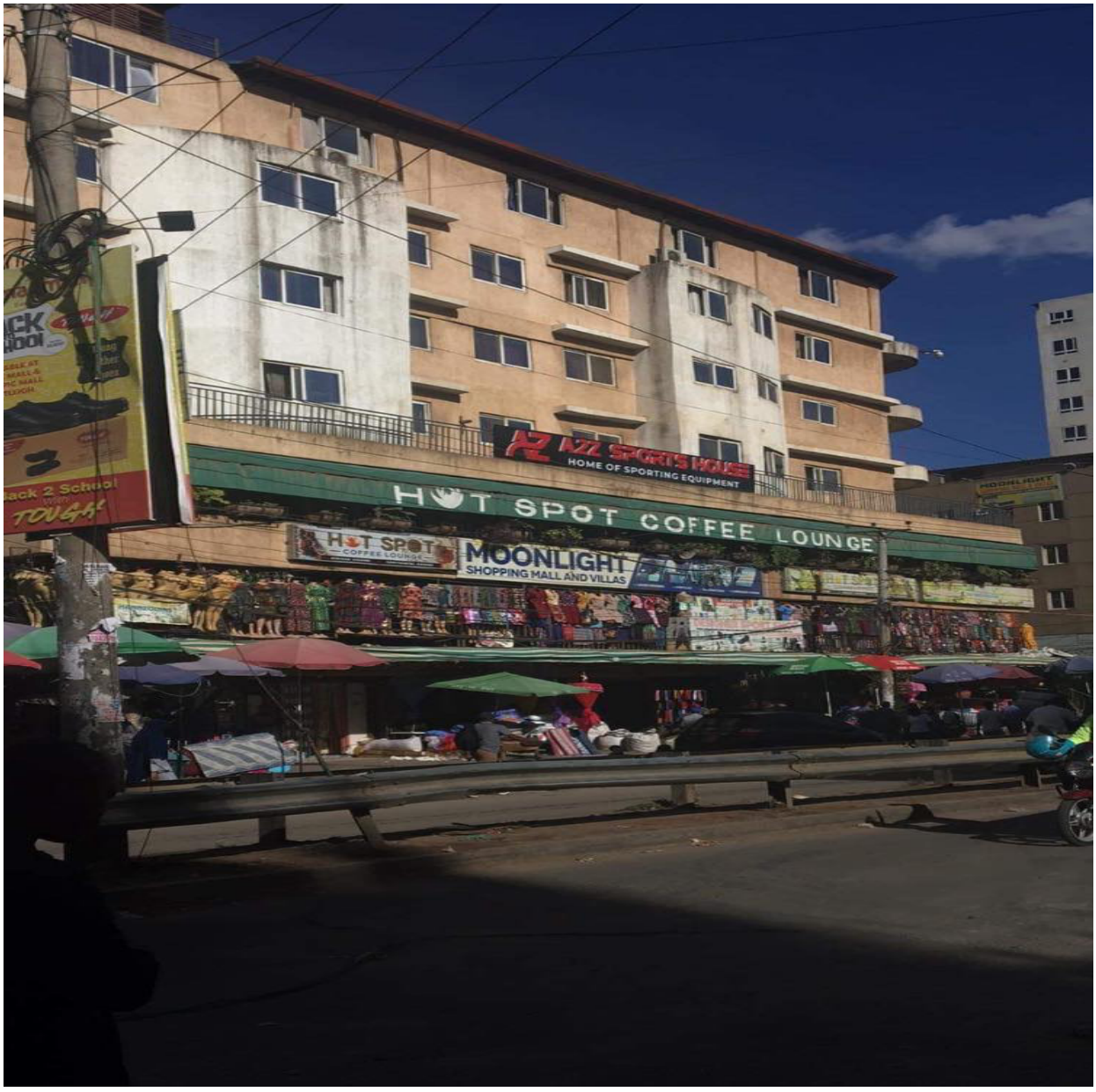
Somali Urban Refugees in Eastleigh, Kenya

A qualitative study on how Somali refugees navigate uncertainty through informal economy and social navigation.



Global Refugee Studies

10th semester Master Thesis 2023

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine how urban Somali refugees navigate in times of uncertainty in Eastleigh Kenya, through the lens of social navigation, social death, and informal economy. By utilizing semi-structured interviews and participatory observation during my field trip to Eastleigh, I met young Somali refugees and through their stories, the findings show that whilst their families are stuck in the camps, the young males escape the camps as it becomes a site of scarce opportunities and absence of resources needed to become social beings and agents of their lives. Through migration and strategical planning, they managed to mobilize job opportunities through established social networks and kinship in Eastleigh which is an expression of how they exercise agency and therefore challenges our conventional conceptualization of the refugee figure as merely passive recipients of humanitarian aid unable to take control over their lives. By escaping the camps and seeking the urban areas of Nairobi, they are thus navigating many positions as they must not only take care of their own needs but also their families awaiting in the camps, whilst escaping social death. The findings of this study contribute to discussions on how one should study refugees and their lived experiences, as such focus reveals that although they are refugees, they are also significant actors wishing to influence the outcome of their displacement, and therefore actively make calculated decisions to resettle where opportunities are made available and hence abandon the stuckness and hopelessness they are facing as camp refugees. Hence, this thesis aims to 'unmute' refugees and provide a forum where they become storytellers of their own lives and lived experiences. Based on field study and semi-structured interviews I argue that young Somali urban refugees adopt mobilization as a strategy to escape social death and become social beings as the camps became a site of 'an absence of possibilities' and seek towards the urban areas of Nairobi, namely Eastleigh as the city offers resources, possibilities needed to become 'social beings' and establish a dignified life for themselves and their families. In this thesis, I will study my interlocutors as persons with social, cultural, and historical contexts capable of exercising agency and having influence over their lives, rather than studying them merely as just refugees. Although they are refugees, they are also persons with dreams and hopes and wish better for themselves. Hence, avoiding boxing them into specific refugee configurations will avoid reducing them to just a state of bare life.

Acknowledgment

I owe a great thanks to Faysal, Ayub, and all the amazing people I have encountered during my field trip to Eastleigh, who have willingly granted me access to their world, stories, and experiences. I feel honored to have been given the trust to tell their stories and offer insight into being an urban Somali refugee in Eastleigh, trying to navigate hardships and survive. I also owe thanks to my supervisor Vibeke for her positivity and encouragement whilst writing this thesis.

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1.Introduction

1.1. Preface

Often, refugees in forced displacement literature are framed as a category of individuals "who suffer not only the trauma of forced displacement but also the boredom, uncertainty, despair, and helplessness induced by camp life" (Espiritu, 2006:411, cited in Schiltz, et al, 2019:5). Moreover, the consequence of humanitarianism in forced displacement deprives refugees of becoming the storytellers of their situations and lives "in a politically and institutionally consequential forum" (ibid: 378). Hence, refugees are stripped of their social and political historical contexts and transformed into mute victims, rather than "historical actors and specific persons" (ibid). When displaced people need assistance, their bodies (visible wounds, scars, injuries) are perceived to be more trustworthy than the refugees' stories(ibid).
Study shows that" even when fleeing persecution and conflict, many refugees can exercise some agency in choosing exactly when and where to go, weighing up economic, social, and security factors" (Long,2021:2). I argue that it is essential to study Somali urban refugees within their context, socially and historically and how they have managed to "turn political and social challenges into unique opportunities" (Abdulsamed,2011:12) by relying on transitional ties, clan system, and social networks. Moreover, urban Somali refugees rely on the informal economy in urban sites of Kenya as it enables access to resources and opportunities to create a livelihood for themselves" (Oka,2011:236) and their families. Moreover, most urban Somali refugees seek to settle in Eastleigh "where the informal economy is flourishing" (Campell, 2006:402), often referred to as 'Little. In this study, I will refer to the informal economy (jua lia) to also include what I refer to as 'transactional relations' which explores how they transform established friendships into transactions through different strategies and resource mobilization to create opportunities for themselves and their friends. The concept of social network and kinship will also fall under jua lia as the findings will show that it is through established social network and kinship that Somali urban refugees can participate in the business activities in Eastleigh informally as they do not have access to formal positions due to a lack of legal right to work and live in Eastleigh. Based on a field trip to Eastleigh, semi-structured interviews, and participatory observation of the Somali community in Eastleigh, I met young Somali refugees and through the concept of social death provided by Vigh (2016) I will illustrate how they exercise agency to escape social death and "the social relations and networks that young people navigate to gain a positive existence" (Vigh,2016: p). Furthermore, their lived experiences have been studied in

a context where they are not under the control and management of humanitarian assistance but instead, as agents operating in Eastleigh. I argue that young Somali urban refugees adopt mobilization as a strategy to escape social death and become social beings as the camps became a site of 'an absence of possibilities' and seek towards the urban areas of Nairobi, namely Eastleigh as the city offers resources, possibilities needed to become 'social beings' and establish a dignified life for themselves and their families.

1.2. Research question

How do Somali urban refugees in Eastleigh navigate in times of uncertainty through the informal economy and social navigation?

2.Methodology

2.1. Semi-structured interview and participatory observation

To be able to collect data to investigate 'How urban Somalis in Eastleigh navigate in times of uncertainty through the informal economy and social networks I have utilized a semi-structured interview method for data collection. Semi-structured interviews as a methodology in qualitative studies have their strengths and weaknesses. Examples of strengths include allowing the researcher to ask open-ended questions and allowing interviewees to respond to freely "diverge slightly from the script" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015:4). Furthermore, conducting semi-structured interviews psychically where the interviewer and interviewee are present, enables a more contextual atmosphere during the conversations. For instance, the interviewer can ask the interviewee if she or he can elaborate or provide clarification on their statements and "[…] if the participant appears confused and unscheduled prompts that elicit a clearer and more elaborate response from the participant" (ibid:7). Additionally, McIntosh and Morse suggest that conducting semi-structured interviews were the interviewer and interviewee face each other is the most ethical approach as the interviewer can read the body language of the interviewees and perhaps take appropriate measures such as asking the interviewee if she or he will prefer to proceed on to next question if they show clear signs of discomfort or emotional distress. Moreover, alternative measures may include taking breaks and allowing the interviewee to disrupt the interview(ibid). Additionally, pursuing a semi-structured interview approach enables the researcher to formulate open-end questions which allow the participants to respond in a safe and free environment on their premises whilst staying relevant to the research question(s). However, utilizing semi-structured interviews

for qualitative data collection "[…] maximizes the influence of the interviewer such that the responses from participants are very similar" (ibid). Furthermore, the nature of personal interactions when conducting semi-structured interviews risks generating bias and fallacies during the early stages of 'planning, interviewing, recording and interpretation" (Stephanie & Long, 2001:220). On the contrary, semi-structured interviews enable an authentic account of the participants 'experiences, behaviors, or feelings'(ibid). When conducting qualitative research, one must be cautious of bias irregularities. An appropriate strategy to avoid such bias is to keep records and documentation of the data collected, such as transcripts of interviews and recordings. By doing so, the researcher enables an external researcher to validate and check if the provided documentation supports the findings(ibid). I have taken this approach to avoid bias irregularities and transcript all recordings from the interviews conducted except those informal conversations I have had during my encounters with various people in Eastleigh as part of my observational approach. However, the collected data from those informal conversations have been incorporated into the analysis with the permission of the involved individuals. Stephanie and Long suggest that a researcher can deploy a technique to strengthen the validity of one's findings through "[…] feedback to the participants to see if they regard the findings as reasonable accounts of their experiences" (ibid). In the early stages of meeting my interlocutors, I emphasized the importance of creating a safe space in which my interlocutors felt heard and seen whilst narrating their stories and experiences. I frequently experienced that my interlocutors would ask questions about how much they should share to which I responded that the choice of sharing sensitive and personal information about their lives, was theirs to make and that I would respect their preference. By doing so, I would ensure their experiences and narratives were shared on their premises and therefore avoid involuntary statements. Furthermore, I would ensure that they did not feel pressured by the objectives of my research causing them to say what they might think I wanted to hear. Additionally, I offered my interlocutors that after completion of my thesis, I will send them a copy. Nevertheless, due to arriving back in Denmark before I initiated the process of transcription and analyzing the collected data, I did not have the opportunity to present the transcripts of the interviews to my interlocutors, to validate their statements, and/or in case they may have any objections or regrets. By doing so, the validity of my findings would have been strengthened. However, as an attempt to do this, I will present and discuss existing literature where other research has conducted a similar study using a divergent method and situate my findings in the discussion section of this thesis and arrive at a conclusion.

The process of collecting qualitative data took place in Eastleigh, Kenya. I arrived in the capital Nairobi mid-February and came back to Copenhagen on the 5th of April, and the field trip to Kenya was self-funded and in companionship with my mother as I combined the trip with a visit to my grandmother who lives in Nairobi. My last trip to Eastleigh was in 2018 where I stayed for 5 weeks and therefore considered my familiarity with Eastleigh as a strength as I had already grasped a first-hand impression of the overwhelming and chaotic charm of Eastleigh. After a couple of days upon arrival, I slowly initiated the process of meeting and talking to people, specifically Somalis, as they are the target group of my research study, and as a Somali, I immediately blended in as if I was just another one living in Eastleigh. I realized that I would also to an extent merge myself into the Somali community as part of my data collection and therefore decided to combine semi-structured interviews with participatory observation. According to Kawulich (2005), deploying participatory observation as a methodology when conducting fieldwork strengthens the validity of one's study "[…] as observations may help the researcher have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study" (Kawulich,2005:9). Additionally, Kawulich suggests that a researcher should combine other methods with participatory observation when collecting qualitative data as it "leads to a richer understanding of the social context and the participants therein" (ibid:19). The 4 weeks I spent in Eastleigh with my interlocutors and the Somali community enabled a strong interpretation of the collected material as I was able to integrate my experiences and understandings of Somali refugees culturally, and socially, and their interactions and dynamics with each other which I experienced and witnessed first-hand.

I stayed in a hotel called Andalus located in the so-called Eastleigh Mall, which is a popular site for Somali business. I spent much time in the reception talking to the young receptionist, named Faysal, who was born in the Kakuma refugee camp and had lived in the camp most of his life. His mother and siblings still live in the camp and whenever Faysal has time and means, he visits them for a couple of weeks. Before his settlement in Eastleigh, Faysal went to Mombasa in Kenya as he had an uncle who owned a small restaurant and therefore could get a job there. He stayed there for 2 years and decided to try his luck in Eastleigh as he had heard from his social network that better opportunities awaited him there. Eventually, Faysal managed to get a job at Andalus Hotel where he worked as a server in the hotel's restaurant and eventually worked his way up to become a receptionist. I took the opportunity and informed Faysal about my research in which he quickly responded that I had come to the

right place in terms of meeting Somali refugees in Eastleigh, as it turned out that the receptionist, managers, security guards, cleaners, and waiters are all refugees. Initially, I avoided limiting myself in terms of who I wanted to interview and therefore agreed with myself that I would interview anyone who was a Somali, registered or unregistered refugee, as Somali refugees in Eastleigh who are not registered by the UNHCR, or the Kenyan authorities consider themselves refugees. Therefore, my criteria for selecting interlocutors were not limited to those defined as a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention, nor did I exclude those former refugees living in Eastleigh who currently hold a Kenyan residence card as these individuals had been a refugee before receiving a Kenyan residence card, and therefore their lived experiences were still relevant to my research question. My interactions with these individuals thus confirmed this notion. I preferred to interview those who were already present in Eastleigh, as I sought to investigate the interrelation between Somali refugees and the Somali community in Eastleigh. Furthermore, it is common amongst Somali refugees to shift between the refugee camps and Eastleigh regularly, and therefore decided to be flexible in terms of selecting interlocutors. When people find themselves in forced displacement situations, they are facing uncertainties and challenges differently and their experiences are different. However, my focus was located within the Somali refugee community in Eastleigh and therefore was my only criterion that they were present and accessible during my field study.

During my numerous casual conversations with Faysal, I learned everything from how life in the camps is for Somali refugees mainly in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, why most young people from the camps come to Eastleigh, which strategies they deploy once they arrive, and how Somali people help each other in times of need. These conversations served as a guiding map in terms of where I should locate my focus and opened a forum where new perspectives and concepts which I had not already thought about presented themselves. Furthermore, as a researcher, I gained a better understanding of the people I wanted to study. As a start, I interviewed 4 young Somali refugees from the hotel I stayed at who are working as waiters and security guards, and I got in contact with them through Faysal and he facilitated the meetings. Consequently, a few meetings were scheduled whilst others were conducted with short notice. However, usually, Faysal would tell me the day before if I was able to meet the interlocutors for an interview. Most of the interviews took place mostly late evening as they were working in the daytime. I conducted all the interviews on the balcony located in the hotel where I would sit across the interviewees facing each other. Before

starting the interviews, I always made sure to first get to know the interlocutors informally and introduce myself to create a relaxing and friendly environment where they felt comfortable. They were already familiar with my research and its content as Faysal would inform them prior to our meetings. I always asked my interlocutors if I had their permission to record the interview on my computer, and if I was permitted to use their names in my thesis. They gave consent to being recorded on my computer and use their first name, however, I am not allowed to use their recordings after completion of transcription. I have transcripts of the interviews which will serve as documentation however the recordings are deleted as of today. The circumstances when interviewing was not always optimal as Eastleigh is a very noisy place during all times of the day, which meant I had to adjust my computer several times to make sure the recording captured the voice of the interviewees. In some cases, I had to ask the interviewee to speak louder and repeat their statements. I consider these circumstances as a limitation of my collected data as I was not always able to hear exactly what had been said in the process of transcribing the recordings and may have affected the interpretations of the data which further may affect the findings as in those cases where a word or a sentence was difficult to hear may have influenced the overall meaning of a statement. I was informed by Faysal that due to limited resources, people rarely leave Eastleigh, and therefore I was unable to suggest alternative meeting locations.

Before conducting the interviews, I reflected on my position as an interviewer, and whether I intended to be an active or passive participant. The nature of my chosen method, which is qualitative, meaning the material would consist of first-hand experiences and narratives of Somali refugees told by themselves, I emphasized creating an environment where the interviewee would be in focus. Therefore, I rarely interrupted when they spoke, and when I did, it was either to ask a follow-up question or elaboration or to kindly ask for repetition if they spoke very low. This meant that a few of the interviews lasted over an hour, whilst others were shorter. I was further informed by Faysal that there were plenty of his friends whom I could interview. However, after I had conducted various interviews and spent a considerable amount of time with them, I identified a pattern and recurring themes amongst the young Somali refugees working at the hotel and decided that I should try to focus on other groups of refugees, namely those working on the street shops, restaurants, electronic shops and so forth. I started by walking up and down the streets and observing everything from the people working in small electronic shops, to the single mother selling tea on the streets, to the young Somali girls selling homemade Somali food on the streets from a small food stand, to what seems like an endless road where at least dozens of street vendors sell the

Somali attire called ‘Dirac’. Hence, people engage in the informal economy. I went inside a small shop selling suitcases and school bags near the streets where I lived and met Ayub, and with curios and welcoming gestures asked what had brought me to his shop. I told him about my research, and I was looking for people who would be interested in sharing their stories and experiences. I spent a couple of hours in his shops talking about everything from his background as a refugee, living in Eastleigh, and the hardships the Somali community in Eastleigh are facing due to refugeehood. In his shop is also where a new category of refugees presented themselves, namely those preparing onward movement through boat journeys in the hopes of reaching the US via Mexico. I also met a friend of Ayub waiting for his family renunciation process to be finalized. Although these young Somali refugees were reluctant when I approached them, they shared their stories of how they managed to finance onward movements, and how it was possible for a family relative living in Europe to apply for family renunciation. Both cases showed the strategies and calculations made in a refugee context as an attempt to escape the stuckness and uncertainness refugeehood produces when displaced in Kenya. The conversations I had with these individuals I consider as a part of my participatory observations and therefore will serve as an integral part of the analysis.
Through Ayub, I also got in contact with a Somali mother selling tea on the streets, and the interview with her was the shortest of all the interviews combined due to a limited time on her end, as the mid-day was usually the most profitable time for her, however, it was also the only time I was able to meet her due to her schedule. Therefore, I interviewed her whilst still holding on to her thermos as if every second she was not selling tea meant less profit. Eventually, I decided to shorten the interview as I could no longer defend stealing her valuable time.
I conducted in total 9, where 2 of the participants spontaneously volunteered to give an interview whilst I was unprepared and had just finalized an interview with Ayub. Consequently, the content of that interview was of very insufficient quality, meaning the answers and statements from the interview were very short, unclear, and unserious. Therefore, I decided to terminate that interview.
Before the interviews, I had created five questions that would guide the interviews and avoid deviation from the research question and hence keep the conversations relevant. The five questions are:

- Q1: *Why did you come to Eastleigh.*
- *Q2: How did you come to Eastleigh?*

- *Q3: How did you get this job?*
- *Q4: How do you experience the Somali community in Eastleigh?*
- *Q5: Do you think a Somali refugee would receive the same support if he had gone to other places than Eastleigh?*

Follow-up questions during the interviews:

- Q: *How does it make you feel to be able to help your mother and siblings?*
- *Q: What are your experiences living as a camp refugee p?*
- *Q: what are your experiences living as an urban refugee?*
- Q*: Do you feel any difference when you are in the refugee camp and when you are in Eastleigh*

After completing of transcription, I turned to my formulated and follow-up questions and the empirical data derived from the interviews and participatory observational notes and scrutinized them one by one, which enabled a systematic overview of the material in which I could identify themes, keywords, and relevant topics relating to my research question.
All the interviewers were recorded on my computer and transcript word by word from Somali to English. I spent in total around 4 weeks in Eastleigh.
I am convinced that my background as a Somali has made the process of meeting people and engaging in conversations easier as I was often welcomed with respect, support, and much helpfulness, and has treated trust and mutual understanding. The fact that I was never met with distrust or skepticism, allowed for a deeper connection with my interlocutors and the people I met and spoke to, resulting in them sharing their stories and experiences authentically and genuinely. Additionally, I hung out with my interlocutors often in their environment, and they would often insist I ate with them as a sign of respect and community.

I used Aalborg University's online library https://www.en.aub.aau.dk to search for existing literature relevant to my research area by using keywords such as **forced displacement**, **uncertainty**, **informal economies**, **urban refugees**, **Somali refugees**, **social network**, and **kinship**. Additionally, I also used Google Scholar and in some parts of the analyses, scholarly literature has also been used to validate a claim or point established considering the empirical data derived mainly from the interviews.

I will shortly provide background information on my interlocutors whom I have interviewed.

Pilot interview(informal): Faysal

Faysal was born in Kakuma refugee camp, where he spent most of his childhood and teenagerhood. At first, Faysal managed to migrate to Mombasa as he had an uncle who owned a small and therefore could get a job. He stayed there for 2 years and decided to try his luck in Eastleigh as he had heard from his social networks that there was bigger job security there. Currently, Faysal is a receptionist at Andalus where he previously worked as a server in the hotel's restaurant and eventually worked his way up as a receptionist.
Faysal was unmarried at the time I met him.

Interviewee: Siyad

Siyad is born in a refugee camp in Cagadeer, where he also completed his education. Currently, his mother and 4 siblings live in the Ifo refugee camp in Kenya, as his father has deceased. Siyad migrated to Nairobi from the camps to find a job to be able to provide for his family in the camps by sending them money. Currently lives and works in Eastleigh.
Siyad was unmarried at the time I met him.

Interviewee: Mohamed

Mohamed works as security at Andalus hotel and grew up in Cagadeer as well. After a couple of months of staying and working in Eastleigh, Mohamed goes back to his family in the camp regularly and even stays with them for around 20 days.
Mohamed was unmarried at the time I met him.

Interviewee 3: Ahmed

Ahmed lived and grew up in the Kakuma refugee camp and came to Eastleigh to work and is currently working as a manager in Andalus. Ahmed and Faysal are very close friends as they grew up together in the refugee camp and work together currently.
Ahmed was unmarried at the time I met him.

Interviewee: Ayub

Ayub came to Kenya from Somalia as a refugee in 2011 with the help of his brother. He came to Dadaab refugee camp in Garissa County which opened in 1991.

Ayub married in the camp where his children are born. Currently, Ayub lives and works in Eastleigh selling suitcases to be able to provide for his family.

Interviewee: Adan

Adan fled to Ifo in 1991 and came to Eastleigh recently. He works in a suitcase shop and works to provide for himself. Adan plans a return to the refugee camp in Ifo once he has saved up, and only goes back to the camp whenever it is necessary and has a travel document issued by the UNHCR which enables him to be able to work and live in Eastleigh. He managed to get a job on his own by going directly to the shop owner where he is currently working at.

Adan was unmarried at the time the I met him.

Interviewee: single mother selling tea

Previously lived in the refugee camp Dhagaxley and has 7 siblings where one of them lives with her in Eastleigh. She is the second oldest and her oldest sister helps take care of the other siblings in the camp and has one daughter. The mother is providing for them by selling tea on the streets and came to Eastleigh by paying a courier to facilitate mobilization from the camp to the city. Both her parents are no longer alive, so she has full responsibility for her siblings with the help of her sister.

2.3. Ethical consideration

Refugees are considered a vulnerable group due to their status as a refugee. My research field is centered around refugeehood and will encounter individuals with a refugee background. As a researcher, I am aware of my responsibility to conduct research that does not harm or further disadvantage those involved. For that reason, I will ensure that I take precautions in every step of the process and undertake due diligence and comply with existing guidance and principles on ethical considerations in human research.

Although I am familiar with the last name of my interlocutors, I have chosen for ethical reasons to only use their first names in this thesis. In addition, the names, and identities of those I have spoken to during my time in the Somali community in Eastleigh do not appear throughout this thesis, although I have treated our informal conversations as empirical data which is an integral part of the analyses with their permission. However, an interview with the Somali mother selling tea on the streets did not state her name at any point and therefore,

I will be referring to her as 'the single mum selling the'. I reckon that this term may carry with it negative connotations, however, it is a term that she used herself to describe her persona. Hence, I will be using the same terminology as a reference.

2.4. Terminology

Throughout this thesis, the term refugee is not necessarily referred to as a refugee as defined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The participants involved in this thesis are referring to themselves as refugees although considered mandated refugees under the UNHCR Kenya. Furthermore, the Kenyan government also refers to displaced Somali people in Kenya as refugees, without clear reference to the convention. Furthermore, I will be deploying the term urban refugees when referring to Somali refugees in Eastleigh as they perceive themselves as urban settlers as opposed to camp refugees.

3. Conceptual framework

3.1. Contextualizing uncertainty in a refugee context

Applying uncertainty as a theoretical concept to analyze how urban Somali refugees in Eastleigh navigate uncertainty through the informal economy and social network it is essential to contextualize uncertainty in a refugee context. The article by Schiltz, et al (2019) in "Uncertainty in Situations of forced displacement: A critical interpretative synthesis of refugee literature" will provide such contextualization. According to the authors, scholarly literature on uncertainty in a refugee context fails to theorize uncertainty as a concept and lacks to provide a clear definition of uncertainty in a refugee context (Schiltz, et al, 2019:3). They offer a critical contextual understanding of how to study the 'lived experiences of uncertainty in a refugee situation' through the theoretical frameworks of critical theory and constructionism(ibid). The authors identify 3 common assumptions in existing literature concerning uncertainty in forced displacement. The first assumption asserts that" uncertainty is considered inherent, or taken for granted, in refugee situations, regardless of the context or people involved in the study" (ibid). Meaning, the context, and situation in which uncertainty is yielded is a hence the consequence of such a taken-for-granted assumption about uncertainty in refugee situations. In addition, the authors assert that most scholarly writings vaguely refer to uncertainty as situations of "[…] hopelessness, despair, trauma frustration, fear, psychological distress, powerlessness, boredom […] and chronic states of anxiety and depression" (ibid). Hence, a contextual comprehension of the circumstances and contexts in

which uncertainty arises and is experienced by refugees themselves remains neglected. The second assumption assumes that uncertainty in a refugee context is “an abnormal experience”(ibid) and a “ massive disruption to a way of life”(Becker et al, 2000:139, cited in Schiltz, et al, 2019:3), where it is presumed that once refugees exit such condition through the three durable solutions for refugees, namely voluntarily return to home country, integration in the host country, or resettlement in another country, they will return to a ‘normal’ way of life(Schiltz, et al, 2019: 3). Lastly, the third assumption in existing literature in uncertainty in the backdrop of refugeehood characterize uncertainty as “negative and constraining” (ibid) causing mental health issue or exacerbates existing mental health conditions amongst refugees in such situations(ibid).

As a student in the field of forced displacement, I too fell into the trap of taking for granted the perception and understanding of uncertainty in refugee situations, failing to conceptualize uncertainty as a concept allowing me to comprehend the context which produces the uncertainty that Somali urban refugees navigate in, and how they experience such uncertainty. Instead, I should have confronted myself with these so-called assumptions that the authors assert exist in forced displacement literature relating to uncertainty and problematized the conditions and context which had produced the kind of uncertainty my interlocutors are navigating within, to then be able to conduct a meaningful and contextual study on how urban Somali refugees navigate in uncertainty through the informal economy and social navigation. Although I learned about the different backgrounds of my interlocutors. Following the suggestion of the authors, I would be able to truly grasp “The processes and dynamics that create, heighten, or maintain […]” uncertainty in a refugee situation (ibid:4). I neglected to recognize that their experiences although might be similar in many ways are also different. They each have different motives, challenges, aspirations, and what they consider uncertainty. Therefore, I could have moderated my research question to avoid such generalizations about uncertainty in refugee situations and the lived experiences of those in such conditions. However, as uncertainty is treated as a concept regarding my research question, it was, therefore, necessary to utilize a generalized concept. The findings will uncover how my interlocutors define uncertainty and its significance for how they navigate as urban refugees in Eastleigh. According to the authors, researchers associate uncertainty with ‘bureaucratic asylum procedures to limited economic opportunities or the political and social situation of refugees’ (ibid:3). In my study, it is not the asylum process that is in focus, however, the challenges and uncertainty produced by living in Eastleigh as an urban Somali refugee without access to material assistance, social and political rights.

Drawing on Grillo's (1995) theoretical framework of essentialism, the authors explain that the assumption made by scholars on uncertainty asserts that it is a state of coping. Meaning, refugees are expected to tackle the state of uncertainty, where "[…] an essentialist narrative presents a certain experience (e.g., forced dis- placement) that is "a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts"(ibid:4), where the context in which uncertainty is produced remains disregarded(ibid:4). Consequently, causing the researchers to solely direct focus on how refugees cope with uncertainty. Additionally, an essentialist approach to uncertainty in refugee situations and presuming uncertainty as intrinsic to refugeehood, shifts our focus away from those who experience uncertainty empirically, namely refugees themselves(ibid). Furthermore, taking a departure from his study of Vietnamese refugees, Espiritu (2006) argues that often, refugees in forced displacement literature are framed as a category of individuals "who suffer not only the trauma of forced displacement but also the boredom, uncertainty, despair, and helplessness induced by camp life" (Espiritu, 2006:411, cited in Schiltz, et al, 2019:5). Similarly, a study carried out by Malkki (1996) discusses the social significance of the refugee category in her studies of the 1972 Hutu refugees in refugee camps in Tanzania concluding that "refugees stop being specific persons and become pure victims" (Malkki, 1996:378), and refugees are often in need of assistance and have been made victims(ibid). Based on this, Schiltz and the authors conclude that framing refugees as victims in need of assistance allows a configuration of the refugee figure as "passive, immobilized and pathetic" (Schiltz, et al, 2019:5). However, the findings of my field study challenge this perception of the refugee figure by showing how Somali refugees can make calculated and rational decisions in seeking where opportunities are enabling them to provide for themselves and their families, escaping the starkness and passivity they are facing in the camps. Furthermore, the findings further show that uncertainty is functional in terms of allowing refugees to 'negotiate their position and establish new relationships' (ibid). During my time with my interlocutors and the Somali community, I experienced collectiveness, close relations, co-dependence, and a collective interest in helping each other establish a good life through job offers, accommodation, and fulfillment of human basic needs such as food. Hence, "people seek new options, cope with the conditions they live in, and demonstrate agency within the uncertain conditions" (ibid). Instead of waiting for normalization of their current conditions, Somali urban refugees in Eastleigh constantly seek and negotiate their position in the Somali community where they attempt to establish a dignified livelihood for themselves and their families through the informal economy and social network. The authors

argue that researchers must avoid taking on an essentialism approach to studying uncertainty in refugee situations, as it leaves out a nuanced perceptive on how the context in which uncertainty is produced and the experiences of refugees themselves. We must challenge our assumptions through the lens of critical and constructivist theoretical frameworks, by shifting our focus to the empirical study of the experiences and narratives of refugees, through 'ethnographic, long-term engagements with forcibly people' (ibid:7), which I have done by spending time with my interlocutors and provided a forum essentializing their lived experiences and stories.

3.2. Social death

To analyze how Somali urban refugees navigate in times of uncertainty through social navigation, I will utilize Vigh's (2016) concept of 'social death' as contextualized in his article on how youths in Guinea navigate social positions in times of war and conflict, and 'how young urban men through mobilization, aspire to realize social beings and escape 'social death' (Vigh,2016:33). By doing so, it will help understand the choices of the young men I met and interviewed why they choose to leave the camps to settle in Eastleigh and how the uncertainty they are facing as urban refugees has implication for their identity as young Somali males and in their journey of social becoming's through social network and kinship to escape social death. Hence, the concept of social death provided by Vigh (2016) will provide an analytical framework for exploring how they exercise agency to escape social death. In other words, "the social relations and networks that young people navigate to gain a positive existence" (Vigh,2016: p). First, I must provide an understanding of 'social death' and define 'youth' as explained by Vigh in his article 'Social death and violent life chances'. In C Christiansen, M. Utas and H.E. Vigh (eds) Navigating youth, generating adulthood: Social becoming in an African context. According to Vigh, the concept of 'social death' can be described as "[…] an absence of the possibility of worthy life" (ibid:45, cited in Hage, 2003:132). Based on the interviews and interactions with Ayub, Mohamed, Siyad, Ahmed, and the other young Somali urban refugees, I was able to understand what such absence of possibility entails and means for them, and how they adopt strategies to mobilize and access resources and opportunities made unavailable to them due to their social status as refugees in Nairobi. In the context of his study on youths in Bissau, Vigh defines youth as "what youths can do" (ibid: p) and contingent on the "[…] social-political factors, on the space of possibilities afforded the specific group of you in question, and on their possibilities of

building and maintaining lives independently […] (ibid:). In this context, mobilization becomes a strategy for the youths in Bissau as a strategy to escape 'social death¨. Correspondingly, the Somali youths also adopted mobilization as a strategy to escape the refugee camps as the camps became a site of 'an absence of possibilities' and seek towards the urban areas of Nairobi, namely Eastleigh as the city offers resources, possibilities needed to become 'social beings' and establish a dignified life for themselves and their families. Hence, I will explore how young Somali youths maneuver in the process of escaping social death in Eastleigh as urban refugees through social networks and kinship. I will also illustrate how they define social death and what such absence of social death entails.

3.3. Agency

As I sought to scrutinize how and in which ways young men exercise agency, it is essential to first define its meaning. According to Long (2021)," Even when fleeing persecution and conflict, many refugees can exercise some agency in choosing exactly when and where to go, weighing up economic, social, and security factors" (Long,2021: p), which illustrates that even when people find themselves displaced, they are still capable of exercise agency and taking control over their lives. In this thesis, I will be referring to an agency based on Tan's (2011) definition which is the "[…] individuals' judgments, decisions, and actions […] in social life" (Tan,2021:37) and their ability to "[…] plan, define, understand, organize, and execute their actions" (ibid:38). Therefore, through semi-structured interviews, I will uncover how they take control over their lives in times of uncertainty associated with the forced displacement and understand their motivations, choices, actions, decisions, and judgment as an attempt to escape social death as displaced people far from their motherland. In this thesis, I will study my interlocutors as persons with social, cultural, and historical contexts capable of exercising agency and having influence over their lives, rather than studying them merely as just refugees. Although they are refugees, they are also persons with dreams and hopes to wish better for themselves and are willing to actively become just that. Hence, avoiding boxing them into specific refugee configurations will avoid reducing them to just a state of bare life.

3.4. Informal economy (*jua lia*)

In her article '*Unlikely Cities In The Desert: The Informal Economy As Causal Agent For Permanent Urban" Sustainability In Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya'*, Oka(2011), a

definition of informal economy may differ depending on the context, however in Kenya, informal economy, also referred to as '*jua lia'* can be described as " […] all small-scale activities that are normally semi-organized and unregulated, and use simple labor-intensive technology undertaken by artisans, traders, and operators in work-sites such as open yards, mark stalls, undeveloped plots, residential houses, and street pavements[…]"(Oka, 2011:237). Similarly, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization(ILO), the Federation of Kenyan Employers(FKE) characterize jua lia as " […] those activities carried out in open worksites in which individuals are exposed to harsh conditions such as hot sun, dust and rain"(FKE,2021:11), and the usage of "[…] vocational skills, use of low and simple technologies, low capital investment, limited job security, and therefor lacks a clear national criterion" (ibid). According to Campell (2005), the successful presence of *jua lia* in Eastleigh dominated by Somali refugees and migrants is unwelcomed by the Kenyan government which regularly threatens to send them back to the camps when discovered working in Eastleigh. However, one can argue that is it not in the interest of the Kenyan government to remove all Somali refugees and close their business in Eastleigh as it "[…] would result in an economic catastrophe, so firmly entrenched are they into the fabric of the city "(Campell,2005:27). Based on this, Campell further argues that pursuing local integration for Somali urban refugees, meaning, allowing them to work and settle legally in Eastleigh, would be the best solution, as most of them have lived there for many years and "[…] firmly entrenched in transnational trade network and are there to stay" (ibid). In the case of my interlocutors *jua lia* enables access to resources and opportunists to create a livelihood for themselves and "[…]" (Oka,2011:236) and their families. In this study, I will refer to *jua lia* to also include what I refer to as 'transactional relations' which explores how they transform established friendships into transactions through different strategies and resource mobilization to create opportunities for themselves and their friends. The concept of social network and kinship will also fall under *jua lia* as the findings will show that it is through established social network and kinship that my interlocutors can participate in the business activities in Eastleigh informally as they do not have access to formal positions due to a legal right to work and live in Eastleigh.

4. Background

4.1. Somali refugees in Kenya

As a response to the 1991 civil war in Somalia where thousands of Somali refugees became displacement in Kenya, the first refugee camp was established. Namely, the Dadaab refugee camp. In addition, due to famine and drought, the number of refugees seeking the Kenyan border increased to over 130.000. The so-called 'Dadaab refugee complex' consists of three camps, Dagahaley, Ifo, and Hagadera, where Dagahaley and Ifo are established in the area district of Lagdera in Dadaab, and Ifo in the Fafi district, near Dadaab (UNHCR, Kenya). Moreover, in 1992, the UNHCR established the Kakuma refugee camp as a response to the "Lost Boys of Sudan", a term referring to the mass influx of young boys from South Sudan due to the civil war in 1987. The following year, the Kakuma refugee camp hosted groups of Somali and Ethiopian refugees, due to security instabilities and civil war in their respective countries. The Kakuma refugee is found in the North-Western region of Kenya in the district of Turkana County. According to a statistic by Kenya and the UNHCR as of January 2023 on 'Registered refugees and asylum-seekers, there are currently estimated 226,081 Somali refugees in Dadaab refugee camp, 38,986 in Kakuma, and approximately 23,691 in the urban areas of Kenya, including Nairobi (UNHCR Kenya, 2023:2). However, the number may be higher as the statistics do not include Somali refugees not officially registered by the UNHCR, and those arriving to Nairobi directly from Somalia circumventing the camps.
My interlocutors have previously been encamped in Ifo, Kakuma, and Dadaab refugee camps.

Kenya is a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) however lacks official legislation on refugee policy nationally. Instead, Kenya practice and implement "ad hoc policies and existing immigration law to address refugee issues" (Campell, 2006:399). In addition, a premise for the Kenyan acceptance of the mass refugee influx from the beginning of 1991, included a strict encampment policy, requiring refugees to stay away from the urban areas of Kenya (ibid:). The Kenyan government's unwelcoming attitude expressed in their encamp policy has not always prevailed until recently. For instance, Ugandan refugees in Kenya in 1988 were granted the right to work and live in the city, granted access to educational institutions, and allowed local integration. This kind of welcoming attitude towards the Ugandan refugees has shifted as a result of the overwhelming increase of Somali and Sudanese refugees in 1991, which burden the Kenyan government's ability to refugee protection and therefore "[…] resulting in its collapse and the eventual withdrawal of Kenyan authorities from all refugee affairs" (ibid). Today, Somali refugees who are defined as so-called mandate refugees by the UNHCR, do not enjoy such

rights, as they are prohibited from coming near the city and must stay in the camps(ibid). Furthermore, the legal status of Somali camp refugees makes them dependent on the UNHCR for basic needs such as food and shelter. However, once leaving the camps Somali refugees do not have a right to assistance in any form due to the encampment policy. Despite the safety net provided by the UNHCR for humanitarian assistance, Somali refugees continuously abandon the camps to establish a new life in Nairobi by taking a bus directly to Nairobi and bribing police officers at the checkpoints(ibid). Hence, the mobility of camp refugees is enabled by corrupt policemen, accessible modes of transportation, and financial means. Additionally, it is contested that urban refugees have established a lucrative business of transporting camp refugees to the city with a so-called 'matatu' (a small minibus) financed by remittance sent by transnational kinship or social network (Campell,2006:404). Based on this, it is evident that escaping the camps and seek towards the city is not an impossible task.

4.2. 'Little Mogadishu'

Most urban Somali refugees seek to settle in Eastleigh "where the informal economy is flourishing" (Campell, 2006:402), and is often referred to as 'Little Mogadishu' and most of the inhabitants are of Somali origin(ibid), and very poor (Abdulsamed, 2011:6). According to Abdulsamed, the successful business activates in Eastleigh has challenged the perception of them by the Kenyan government as an economic burden. Instead, urban Somali refugees have proven to contribute immensely to the Kenyan economy and hence become an asset rather than a burden. However, the successful business activities by Somali through informal economies in Eastleigh has not been supported by Kenyans and Asian enterprise as many Kenyans who have lived most of their lives in Eastleigh has been forced to move into "neighboring slums' as they can no longer afford increased housing prices and Asian shops forced out of business (Abdulsamed,2011:3). Abdulsamed further asserts that two distinct groups of Somali can be found in Eastleigh, the poor and wealthy. The first group is operating within the informal economy by taking jobs such as waiters, street vendors, and security guards, where they rely heavily on the mercy of social networks and kinship in Eastleigh as they are often urban refugees without access to formal positions and legal protection once leaving the camps. Similarly, wealthy Somalis also rely on "[…] clan, or kinship networks of trust in their business dealings" (ibid:6) and engage in business in the formal sector such as "hotels, real estate, and transportation industries(ibid) and high-rise apartment buildings. The author further establishes that Somali refugees in Eastleigh have

successfully started a business within ‘commercial centers and residential outlets’ by relying on financial support from diasporic kinship and hence became an integral part of the formal economy and shifted away from engaging in business informally. Examples include the notorious Garissa Lodge, Amal Shopping Plaza, and Eastleigh Mall (ibid:7). Hence, Somalis in Eastleigh have managed to “turn political and social challenges into unique opportunities” (ibid:12) by relying on transitional ties, clan system, and social networks.

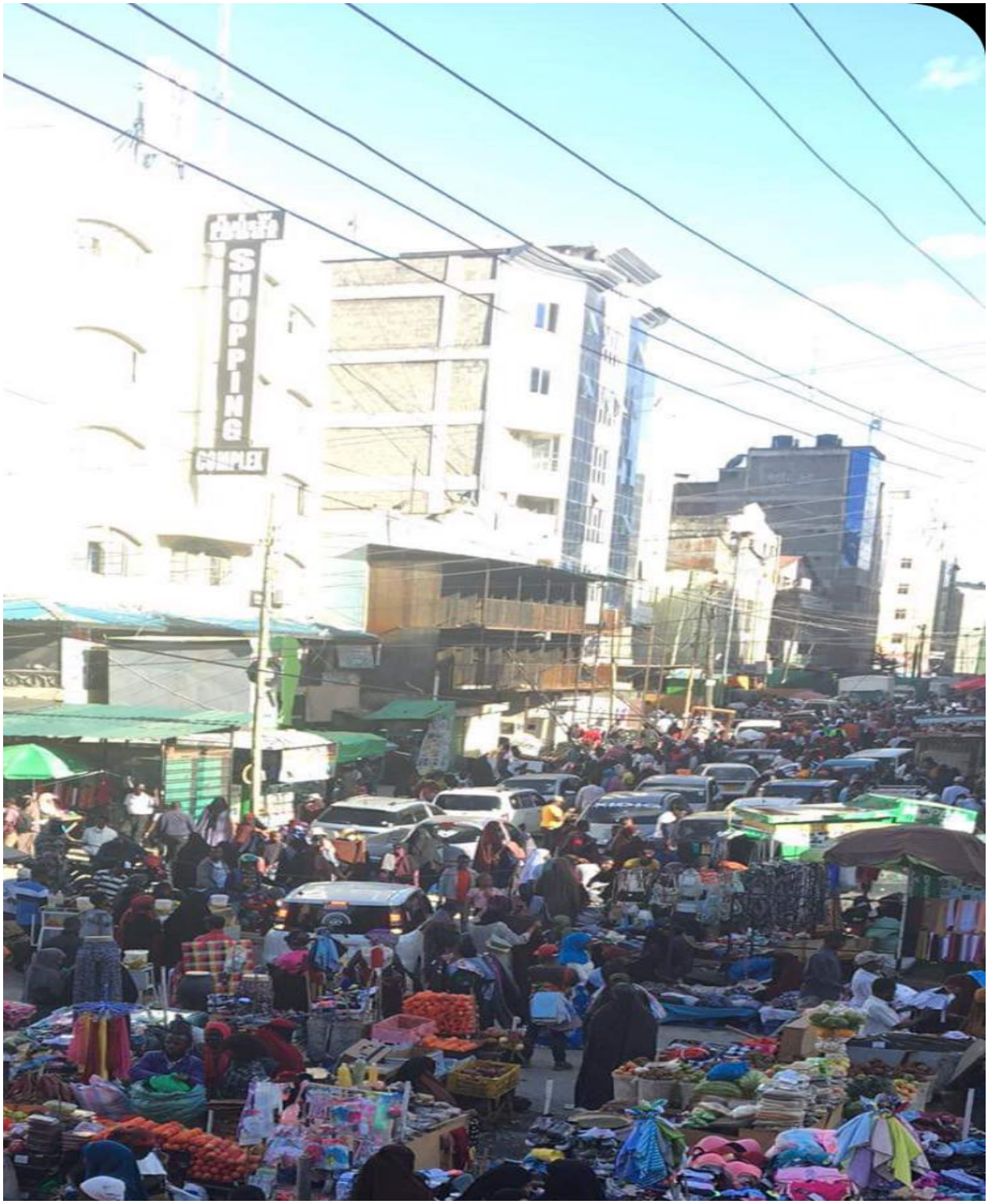

Figure 1. *Somewhere in Eastleigh*

5. Analysis

5.1. Dehistorization of the refugee figure in humanitarianism

The consequence of humanitarianism results in depriving the refugee figure of becoming the storytellers of their situations and life "in a politically and institutionally consequential forum" (ibid: 378). Hence, refugees are stripped of their social and political historical contexts and transformed into mute victims, rather than "historical actors and specific persons" (ibid). She further argues that when displaced people need assistance, their bodies (visible wounds, scars, injuries) are perceived to be more trustworthy than the refugees' stories. Hence, the refugee's visible physical suffering is made the epitome of the refugee figure. Based on this, those providing humanitarian assistance in the field of displacement create an environment where a process of 'dehistorization' takes place where "[…] refugees stop being specific persons and become pure victims" (Malkki, 1996:378). For example, the administration in the camps in charge of the refugee camps in Tanzania (TCRS or UNHCR) often regarded the refugees in the camps as dishonest, exaggerated, and untrustworthy, and therefore had to be cared for(ibid:379). In her study, Malkki takes a point of departure from "the biographical and social circumstances" of camp refugees in Kigoma and town refugees in Mishamo Tanzania, showing that although the camp refugees and town refugees have similar cultural and historical backgrounds due to having lived in Burundi before fleeing to Tanzania as refugees, their displacement experiences differed to a great extent(ibid). For instance, whereas the camp refugees "[…] heroized or positively valued aspect of one's social person "(ibid:379) where a refugee status was perceived as a positive bringing with it prominent advantages, the town refugees perceived such status as an "[…] liability than a protective or positive status" (ibid:380". Consequently, the lived experiences of the displaced may differ, despite sharing social and historical similarities. The stories of the Somali refugees in my field study shows that although they too share cultural and religious similarities, they each must be studied and understood as an individual with different "political, historical and cultural context" whilst navigating uncertainty as urban refugees in Eastleigh. Furthermore, their lived experiences have been studied in a context where they are not under the control and management of humanitarian assistance but instead, as agents operating within Eastleigh where such assistance is not available.

5.2. Why do Somali camp refugees seek towards Eastleigh?

Based on the interviews and informal conversations with Faysal, factors such as job insecurity, kinship, and established social networks play a significant role in deciding where to settle. For instance, a friend who is already established in Eastleigh will call his friend who lives in the refugee camps informing him or her about a job opportunity or offered a position by a relative who owns a shop or restaurant in Eastleigh. When I asked my interlocutors why they came to Eastleigh their response was akin to a great extent:

"I came to Nairobi to work so I can assist my siblings who live in the refugee camp and send money to them" – Siyad.

" I came to Eastleigh out of necessity because I have a family who needs me, who lives in the refugee camp. I was brought here due to the struggles I was facing in the refugee camp. That's the reason why I came" – Mohamed.

"There is a lack of security in the refugee camps […]. The reason why we come here is to help our people and establish a good life for ourselves" – Ahmed (see appendix A)

Although the UNHCR Kenya provides shelter and food in the camps, Somali camp refugees are willingly risking such relief by seeking Nairobi as the city "[…] offer refugees the opportunity to subsist, find succor, and exercise some agency amid significant constraints" (Palmgreen, 2017: p). Moreover, individuals receiving a job offer from a friend must pursue alternative strategies to reach Nairobi. A strategy that is frequently utilized is to apply for a travel document from the UNHCR which will facilitate movement from the camps to the city. Travel documents can be issued for medical or personal reasons. For instance, a sick relative whom you must visit or need medical treatment in a hospital located in Nairobi. The duration of a travel document ranges between one and two months and can be extended multiple times. Additionally, I was informed that UNHCR Kenya generously extends travel documents in many cases hence enabling movement from the camps to the city.
The increasing development of an onward movement of Somali camp refugees seeking to settle in the urban cities of Nairobi has created a reconfiguration of the refugee figure, namely the 'economic refugee'. In earlier times, negative and degrading terms were often connotated when speaking of urban refugees and considered an economic burden by the Kenyan authorities. Today, the perception of urban refugees amongst Kenyans and the Kenyan government has shifted towards a more pragmatic perception and is considered as "[…] strong economic competitors pushing out local business and taking jobs away from Kenyans" (Campbell, 2006:402). Moreover, although camp refugees are prohibited by the Kenyan

authorities to seek towards the city as they are perceived to be an 'economic burden' (Campbell, 2006:397) an increasing number of Somali camp refugees defy the strict encampment policy by abandoning the camps in the hopes of finding a better life in Eastleigh. Moreover, attempts of searching for relatives in Eastleigh are made as relatives can serve as a support system in terms of providing basic human needs such as shelter and meals whilst the young man or woman tries to search for jobs. On the contrary, those without a support system are facing living life on the streets leaving them with very little prospect of earning money which will make financial support to their family in the camps plausible. Based on my interviews, most of the young Somali refugees managed to acquire a job through a friend or a relative in Eastleigh:

When I came to town, there was a friend of my family and, he called me, and he picked me up in a car and took me to his home. He helped me with everything, with food, accommodation, and I stayed with him until I was able to find a job" - Ahmed.

" I got this job through a friend who used to work at this same hotel where he also used to work as a waitress in the restaurant's department.
He brought me to the hotel and introduced me, he supported me a lot as I didn't know much about this kind of work […]" – Siyad.

"I got this job through a friend who was granted a visa to Canada with a Kenyan passport. He was not a refugee. Somali refugees and Somali-Kenyan coexist. He then called me and said," Friend, come and work for me in my shop. ". Leave the refugee camp and come here (Eastleigh) and use your capacity to work in the shop. He called me whilst I was in the camp. Of course, I said yes. Who would say no to a job offer? The profits are mostly his, but I receive a good salary. It is not a shop generating a lot of money, but it is a friendly gesture and a helping hand"- Ayub (see Appendix A)

There seems to exist an expectation amongst Somali refugees that having an established social network or kinship serves as an indicator for successful settlement in Eastleigh. However, in some cases, the individual is not in a position where he or she can turn to relatives or friends and must therefore take matters into their own hands to seek employment. An example of this is one of my interlocutors Mohamed as he struggled to a great extent in searching for a job which took several years before finally obtaining a job as a security guard

in the hotel I was staying at. Mohamed stated that "I did not this job through my social connections, I was looking for myself and I was told there was a job offer as a security at this hotel, and I went for an interview and got the job the next day" (see appendix A). The case of Mohamed illustrates that there exist a group of Somali refugees without a support system in they can lean on for support such as accommodation, job finding, food, etc., and must therefore take matters into their own hands alone.

"The Somalis work very hard. 99% of the don't eat the food. The Somalis feel that they are above being granted the food and handouts. You know how Somalis are very proud people" (*see appendix A*). According to Ayub, the statement is a representation of how one should understand Somalis as a social and cultural group. Although the UNHCR teaches skills such as sewing, photography, henna art, cooking, and hotel management the young refugees often struggle to find jobs based on these life skills. During my time in Eastleigh, my various encounters with Kenyan people living in Eastleigh enforced this notion of Somali people as 'hard-working' and business-minded with access to resources and capital. However, although Somalis consider themselves as a relatively homogeneousness ethnic group, in Eastleigh there is a hierarchy in terms of whom have access to such resources. For instance, the small shops selling electronics, suitcases, groceries, hotels, buildings, restaurants, and so forth are often owned by Somali diasporas. It is evident that although Somalis consider themselves hard-working and business-minded people, urban and camp refugees are dependent on external support such as remittance from kinships and social networks to sustain a steady source of income in securing themselves a relatively decent livelihood.

5.3. Life in the refugee camps

In the early stages of the interviews, my interlocutors would often initiate the conversation by describing the struggles and challenges they experienced as camp refugees camp, where most of them were born and raised. A few of them married inside the camp and started their own families. Others lost a parent, a child, and other kinship. Accordingly, Somali camp refugees and their stories and experiences demonstrate how they are constantly navigating the struggles and uncertainty produced by camp life, whilst trying to live as 'normal' as possible. They often referred to the refugee camp as a prison and feeling 'stuck' as they are not able to go back home to Somalia. Additionally, job insecurity was one of the most significant contributors to the stress of living inside the camp, especially among young males. The following statements from a young male named Ahmed state:

" There is a lack of security in the refugee camps, there is a lot of violence and girls are getting raped inside the camps, it is hard to live a decent life inside the camps. It is not allowed for you to work.

The reason why we come here is to help our people and establish a good life for ourselves. Life there is risky, you cannot even walk on the streets safely if you don't have a residence card. You are required to always stay inside the camps. They tell you that you can't go outside, you can't seek education elsewhere, or establish a life outside the camps. That is the life there"- Ahmed (see Appendix A).

According to Ahmed, harassment from the soldiers controlling the camps is a daily part of their lives as camp refugees. In addition, tribalism amongst Somali refugees also prevails, where one will face hardships if he or she does not belong to the superior tribe. In Somali culture, tribalism is still practiced widely, even in the refugee camps as stated by Ahmed, subjecting those Somali refugees belonging to a divergent tribe than the tribe in control, to further harassment and discrimination. In general, there is a collective consensus amongst the Somali refugees I met and spoke to that life as camp refugees were constraining, negative, strenuous, and hopeless. On the contrary, Ayub's account of life as a camp refugee was positive rather than negative. Ayub came to Kenya from Somalia as a refugee in 2011 with the help of their brother and settled in the Dadaab refugee camp which is in Garissa County which opened in 1991 where most of the Somali refugees are encamped. According to him, 'back in the days, the refugee camp life was good" (*see appendix A).* The UNHCR implemented financial support which is referred to as '*Chakula'*[1]which means 'food' in Swahili. In this context, '*Chakula'* is a form of financial support where the refugees in the camps receive a monetary amount each month deposited in a bank card which is earmarked for buying groceries e.g., beans, sugar, washing powder, yeast, tuna, oil, rice, where each head in a family household counts for 800 Kenyan shillings. However, due to a worsening of the refugee situation in the respective areas Kakuma and Dadaab, and insufficient resources, Ayub and others in the refugee camp were instead receiving small amounts of oil, beans, and maze. Based on my interlocutors' experiences as camp refugees, it can be established that Somali refugees in Kakuma and Dadaab are subjected to control, harassment, discrimination,

[1] https://cdn.wfp.org/wfp.org/publications/Bamba%20Chakula%20update%20Jul-Aug%202015.pdf?_ga=2.59038189.17768849.1681843593-1088522625.1681843593

and isolation. Furthermore, the Kenyan government's decision to prohibit Somali refugees to leave the camps and seek towards Nairobi illustrates that they are unwelcomed and therefore justifies restricting their mobility and therefore find themselves 'stuck' in the camps while awaiting a solution to their encampment. Moreover, In the case of Somali refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps, the three durable solutions are often inapplicable as the Kenyan government does not allow local integration, and voluntary repatriation to Somalia is not a possibility for most of the Somali camp refugees. Also, although local integration is not permitted by the Kenyan authorities, an increasing number of Somali camp refugees chose to leave the camps and seek Nairobi and integrate into the Somali community in Eastleigh, and partake in the informal economy, whilst circumventing the Kenyan police to avoid deportation back to the camps.

Whilst I was conducting interviews, I would often attract curious young guys roaming around the streets and shops of Eastleigh, particularly in the area where I was carrying my research. These Somali youth belonged to a distinct group of refugees. Namely, those on the move. Long (2021) refers to the onward movement as "[…] the further movement of those already in exile" (Long, 2021. p). For instance, camp refugees in Dadaab or Kakuma migrate to Nairobi" in search of work or better services" (ibid). They had never set foot in a refugee camp as they managed to circumvent the refugee camps, coming straight from Somalia to the urban city of Kenya, namely Nairobi. However, Nairobi was indeed not their ultimate destination. According to one of the young males I met regularly in one of the shops where I spent much time with my interlocutors, it was for practical reasons that he and others had come to Eastleigh. That is, to initiate family reunification processes and therefore needed to approach an embassy, which can often be lengthy and stressful, where they find themselves in a state of limbo, uncertainty, and feeling 'stuck 'similar to the camp refugees. Also, to make time pass they either work as a waiter, or as a seller in small-scale shop streets of Eastleigh, whilst others were in Eastleigh for reasons beyond practicality. Specifically, those preparing a '*tahrib'*[2], which is an Arabic term meaning 'running' or 'smuggling'. Additionally, 'tahrib' is a terminology commonly utilized in the Somali community and refers to the dangerous journeys across oceans via Mexico in the hopes of reaching Amerika in the pursuit of a better life. Similarly, those determined to perform tahrib also find

[2] More on Somali refugees performing 'tahrib'. https://www.unicef.org/somalia/media/966/file/Somalia-going-on-tahriib-2016.pdf

themselves in a state of 'stuckness' as they are dependent on family or friends to finance their tahrib which can be a tiring process as they often must negotiate and convince kinship abroad to support economically through remittance. To illustrate, one of the youths stated that" there are some who do not have relatives who can send them money or in some cases they ignore them when they reach out for help by not picking up the phone so the only option one has is to do" (*see appendix A)*. Hence, any prospect of performing tahrib is contingent upon family or friends' willingness to assist financially.

5.4. Betwixt and between precariousness and (un)precariousness

Fee (2021) defines precarity as 'structurally contingent' and 'uncertainty, unpredictability, and insecurity', and an effect of 'time, place and circumstance' (Fee,2021: p). In the context of the Somali refugees, a state of precarity occurs as they are in a state of constant hopelessness, uncertainty, and struggles attributed to refugeehood, which is further exacerbated by being subjected to a strict encampment policy. Hence, in this context, precarity is an effect of their status as refugees confined in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps. Consequently, Somali camp refugees assess and make rational decisions to leave the camp and undertake a journey to Eastleigh as an attempt to escape the state of precariousness. However, due to a lack of legal protection and assistance outside the camps, and the Kenyan authority prohibits them to work and integrate under the law and regulations, "urban refugees, therefore, run business, engage in small-scale trade, live off remittances, or earn money through casual labor to survive" (Campell, 2006:400) escaping job and livelihood precarity. Moreover, the lack of legal protections risks subjecting Somali refugees living in Eastleigh to police harassment and threats of arrest(ibid). Similarly, to the study of refugees in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur by Palmgreen (2017) Somali refugees and migrants must constantly negotiate with the law-enforcement in Eastleigh and maneuver in "exploitative interactions with coercive state agents" (Palmgreen, 2017:1).

It is contested that Kenya has yet to present a clear policy on urban refugees, and how such figure is defined. Consequently, urban Somali refugees and other refugees of various nationalities are unable to seek legal assistance from the Kenyan authorities, hence adding to existing uncertainties, unfilled needs, and struggles, (Campell,2006:400). Consequently, escaping precariousness becomes an impossible task. In addition, what further exacerbates a condition of precariousness is the regular shift between the camps and the urban city which is the reality for Somali refugees. For instance, it is not uncommon that they must return to the

camps after completion of a temporary work position in Eastleigh due to the expiration of their travel document which enables legal movement between the camp and the city. Therefore, they often find themselves moving in time and space, where the presence of (un)precariousness only becomes a temporary condition. Applying Schiltz et al contextual notion of uncertainty in the case of the young Somali refugees I met, their experiences and stories reveal how they constantly search for strategies to cope with their condition as urban refugees in Eastleigh without legal protection, in which they exercise agency by actively seeking where opportunities are made available to them through social network and kinship. Hence it can be established that in this context, uncertainty is functional in terms of allowing refugees to 'negotiate their position and establish new relationships'. Instead of waiting for normalization of their current conditions, Somali urban refugees constantly seek and negotiate their position in the Somali community where they attempt to establish a dignified livelihood for themselves and their families through social networking and informal economy. Furthermore, the stories of Ayub, Faysal, and the other young Somali refugees challenge this perception of the refugee figure by showing they can make calculated and rational decisions in seeking where opportunities are enabling them to provide for themselves and their families, escape the starkness and passivity they were facing in the camps escaping the state of bare life and hence become 'historical and social actors'.

5.5. "In Eastleigh I become a man": Escaping social death.

To analyze how Ayub, Mohamed, Siyad, and my other interlocutors navigate in times of uncertainty as urban refugees in Eastleigh through social navigation, I will utilize Vigh's (2016) concept of 'social death' to analyze how they navigate social positions and how they, through mobilization attempt to escape social death and become social beings and agents of their own lives. They attributed job insecurity in the camps as making them 'less of a man' as they were not able to provide for their families. As established earlier, most camp refugees seek the urban city of Nairobi, specifically Eastleigh due to job insecurity and the feeling of 'stuckness' as they attempt to navigate the challenges and uncertainties they are facing daily as camp refugees. In this context, the prevailing job insecurity that these men were facing in the camps was tied to concepts of identity, obligation, and reciprocity. Hence, job insecurity was associated with inadequacy in relation to their identity as young Somali sons, brothers, and husbands. In Somali culture, it is often the norm for the man to work and support his

family from a young age. Furthermore, the young males feel a duty to make use of their capacity to provide for their mother and siblings as an act of reciprocity and obligation. Amongst my interlocutors, the young men are often the eldest son in the family or had lost a father, and hence taken upon themselves a patriarchal role due to the absence of a fader figure. The following statements by young male interlocutors illustrate the latter:

"I came to Nairobi to work so I can assist my siblings who live in the refugee camp and send money to them. I came to Eastleigh so I can attempt to provide the stuff my mother needs such as relating to her health and earn money to provide the things she needs for her health where she is there is a lack of good hospitals as my mum's health is not so good. We don't have a father, but I don't have a brother who can also help me provide for my family. I am the only one. I am the oldest of all our siblings. So, because my mum doesn't have any other than me and I am the only son that the only reason why I came to Eastleigh is so that I can buy things my mum needs for her" – Siyad.

" I came to Eastleigh out of necessity because I have a family who needs me, who lives in the refugee camp. I was brought here due to the struggles I was facing in the refugee camp. That's the reason why I came"- Mohamed.

"When someone can leave the camp and get a job here, his family will be very happy. They trust their young male as he gets a good job here in Nairobi" – Ayub

" I am very happy that we can help them and find a way to be able to provide such help. The fact that he can also help himself and be able to pursue marriage and help his family. They must be working to be able to do those things because if you do not work hard and make use of your capacity, it will be very hard for you to help your family" – Ahmed (See Appendix A)

Additionally, their stories revealed that they were highly motivated to leave the camps in the hopes of acquiring a job due to feeling to obligated to 'repay' their mothers, as growing up as a young Somali male, the youths often show their gratitude towards their mothers by acknowledging the struggles and hardships their mothers and/or fathers went through in their upbringing and therefor feel an obligation to reciprocate by utilizing his capacity by providing financial support. For instance, Siyad came to work in Eastleigh through his uncle in Kenya to " assist his mother and siblings and send money to them", and stated that " […]

my mother who raised me, who went through lives hurdles with me, expiring with me the struggle of refugeehood, I can never repay her, and may god bless her, so I try my best to utilize my capacity to help and support her"(*see appendix A*). Hence, it can be established that choices made by the young males were influenced by several factors than merely job insecurity prevailing in the camps. However, it was also due to obligations to their mothers in the light of showing gratefulness and 'repayment' and has undertaken the role as the sole provider due to being an only son or absence of fathers. Moreover, undertaking onward movement to Eastleigh illustrates how they make calculated decisions to seek where opportunities offer themselves enabling them to support their families back in the camps financially.

When asked to describe the difference between being a camp refugee and an urban refugee in relation to their identity, Siyad responded that:

"The difference is that before I was just a man with no job, depending on my mum and looking for my uncle's pockets for handouts when going out I even buy a cup of tea for myself and was dependent on others, but now Alhamdulillah's today I can manage to buy myself things, and people in the camps that I know even calls me now and tells me they need a top-up card, or saying someone is sick if I can help by sending money, So praise to god if I am financially able to support I will" – Siyad

For Ahmed, Siyad, Mohamed, and Ayub, staying in the refugee camps and merely living as passive beneficiaries and being dependent on the mercy of the UNHCR and the Kenyan government, becomes a symbol of failure and inadequacy in relation to their identity as young Somali man are unable to become a " homo completto', that is, a " complete man"(Vigh,2006:46) and only by escaping the camps and seek towards urban cities of Nairobi, with the help of established support system will they be able to take control of their lives and become just that. A complete Somali young man. Hence, their social status as refugees in the camps without access to the needed resources and opportunity to become a complete Somali young man, they find themselves in a state of social death, where the only option to escape such conditions, is to escape the camps and settle in the city. Therefore, mobilization functions as a way out of social death and enables a process of becoming social beings. According to Tan, one can exercise agency and improve one's life through a term he calls the 'economy of affection and obligation'. Meaning, "[…] relying on the fact that family, friends, religious and ethnic networks will feed him when in need and that he –if

lucky – will gain an inheritance of worth" (ibid:48). In the case of Ayub and the other young males, social becoming is connected to their ability to utilize their capacity in seeking a job to provide, and reciprocate, an obligation towards their mothers and kinship whom they left in the camps. Moreover, not only must they try to fulfill their own needs but also the burden of fulfilling their mothers, wives, children, fathers, and siblings' needs also rest on their shoulders. Here, the social becoming is also dependent on how well they can make use of their capacity to fulfill and assist the needs of their kinships. Simultaneously, they navigate many roles at the same time whilst trying to seize the few opportunities made available to them in Eastleigh as a young Somali man and a refugee.

The establishment of a support system in the Somali community in Eastleigh servers a motivation for camp refugees to escape the camps and seek where they know help will be provided, and by positioning themselves in an environment where collectiveness, close relations, co-dependence, and a collective interest in helping each other establish a good life through job offers, accommodation, and fulfillment of human basic needs prevails, urban refugees are in the perfect environment for maximining one's agency as shown with the case of my interlocutors. Hence, it illustrates how migration becomes a channel through which they can have a dignified life, where opportunities and resources are accessible, enabling them to become a complete man, and where even in times of uncertainty and forced displacement, they can choose where to go, "[…] weighing up the economic, social and security factors" (Long,2021: p), and hence regain control over their lives.

5.7. 'Transactional relations

As stated in the previous section, transnational remittance from kinships, and an established social network and support are crucial for the well-being and survival of Somali refugees in Eastleigh. However, there are also alternative strategies deployed by Somali refugees, predominantly young men, in addressing access to economic means. In this regard, young Somali refugees in Eastleigh transform established friendships into transactional friendships. An example of such a transactional friendship is the concept of 'Chama', which derives from the Swahili language and refers to 'help'. In earlier times, 'chama' was utilized by Somali housewives by investing the money she receives from her working husband in transactional engagements with other Somali housewives and spent the money on the house, henna, buying clothes for the daughters and husband, bed sheets, fixing a toilet, broken door and so worth. In some cases, any debt will also be paid. In this regard, the intention of engaging in 'chama'

was not to establish a business or pay rent, but merely to finance a luxurious way of living for herself and the household. On the contrary, the Somali community in Eastleigh engages in 'chama' for various reasons, such as business capital, investment, school fees for themselves or siblings, remittance to kinship in the camps, expansions of shops and products and even to finance 'tahrib'. The process of 'Chama' can be explained as a group of friends, be it 3,4, or so forth, where each person must provide for instance 1600 KSH to a designated person in the established group each month and rotates until the last person has received their portion. For instance, if a group consists of eight people, and it has been decided collectedly that each person must provide 1600 KSH, the total amount for a monthly rotation will be 12800 KSH. The rotation time may range from eight to twelve months depending on the number of participants. Engaging in 'chama' amongst Somali refugees and their friends, trust, and rightness are highly emphasized and practiced and hence eliminate distrust and skepticism amongst the participants. Another example of transactional friendships amongst the Somali community in Eastleigh is the so-called shareholder concept, which involves organizing a group of friends or relatives to raise capital and afterward share profit monthly. For instance, I was informed by Faysal that the hotel where I lived during my stay in Eastleigh is owned by 5 people. However, often it is not Somali refugees who participate in such high-value transactions between friends, due to a lack of capacity and resources needed for such investment. Instead, they engage in small-scale investment with friends in a way that will be beneficial to all parties. For instance, a friend with resources in Eastleigh invests in a car that will be transported to Garissa, Kenya, an area with a high percentage of the Somali population and entrust his friend with that car in that respective area and establish a tax I driver business. By doing so, the car investment has multiple functions in terms of eliminating job insecurity for a friend in need, whilst benefiting from the friend profit the friend will accumulate as a taxi driver. A third example of Somali people relying on each other is within marriages. According to Ayub, "One thing Somalis are good at helping each other with is marriage" (*see Appendix A*). When a young Somali refugee in Eastleigh wishes to pursue marriage, it is very often that he does not have the means to do. In Somali culture, weddings are often costly and require help from social networks and family. Examples of how Somali refugees in Eastleigh help each other in marriage arrangements include payment of dowry to the bride's family, venue, transportation, furniture and appliances for the house, food and drinks, clothing for bride and groom, and gifts. In addition to providing marriage support, the Somali community in Eastleigh is also prominent in mobilizing resources amongst the Somali community and diasporic kinship in situations where a person needs

medical assistance. Lastly, paying ‘makhtar’ which can be translated to compensation if a Somali has injured a person, such as an eye or tooth injury, to the affected person is also practiced in the Somali community in Eastleigh. In this context, elder clan members assemble to discuss the price of ‘makthar’, which can range between 50.000 and 100.000 USD. Hence, the injured and the perpetrator will be helped through mediation between clan members and representatives of each clan member the involved parties belong to. The example of ‘chama’, investments between friends, marriage, and health, illustrates the creativity of young Somali refugees in Eastleigh and how the practice of transactional friendships serves as a mechanism for acquiring access to financial means to survive and establish a life for themselves and their families and hence escape social death and become social beings.

6. Concluding remarks

The findings illustrate that Ayub, Faysal, Ahmed, and the other Somali urban refugee” […] depends more on the social connections they establish in cities than on a codified legal and administrative protection […] “as the city” offer refugees the opportunity to subsist, find succor, and exercise some agency amid significant constraints” (Palmgreen,2017: p). Whilst navigating uncertainty in urban sites, specifically Eastleigh, they maneuver as “an active agent, occupying and remaking space through the best use of available if highly circumscribed resources, networks and capacities” (Hammer,2014: p). However, due to their specific ‘ geographical social, political and economic’(ibid) circumstances due to their status as refugees without a legal right to work and settle in urban sites of Kenya, they are constantly pursuing “ complex strategies and tactics of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion”(ibid) including relying on the social network, kinship, and positions in the informal economy(jua lia) in Nairobi, as an attempt to escape stuckness, despair, and uncertainty associated to social death, to become a complete Somali man and able to help their families whom they left in the camps. Moreover, it is evident that Somali refugees in Kenya prefer to settle in Eastleigh as they will be assisted and helped by the Somali community and illustrates that when even in times of displacement, Somali urban refugees offer a different kind of humanitarianism by providing newly arrived Somali camp refugees with basic needs such as food and shelter and hence illustrates how they help each other navigating and overcome the challenges they face. Such challenge derives from their social status as refugees without access to obtaining legal employment or services as they are

prohibited by the Kenyan government to settle in the urban sites due to encampment policy restricting their mobility. Hence, “refugees are often host to other refugees, and take responsibility for their well-being when the state fails to do so” (Qasmiyeh, 2020), and challenges the general perception of refugees as passive beneficiaries(ibid). Furthermore, Somali refugees in Eastleigh rely heavily on each other through transactional engagement, such as ‘Chama’ as a strategy to generate resources needed to survive, become social beings, and establish a dignified life for themselves and their families as refugees in their host country Kenya. Moreover, mobilization of resources through established social networks and kinship and remittance servers as a safety net (Trask,2022:24) for many of the young males I met and spoke to such as establishing a small taxi driver business or finance tahrib’. Moreover, for many Somali camp refugees, including my interlocutors, the incitement for escaping the camps and seeking the city is mainly due to job insecurity and because” […] Nairobi is one of the few places where refugees can be independent of aid” (Campell,2006: 408). However, for the young Somali men, they are also driven by the notion of obligation and reciprocity to their mothers and siblings in the camps, as they have taken on a patriarchal role being the oldest son in the household as they associate being a Somali young male with how well can make use of his capacity and provide for his family and take care of their needs. In addition to having the responsibility of his family resting on his shoulders, they must also fulfill their own needs as they attempt to escape social death, that is, the absence of opportunities essential to becoming social beings and complete (Somali) men. Therefore, one can argue that they must navigate escaping social death and uncertainty as refugees, a son, a brother, and as youths.

Although there have been Somali refugees who have chosen voluntarily repatriation to Somalia as a durable solution to their displacement in Kenya as camp refugees, the reality for many encamped refugees is that very often, the three durable solutions are not applicable and therefore find themselves stuck in the camps. Moreover, although urban Somali refugees are “already economically integrated into the city in that they are self-reliant (Campell,2006:408) have established sustainable livelihoods, are not reliant on aid, and enjoy a standard of living that is equivalent to or even higher than many locals” (ibid:10), the Kenyan authority does not allow local integration as they are often perceived as security threats and an economic burden. Furthermore, despite contributing to the Kenyan economy, urban Somali refugees do not have social or political rights which puts them in a vulnerable position of facing “systematic discrimination and exploitation by authorities and some members of the host

society" (ibid). Drawing on Jacobsen's (2001) argument, Campell asserts that Somali refugees de jure become integrated " when they are not in physical danger and do not live under the threat of non-refoulment, are not confined to camps and have the right to return home, can sustain livelihoods, have access to education, health, and housing, and are social network into the host community"(ibid:409). However, although Somalis are well-established in Eastleigh with their thriving business, the reality for my interlocutors is indeed different, as they do not have the rights attributed to citizenship and therefore participate in society through informal positions with the help of the Somali community, kinship, and social network. Moreover, once leaving the camps, Somali refugees are not in the hands of those providing humanitarian assistance and aid and therefore are not receiving any form of assistance from the Kenyan government if they chose to settle in urban sites. This means that they are facing even more insecurities and challenges once arriving in Eastleigh, and even more so if they do not have a support system they can turn to. A solution allowing a more 'permanent legal integration' according to Campell is to implement a policy on urban refugees explicitly stating the requirements deemed essential for allowing refugees to settle and work legitimacy in Nairobi(ibid:410). Until such policy has been developed and implemented, Ayub, Ahmed, Faysal, and the others are forced to navigate uncertainty and challenges attributed to refugeehood as urban Somali refugees through social navigation and informal economy to escape social death and become social beings.

This thesis sought to examine how urban Somali refugees navigate in times of uncertainty in Eastleigh Kenya, through the lens of social navigation, social death, and informal economy. By utilizing semi-structured interviews and participatory observation during my field trip to Eatleigh, I met young Somali refugees and through their stories, the findings show that whilst their families are stuck in the camps, the young males escape the camps as it becomes a site of scarce opportunities and resources needed to become social beings and agents of their lives. Through migration and strategical planning, they managed to mobilize job opportunities through established social networks and kinship in Eastleigh which is an expression of how they exercise agency and therefore challenges our conventional conceptualization of the refugee as merely passive recipients of humanitarian aid unable to take control over their lives. By escaping the camps and seeking the urban areas of Nairobi, they are thus navigating many positions as they must not only take care of their own needs but also their families awaiting in the camps, whilst escaping social death. The findings of this study contribute to discussions on how one should study refugees and their lived experiences, as such focus reveals that although they are refugees, they are also important

actors wishing to influence the outcome of their displacement, and therefore actively make a calculated decision to resettle where opportunities are made available and hence abandon the stuckness and hopelessness they are facing as camp refugees. Hence, this thesis aims to 'unmute' refugees and provide a forum where they become storytellers of their own lives and lived experiences.

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