

A Tale of Silent Security in Little Mogadishu

Written by Margaret Monyani

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MARGARET MONYANI, JUL 27 2018

The steady rise of the securitisation of migration post 9/11, is bound to have substantial adverse effects on the safety and human dignity of both the existing as well as for potential migrants. The discursive construction of particular issues as an existential threat to state or society as espoused in the original arguments of the Copenhagen Securitization Framework, solely lies with the actors legitimately situated in the elite political circles (Buzan and Waeber, 1998). This, according to Hansen (2002), results in 'Silent Security' whereby the dominant voices and their description of security/threat contribute to the silencing of marginal voices. Such a scenario subdues any efforts of the marginalized voices to challenge these security constructions or even speak about their own security. Inherently the securitisation of migration disempowers migrants in voicing their security needs in the host state settings. In Kenya, refugee governance has historically been interspersed with the idea that Somali refugees who constitute a majority of urban refugees are a threat to national as well as societal security. Consequently, the Kenyan government manages urban refugees contrary to the principles underlying the international instruments to which it is party to, as well as adopting stringent national refugee policy mechanisms and practices which in many ways impact on their lives.

The Evolution of the Securitised Migration Regime

For many years, Kenya has been hosting refugees particulate those fleeing from conflicts and political instability in the neighboring countries. From the 1960s up to until the 1980s, the government allowed refugees to reside and work in any place of their choice. This period has been termed as the golden era as far as refugee management is concerned. According to Campbell (2006) during that time, refugees were entitled to full status rights such as the right to apply for work permits, settle in urban centers and move freely in the country, access to educational opportunities and apply for legal local integration. However, in the 1990s, Kenya's refugee and asylum regime experienced a histrionic shift. A securitised migration regime premised on the containment and seclusion of refugees was adopted. The government sanctioned the encampment practice which remains the bedrock of refugee management in Kenya up to date. Many explanations have been provided for this dramatic change in the refugee regime. Some scholars have attributed it to the shift in global ideologies that resulted from the end of the Cold War. For instance, Lambo (2012) posits at that time many Western countries had lost interest in resettling refugees as an ideological incentive which meant that the burden of hosting lied squarely on countries of first asylum. Moreover, the escalation of intra-state conflicts in the East Africa region that coincided with the end of Cold War, also led to a drastic increase in forced migrants who sought refuge in countries such as Kenya (Ibid). The sudden influx of refugees overwhelmed the Kenyan government making local resettlement deem impossible and that is what led to the adoption of encampment practice. The government had envisioned that the refugee stay would be temporal but three decades later they are still in camps and their numbers have increased tenfold. The Kenyan government also handed over the responsibility of registration of refugees to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Hyndman and Nylund (1998)). As Karyotis (2012) posits, encampment policies are normally instituted so as to curtail refugees' movement especially in the context of deemed or real security threat.

The adoption of the encampment policy by the Kenyan government was and still is a security measure that intends to stop conflict spill overs, the spread of small arms and light weapons but most importantly to protect the Kenyan state from refugees who deemed to pose a threat to state security/national security. The encampment policy and practice has redefined borders in that internal borders within the polity have been created. Kenya has two camps; Kakuma

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and Daadab. The Daadab camp which is closer to the Somali border is where the Somali refugees are hosted. The Kakuma camp hosts other refugees mainly from South Sudan and Ethiopia. Refugees found outside the camp are harassed, arrested and taken back to the camp or deported back to their countries of origin (Pavanello et al, 2010). From 2007 to 2015, the Kenyan government adopted what can be termed as a securitised migration regime. The Refugee Act (2006) also became effective in the same year. Even though the Refugee Act acknowledges the rights of refugees; it still maintains that refugees are to remain in designated camps. Since then the government uses the limitations in the national regime coupled with the current war on terror to shrink the asylum space for it is over half a million refugees and asylum seekers. This manifests in the way the restrictive domestic refugee regime has become cold towards the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Exploring the Silent Security among Somali Urban Refugees

Within the debate of implication of the securitisation of migration exclusionary acts premised on politics and fear play a major role in categorizing migrants as an existential threat to as a threat to national security. As aforementioned, over the years the government of Kenya has adopted exclusionary measures and policies that portray the Somali refugees as the most dangerous refugees among all the other refugees that are being hosted within the state. In the post 9/11 era, terrorism has become both the cause and effect of the tougher strategies of managing international migration. Kenya is not exceptional to this new development, Jaji (2015) argues the restrictive, hostile and generally repressive measures by the Kenyan government towards Somali refugees and asylum seekers are directly linked to the fight against terrorism. The more stringent laws and policies, often adopted in the aftermath of the numerous terrorist incidences that were experienced between 2011 and 2013, were adopted under a carefully constructed cloud of fear. For instance, in 2012 the Department of Refugee Affairs ordered that all urban refugees be returned to camps immediately citing security reasons that linked Somali refugees with terrorism. The exercise was nullified by a court order in 2013 the same year that the Kenyan government signed a tripartite agreement with Somalia and UNHCR to foresee a gradual repatriation of Somali refugees. Again, in 2014 Operation Usalama Watch was launched so as to flush out members of Al-Shabaab who allegedly were staying in Eastleigh, a home to many urban Somali refugees (IPOA, 2014). This was a response to the dreadful Westgate Mall attack which the Kenyan government used to justify its declaration of the xenophobic act on the Kenyan- Somali community and Muslim community (Botha, 2014). About 4000 Somalis residing in Eastleigh were forcefully arrested and detained by the Kenyan police at Kasarani sports Centre (IMLU, 2014). This operation went on for about a week after which about 300 of them were released. However, those individuals that were found without proper identification were instantly deported back to Somalia (Botha, 2014). The government then ordered immediate termination of aid to urban refugees and the relocation of all humanitarian agencies including UNHCR to camps.

Shortly thereafter the government went ahead to announce the closure of the Daadab camp in the next three months which was termed as the breeding ground for terrorism. Even though the camp is yet to be closed as of 2018 the Kenyan government still maintains the presence of Somali refugees in the camps and in the city is the recipe for terrorism. Even with the aforementioned exclusionary practices and policies that characterize the Kenyan refugee regime, available evidence shows that a good number of refugees are now settled in urban centers. In 2009, UNHR carried out a census and the number of urban refugees in Nairobi alone were approximately 50,000. This figure continues to grow and a majority of the refugees are of Somali origin who chose to leave camps or by pass them to settle in urban areas. A focus on the experiences of urban refugees in Kenya amid securitisation is paramount. This is because, many previous studies on Kenyan refugees has given a lot of emphasis on the camp experience. Little is known about what urban refugees undergo especially since they are considered de facto illegal due to the fact that Kenya practices the encampment policy. In addition, securitisation actors tend to emphasize their commitment to state security and the host society as opposed to the security of the migrants. For instance, the late Orwa Ojode who was once the assistance minister in charge of Internal Security once stated that 'Al-Shabaab is like a snake with its tail in Somalia and its head in Eastleigh' (Botha, 2014). Given that Eastleigh is a home of a majority urban Somalis this explains why the government attention has been on this neighborhood. Such exclusionary discourse by government officials ultimately shapes how the government acts towards Somali refugees. Somali refugees have been singled out of the rest of the refugees and branded as the most dangerous ones as they are blamed for all the terrorist activities that the country has experienced in the recent past. The government maintains that their presence in urban centers provides networks to terrorists. Such a negative framing deprives them of their safety and well-being

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of which they are entitled to in the host settings as espoused in the international refugee management instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention on refugee status. Take for example, which saw all urban Somali refugees being rounded off at Kasarani stadium before they were forcefully returned to the camps or Somalia. During this intensive operation that lasted a week which was conducted by over 5000 government security officers, various rape cases and physical attacks were reported by various women refugees (UNHCR, 2015). This operation resulted in the loss of their livelihoods activities and resources. Those who were employed lost their jobs when they were forcefully returned to camps. Upon return to the city they had to start from scratch as far as securing employment is concerned. It is important to note that it's not just that the individual Somali refugees that are securitised, even the neighborhoods (specifically Eastleigh) in which they reside are branded as hot spots which contributes to their vulnerability as well. This secludes them from the larger Kenyan society which makes it impossible to integrate and engage in meaningful and productive livelihood options. Such seclusion is also detrimental to the refugee community whom are mainly business people in that when the government declares Eastleigh a no go zone; it makes it hard for customers who are largely Kenyans to transact business with them. Generally, the Somali refugees' ability to participate in the normal day to day activities of their lives is limited. Their participation to counter the narrative that they are a danger to the state and the society is also thwarted due to such seclusion.

Conclusion

Indeed, the security of migrants in securitised host settings remains a challenge as states adopt a migration management framework based on the prisms of threats, crisis and risks. This is especially in the post 9/11 era which is now characterized by externalization of borders and creation of internal borders through encampment policies resulting in the *us versus them* demarcation. It is also important to note that, whether in camps or outside, refugees face particular unique security challenges which are linked to their status as refugees. This is so because, migration as a process is entwined with insecurity from the moment of the decision to migrate, through to departure from the country of origin, entry into the destination country, and settlement or refusal of entry or settlement (Ibrahim, 2015). Such insecurity is intensified in the case of forced migration and particularly in contexts where migrants are stigmatized as potential terrorists, criminals and social troublemakers, and where economic crises have led to severe cuts in public services, rising unemployment and an attendant rise in racism and xenophobia (Huysmans, 2000). The above analysis of the Somali refugees in Kenya reveals that one of the consequences, intended or not, of constituting migration as a security threat in an age of significant global movements of people, is the creation of greater insecurity among migrant populations. Indeed securitisation compels migrants to adopt survival strategies which are unique to their status in society. For instance, many Somali refugees in Eastleigh largely engage in low-skilled ventures, small scale business such as hawking, or tea vending as a means of survival.

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