks of Eastleigh. However, the growth of the Somali community in Uganda has indeed increased the demand for goods catering to Somali-specific clientele. A neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood trade (Schmoll and Semi, 2013) was sustained by improvements in transport, telecommunication and financial infrastructures.

The following two case studies clearly illustrate the expansion of cross-local ties between Eastleigh and Kisenyi. The first refers to Ferdowsa[5], a 25-year-old who arrived to Kisenyi from Eastleigh after leaving Galkayo in Somalia's Galmudug region. She first spent two years in Dadaab and then in Kakuma camp with her mother, four sisters and a little brother. Despite lacking support from the diaspora, she was initially making a living as a tea seller in Eastleigh until she was accepted into an *ayuuto*[6] where 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 payments through *hawala*, a traditional money transfer system based on trust, upon shipping the fabric rolls by bus. She decided to relocate to Kampala in 2014 where she started to trade textiles and a wide range of women's clothes directly from home. She regularly sent money to her mother and brothers, who remained in Eastleigh, via the mobile money service M-Pesa which, in her view, allowed greater flexibility than *hawala*.

M-Pesa was the service of choice also for Abdicadir[7], another young refugee from Baidoa, in Somalia's Bay region, who gained a reputation among Somali students in both Kenya and Uganda as being very good at fixing electronic devices. One of the authors 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 his mobile wallet (smart-phone-based transfer).

Considering that, at the time, the mobile phone company Safaricom did not rely on a network of official M-Pesa agents in Uganda and did not have a license to operate in the country as a mobile money operator, a quick description of how the system was informally operated is in order. M-Pesa transactions were in fact performed 'over the counter' by unofficial agents, mostly Somali students in Kisenyi and Kabalagala, who used Safaricom SIM cards and Kenyan shillings in their M-Pesa accounts, to perform payments on a 'roaming' basis. The informal agent 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. At the same time, he could receive payments from Kenya on his M-Pesa wallet associated with his Kenyan phone number and then pay the corresponding amount, minus a fee, to the recipient in Uganda shillings. These

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[5] Not her real name.
[6] A self-help group, particularly popular among women.
[7] Not his real name.

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freelance money transfer operators travelled regularly across the Kenyan border to top-up their M-Pesa mobile wallets, often bringing back to Uganda over 100,000 KSh (1000 GBP) in a handful of SIM cards. This practice enforced a strong level of interpersonal trust in the agent because in the case of misplaced payment, there was no way to complain to Safaricom. While *hawala* companies remained the providers of choice for large international transactions, this system appealed to students and others living on smaller amounts. Moreover, working as money transfer operator was often viewed as a way of gaining a reputation among fellow students and businesspeople.

Patterns of capital-intensive business

Somali refugees connected to Somali Ugandans residing in the country prior to the 1990s were better positioned to muster resources to set up a capital-intensive business or to access forms of employment requiring little human capital but with high growth potential. Back in the 1990s, Amal, a money transfer operator from Puntland, opened a branch in Kisenyi, managed by Sheikh Abdiwali. Able to now raise capital through traditional arrangements using the *hawala* system, Somali entrepreneurs fleeing the war at home invested in high-capital/high-growth and transnational businesses such as fuel supply, distribution, also including hospitality and real estate. Entrepreneurs, embedded in their social networks (Kloosterman et al., 2010), proved able to navigate the local market during a time of economic liberalisation policies following Uganda's commitment to structural adjustment reforms in exchange for donor assistance. Among the most prominent of these successful businessmen was the businesswoman Amina Moghe Hersi, a Somali Kenyan who had built a portfolio of several multi-million dollar investments in Kampala and across the country spanning shopping malls, supermarkets and luxury apartments. The expansion of Somali businesses has since been influenced by a combination of greater diaspora involvement from the West and Kenya, leveraging the transfer of trade, capital and knowledge, and improved procurement of expertise and professional standards.

The dominance of the fuel distribution sector is a good example and deserves a closer look. Fuel was initially purchased by clusters of clan-linked entrepreneurs who arranged to ship either alone or through other Somali-run companies from the Persian Gulf to Mombasa, Kenya. Somalis based in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia holding Saudi passports became guarantors of these deals[8]. From Mombasa, the fuel was funnelled to Eldoret through the Western Kenya Pipeline Extension (WKPE)[9] and transported by truck to Uganda with more recent expansions to DRC, Rwanda and Burundi on the back of increasing Somali transport services there. It was through these transportation and business networks that companies such as City Oil, Hass and Shire Petroleum succeeded and became major employers of Somalis working as truck drivers or in gas stations. Other companies took on supply-side services: Hashi Impacts, a Somali-owned company that manages fuel storage depots in Mombasa and a fleet of trucks; Ainu Shamsi, whose core business is the shipping of refined

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[8] Personal communication

[9] The 446 Km WKPE was opened in 1994 to expand the existing Mombasa to Nairobi pipeline and connect it to Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu.

oil from the Gulf; and Banoda Petroleum, a freight company that manages an average of 50 trucks a day from the port and has a few stations across the country. By pursuing strategies of vertical integration, these companies have grown and become major employers for Somalis in Kenya and Uganda.

Besides franchising agreements with trusted, clan-affiliated businesspeople pooling resources to enter the market, it is at the lower end of the investment scale that Somali businesses in Kisenyi and wider Kampala have their roots. Linkages to the supply line of Eastleigh in Nairobi with low-end consumer goods have created a legal and very effective brokerage service sector whilst facilitating, through a sophisticated transport and logistics system, the mobility of those migrating across the region. Moreover, rising business opportunities in neighbouring countries have turned Kampala into a regional hub to operate across borders with Kisenyi at the centre of an extensive network of services, reaching as far as Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia and Kisangani, in neighbouring DRC where some have started timber extraction and trade.

Recent years have also seen the emergence of a business route between Uganda and South Sudan, where the foray of aid organisations, INGOs, and foreign companies after 2011 created tender opportunities paid in USD. Here Somali businesspeople invested in construction, transport and trade, particularly in the capital Juba and in Bor, Jonglei State, as Kisenyi became a transit point for the trucks coming from Mombasa through Nairobi and travelling to South Sudan. Financing was facilitated by two Somali-owned financial institutions which were granted banking licences with the support of Somali Sudanese businessmen. Mostly dealing in supplying fuel, foodstuff and building material, they were also contractors for road construction and provided logistical support to Somali and other African embassies in South Sudan. Somali passport holders could fly directly to Kampala to obtain a South Sudanese visa. The majority of applicants for visas were truck drivers for domestic fuel services and heavy machinery operators. Since only Kenyan-Somalis with Kenyan driving licenses could drive fuel trucks through the South Sudanese border, they earned more than Somali passport holders who were limited to courier services inside South Sudan. 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, but, after violence broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, the flight of Somali businessmen accelerated. With reports of death threats and extortion, 500 Somali citizens were repatriated to Mogadishu by the Somali government (Dalsan Radio, 2014). In mid-2014, many Somali entrepreneurs started returning to South Sudan, while also expanding their presence in Rwanda, as President Paul Kagame's government's adoption of English as the official language had removed a barrier for Somali entrepreneurs previously discouraged by the difficulty of getting a footing in a French-speaking country.

Somali diaspora as a geopolitical asset

The emergence of these new business routes stand against a regional background in which Somalia's political volatility continues to act, on the one hand, as a major trigger of displacement and a source of anxiety over the risk of terrorism in neighbouring countries; on the other, as the arena in which top troop contributors to the African Union Mission to

Somalia (AMISOM) - Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia - advance their own geopolitical goals. The engagement of the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) and the UPDF on Somali soil has influenced national security policies in both countries, but the differences in handling security threats have proven stark, with Kenya securitising its humanitarian policy and Uganda pursuing synergies with its own local Somali community. This latter approach is underpinned by a legislative framework that allows refugees greater freedom of movement than elsewhere in the region, and by a style of governance that is characterised by a personalised presidential engagement with group many see as endowed with economic and political capital (Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012).

This last section further illustrates the significance of contextual factors by emphasising the paradox in Somali migration and settlement, as the same context that has forced Somali refugees to migrate to and subsequently leave Kenya, has created opportunities for them in Uganda. The development of synergies between Somali diaspora organisations like the SCAU and the Ugandan state has helped post-1990s refugees. However, it was the dispatch of UPDF troops in 2007 to AMISOM in Somalia where Ugandan-Somali relations took a new turn, warranting a closer look at Uganda's sudden interest in Somali affairs.

It has been claimed that Uganda has benefited from its intervention in Somalia (Fisher, 2012). One argument is that Uganda could leverage its involvement in Somalia to counter the recognisable regional powers of Kenya and Ethiopia. Favourably for Uganda, its intervention was viewed by Somalia's warring parties as unbiased, as Uganda did not have a large Somali minority, nor direct stakes in Somali politics (Hansen, 2013). Others have suggested that Uganda would also leverage its leading role in AMISOM at an international level. This was proved in November 2012, when Uganda threatened to pull its troops out of Somalia in retaliation for a UN report charging that its government was supporting the M23 rebel group in the DRC (Biryabarema, 2012). However, an overarching further claim is that "Uganda's decision to involve itself in the Somali conflict was part of a wider foreign policy strategy aimed at managing how it is perceived by Western donors" (Fisher, 2012:405), securing "agency at a time when the regime's international reputation was suffering" (Ibid:413). Ugandan President Museveni could therefore bank on Uganda's long-term commitment and importance as a regional peacekeeper and ally in the global war on terror.

One can, therefore, argue that it is only circumstantial that Ugandan authorities have been unwavering in their support for both legitimate institutions in Somalia and Somali grassroots organisations in Uganda with the Somali population largely perceived - by Ugandans and Somalis alike - as being under the personal protection of President Museveni and affirming Uganda as a safe haven for Somalis in East Africa. As discussed above, this was tested in July 2010 when Al-Shabaab carried out suicide bombings across two locations in Kampala targeting crowds watching the 2010 World Cup Finals. In the aftermath, Uganda reaffirmed its commitment to defeating Al-Shabaab in Somalia with no repercussions on Somalis living there, followed by Museveni rallying other African leaders to follow suit at an AU summit two weeks later – not far from where the attacks occurred (Aljazeera, 2010). Somalis in Kampala were also overwhelmingly positive in their opinions of the Museveni administration during fieldwork in 2015. This is in stark contrast to Kenya where security forces have been accused of profiling and targeting the Somali communities there (Teff and

Yarnell, 2013). However, when asked whether it mattered that Ugandan support was in conjunction with an overarching geopolitical narrative, responses were mixed. Somali-Ugandans rejected this narrative and were more opinionated on the issue while others (not holding Ugandan citizenship but with some form of residency status) were less concerned with the regional dynamics and more appreciative that Uganda was doing its part to help Somalia. Concern – if any – was about domestic relations with the Ugandan state and its security services more so than its foreign policy strategies.

The Somali community, therefore, plays a pivotal role in the relationship between Uganda and Somalis (whether Ugandan citizens or not) living in Uganda. The SCAU helps organise the transition for arriving migrants and lobbies on their behalf in the country while working hand-in-hand with Ugandan intelligence and security services to screen arrivals and collect intelligence both in Uganda and in Somalia on potential threats to Ugandan civilian and military targets. This close coordination with the state has made them powerful enough to deter any attempts by other Somali groups – even if affiliated with the Somali Embassy - from claiming advocacy rights over the Somali community in Uganda. This led to a public spat between the SCAU and individuals from the Embassy leading to a court battle win for the SCAU and the departure of rogue officials of the Somali Embassy in Kampala in 2014 (Sunday Vision, 2014). Members of the local community through the SCAU were regularly employed as consultants for 'cultural awareness' training courses, funded by the US Embassy catering to UPDF troops being deployed in Somalia.

Conclusions

This paper has traced the emergence of a migrant and trading hub in Uganda in the light of recent developments at the regional level. While studies on Somali migration and livelihoods are dominated by an emphasis on crisis as a major driver of regional displacement, we stressed the need to consider the complex set of factors creating not only constraints but also opportunities. In doing so, we focused on organisational structures as they accommodate a changing political and economic scenario at the regional level. By blurring the line separating forced from voluntary migration, and thus challenging assumptions on displacement and exile that are engrained in international humanitarian frameworks, we sought to bring an empirical contribution to the discussion on migration networks, immigrant entrepreneurship and state-diaspora interactions in Africa.

While foregrounding the importance of social structures that enable a network effect, thus supporting mobility strategies, the case here described illustrates the complexity of migratory flows, changing across time and space, and shaped by endogenous and contextual factors. Somali business in Kisenyi developed because of a favourable institutional setting and connections outside of Somalia which enabled the pooling of capital and evolving economic dynamism to create a strong business sector. These businesses benefitted from a growing pool of cheap labour, mostly sourced through family/clan ties and recently arriving from Somalia or regionally-located refugee camps. These workers were willing to accept low wages because they were excluded from the formal secondary market and because an entry level job would have helped prove their skills and trustworthiness to the business community, as we have illustrated when discussing the importance that young Somalis attach to pursue a higher education degree, but also to participate in the political activities

of university student associations. The partnership between the Ugandan security services and the community through organisations like the SCAU, and the engagement of Somali advisors in AMISOM, reveals the importance of the Somali diaspora as an asset to advance a geopolitical agenda. At the centre of this agenda is the interlocked goals of shoring up Museveni's power and enhancing the country's reputation vis-à-vis international donors. A worrying scenario is the end of the Museveni era, whether through the ballot box or otherwise, which could bring to an abrupt end the current Ugandan sanctuary. When asked whether a Ugandan withdrawal from a still-unstable Somalia – now being planned for December 2017 (BBC, 2016) - will do anything to the relations between the state and the Somali community, many Somalis expressed concerns but hoped that Uganda would continue to support the community. This is a reminder that the current Ugandan sanctuary could at any time come to an abrupt end. Fully aware of both possibilities, the SCAU has been lobbying since 2007 to have Somalis recognised in the Constitution as a Ugandan tribe, supporting its case with the argument that Somalis have been living in the Ugandan territory for nearly a century.

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