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## **Pulling The Rug From Under Their Feet: Investigating the Kenyan Government's Decision to Close the Dadaab Refugee Complex.**

Wolters, Roos

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**Pulling The Rug From Under Their Feet: Investigating the  
Kenyan Government's Decision to Close the Dadaab Refugee  
Complex.**



(Al Jazeera 2011).

Roos Wolters  
s2442825

MA Thesis International Relations, Faculty of Humanities  
Supervisor: Professor Isabelle Duyvesteyn

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## 1. Introduction

It was a tweet, issuing a 14-day ultimatum from the Kenyan Ministry of Interior to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that ultimately revealed Kenya's intentions to close the Dadaab Refugee Complex – a complex established in the early 1990s and housed around 485,000 refugees in 2012, most of whom were Somali – by June 2022 (Ministry of Interior Kenya 2021; Muiruri 2021; UNHCR 2017, 29). It was a complex that was seen "more like a small city" (Taprogge 2016) with its developed urban features, demographically dense populations, and market streets (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000, 205). Nevertheless, the Kenyan government announced its intentions to close the Complex on the 25th of March 2021. With the exception of organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, this announcement received little attention from the international community (Cannon and Fujibayashi 2018, 25-26).

Refugees can be defined as persons "who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require 'international protection'" (UNHCR 2016). Refugees differ from internally displaced people (IDPs) as IDPs do not cross an international border, giving them no specific status in international law with rights specific to their situation (OHCHR 2023). However, both end up in a situation of forced displacement, which creates not only challenges for the affected state but can also have repercussions on neighbouring states due to potential spillover effects (UNHCR 2007; Adhikari 2012, 591). Moreover, a refugee camp can be defined as a temporary space where refugees are able to seek shelter, protection, and receive humanitarian aid (Ramadan 2013, 65-68). The difference between a refugee camp and a complex is that a refugee complex is often used to describe a larger and more durable settlement that works towards expanding beyond the basic infrastructure and services provided in refugee camps (UNHCR, n.d.).

This thesis aims to understand why the Kenyan government announced its intentions to close the Dadaab Refugee Complex in March 2021, after being in existence for 31 years. Investigating this is relevant as its closure in July 2022 left more than 233,736 refugees and asylum seekers in a vulnerable position (REACH Initiative 2022). Although the camps seemed to have reopened since the 'closure' from July 2022 to January 2023, it could still bring

negative implications with it considering that the Horn of Africa's environment continues to be fragile and prone to conflict.

This first chapter provided a brief introduction to the thesis, its case study, and relevance. In Chapter Two, literature related to the topic will be analyzed to identify areas where gaps in existing knowledge can be filled and expanded on. Chapter Three will look at the methodology and in Chapter Four, a detailed case study will be provided, followed by an analysis in Chapter 5. Lastly, a conclusion will be given and potential avenues for further research will be explored.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 A Roadmap of the Literature**

In this chapter, a range of academic literature will be presented to help lay the foundations for this thesis. Firstly, the concept of refugee camps will be discussed and reveal that, although they intend to be temporary, they can become camps that develop long-term organisational structures. This challenges the notion that the closure of refugee camps is inevitable, laying the foundations for this thesis to analyse the organisational structure of Dadaab.

Secondly, literature relating to the impact bilateral relations can have on refugees will be discussed. Understanding the effect bilateral relations can have on the way refugees are seen and treated is important as it could provide political insights as to why the Kenyan government decided to announce the closure of the Complex.

Thirdly, topics related to (in)security threats, terrorism, and radicalisation will be discussed. Literature highlighting the concept of (in)security and how it, especially after 9/11, increased the scope of what and who was considered a threat will be provided. Furthermore, links between the movement of large refugee populations and terrorism, specifically when discussing recruitment and radicalisation, will be discussed. This is significant for the analysis of the Complex, as there were speculations that Al-Shabaab was operating within the Complex.

Finally, this section will discuss refugees and their impact on the host country's economy. Within academia, there have been varying thoughts on whether hosting refugees is economically beneficial, as a sudden influx of refugees does place significant pressure on the economic and social infrastructure of the host country. This section aims to highlight that when talking about refugees and whether they can be considered an economic burden or asset/opportunity to the host country, there is a lot of grey area as the lives of refugees reflect a complex reality.

### **2.2 Refugee Camps, Their Sustainability and Organization**

Within the academic literature, the conceptualization of refugee camps has varied (McConnachie 2016, 397). While some scholars view refugee camps in terms of spaces of

contradiction, others have focused on understanding refugee camps as categories of settlements (McConnachie 2016, 397). However, a common thread connecting discussions on refugee camps is their dimension of spatiality and temporality (Turner 2015, 139). This is because the term "camp" originates from the Latin word *campus*, meaning an open field and level of space (Turner 2015, 141). A refugee camp is typically seen as a site that is set apart from other spaces and spatially bounded, often identifiable by its high concentration of refugees in a specific geographical area (Turner 2015, 141; McConnachie 2016, 399). Furthermore, refugee camps are intended to be temporary spaces where refugees "receive humanitarian relief and protection until a durable solution can be found to their situation" (Ramadan 2013, 65-68). This suggests that there is no intention for refugee camps to be sustainable as they are created as a response to a state of emergency and are no longer necessary once normality is restored (Turner 2015, 140-141).

However, in reality, across space and time, refugees can transform the organisation of camps to become more permanent. This was seen in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria (OXFAM International 2023). When looking at the level of organisation within the camps, refugees play a major role in managing the camps (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). This is because the management was divided into three levels, namely; the "wilaya" (regional) level, the "daira" (zone) level and the "hy" (neighbourhood) level (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). On each level, management groups led by refugees are present to ensure that refugee involvement remains high and that skills such as project management are developed, allowing them to become more self-reliant (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). Additionally, the communication and ability to respond to people's needs are high with this grassroots structure due to the interconnectedness between these three levels (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). Therefore, it appears that refugees start to manage themselves, with humanitarian agencies assisting them (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). As a result, they have existed for decades and have become the home for new generations.

Since 2015, this level of "success" has also been seen in the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut (Mahoudeau 2021). Due to a lack of good governance from the top-down, a grassroots organisation named Al-Shabka ("The Network") took shape in 2015 and conducted small-scale reconstruction projects to transform the space (Mahoudeau 2021, 821). Their goal was to improve the governance in the camps and bring stability and structure, which they were able to do through donor funds (Mahoudeau 2021, 822). It became clear that individual initiatives



started to accumulate, as families and individuals would hook lines and cables to networks, increasing the collective electricity and water distributions (Mahoudeau 2021, 822). Real estate markets started to form through obtaining unlawful lands and shelters, and eventually a "local committee" was established (Mahoudeau 2021, 822-825). This lack of governance, order and organisation before 2015 was a blessing in disguise as it allowed for grassroots organisations such as Al-Shabka to establish and, to a certain degree, benefit "from the "unruliness" of the power relations they criticised" (Mahoudeau 2021, 827). They took on responsibilities and delivered services that would typically be provided by the central/local state, revealing that they were perhaps becoming in some ways more of a shadow state (Jones and Royles 2020, 40).

Furthermore, scholars found that an entrepreneurship programme run by a local NGO named B&Z in these Palestinian refugee camps acted as a "form of 'sheltering work' that provided the basis for an alternative... fostering a local place and structuring [refugees'] day-to-day activity" (Kodeih, Schildt and Lawrence 2023, 176). By receiving temporary help from B&Z, refugees managed to apply for a small business start-up grant from the organisation, reducing their dependency on aid agencies in the long run (Kodeih, Schildt and Lawrence 2023, 179). 'Sheltering work' represented a "form of institutional work that establishe[d] local conditions" (Kodeih, Schildt and Lawrence 2023, 192), enabling actors to create networks and gather resources needed for collective action and institutional change (Kodeih, Schildt and Lawrence 2023, 193). This allowed refugees to reclaim their agency and stimulate the organisational structure within the camps (Kodeih, Schildt and Lawrence 2023, 193). As a result, these camps were able to develop their own processes and organisation, allowing them to become more like a small city, developing an organisation, system as well as economy.

### **2.3 Effect of Bilateral Relations on Refugees**

Within academic literature, it has been found that "bilateral relations between the two nations impact the status of refugees and that the entry of refugees into a country may become a cause for a shift in bilateral relations" (Pandey 2023, 415). What the first part highlights is that the state of relations between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin matter and can have an impact on how refugees, and thus refugee camps, are seen and treated (Pandey 2023, 415). This argument aligns with Hastedt and Knickrehm's (1988, 260-261) work, as they found

that refugee flows take on a more political rather than humanitarian dimension when the bilateral relationship between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin becomes hostile.

Additionally, the argument that the entry of refugees can shift bilateral relations is clear as Parnini's (2013, 295) work found that the longer Bangladesh hosted Rohingya refugees, the tenser the bilateral ties between Bangladesh and Myanmar became. This is because, since the late 1970s, the Rohingya Crisis has remained an unresolved issue between the two states as new waves of Rohingyas fleeing Myanmar continued to hit Bangladesh (Parnini 2013, 281-288). As the Government of Bangladesh implemented a policy that declares that no refugees are allowed to settle permanently in the country (Parnini 2013, 288), the "statelessness of the Rohingya has come to define the Bangladesh-Myanmar relations... in ways that are ominous for both" (Parnini 2013, 289). Despite their efforts to reach negotiations and manage or resolve the crisis, pressures have only increased and strained their bilateral relations (Parnini 2013, 281). Furthermore, forced displacement can generate spillover effects in neighboring states, which in turn will likely impact their relations with the country of origin as well (Verme and Schuettler 2021, 1; Adhikari 2012, 591).

As it is more complex to measure whether the entry of refugees into Kenya caused a shift in bilateral relations, this thesis aims to add to the literature that "bilateral relations between the two nations impact the status of refugees" (Pandey 2023, 415) by investigating Kenya-Somalia relations, closer to the closure announcement, and see whether bilateral relations influenced Kenya's decision to close the Complex, which was home to mostly Somali refugees.

#### **2.4 Refugees: Security (Threats), Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization**

Since the 9/11 attacks and the launch of the global war on terror campaign by George W. Bush, scholars have increasingly recognized a shift "in world politics, conceptualization of security and refugee policy, and legislation" (Chami, Brown and Roy 2021, 241). During the post-9/11 era, states implemented more restrictive measures when it came to allowing asylum-seekers to enter the country and took more security measures to specifically limit Islamic immigration

and asylum (Chami, Brown and Roy 2021, 241). The term 'security' and what and who constituted a threat evolved.

Between the 1930s-1970s, security was mainly understood in terms of national security, and national security problems were viewed excessively from a military perspective (Walt 1991, 214). However, in the mid-1970s, a renaissance in the field of security studies occurred (Walt 1991, 211). With the rise of feminist literature, militarized masculinity – that heavily embedded military institutions and strategic thinking – was exposed, allowing new ways of viewing (in)security to be established (Tickner 2011, 578). Furthermore, shifts in the international environment during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, such as the end of the Vietnam War and the collapse of *détente*, increased the interest of scholars to join the International Security field and bring different perspectives to the table (Walt 1991, 219-220). Additionally, developments continued during the 1990s, as an increase in equating security with people rather than states could be seen with concepts such as human security developing (Paris 2001, 87; Howard-Hassmann 2012, 90). With the focus on security expanding from the state to the lower level of analysis, namely the individual, more attention has been given to vulnerable and marginalized groups, including refugees (Tickner 2011, 577). At its root, this stems from the 9/11 attack because the discourse on terrorism and counterterrorism contributed to the securitization of refugees and refugee camps (Mwangi 2018, 1318).

When discussing refugees and security threats, research, including reports from the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, has found that if host countries are unable to suitably handle the influx of large refugee populations, the risk of attacks by both domestic and transnational terrorists seems to increase (Schmid 2016, 4). Furthermore, as refugee camps are typically located close to the borders of states, it makes them ideal targets for terrorist attacks (Bossis and Lampas 2018, 40). This is because foreign fighters can infiltrate more easily into the host country, and the proximity of these camps tends to be "outside the immediate reach of the host government" (Bossis and Lampas 2018, 40), making it more difficult for the host government to take swift action.

Additionally, terrorist organizations have used displacement flows as opportunities for radicalization and as a recruitment pool (Böhmelt and Bove 2020, 251). Researchers from The Guardian examined online material from various terrorist groups in Somalia and Nigeria between June 13th, 2016, and January 8th, 2017, and found that more than half (53%) of the

material related to calls from fighters and supporters urging refugees to wage jihad (Townsend 2017). Terrorists seem to target refugees because they are aware that many have little (financial) resources, and that limited resources are provided within the camps due to the high demand (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013, 627).

## **2.5 Refugees: An Economic Burden or Asset?**

Within academia, there has been a debate on whether refugees are economic burdens or assets to the host country. On one side, the asymmetrical relationship between humanitarian aid workers and refugees has led refugees to be seen as dependent and helpless victims, who solely rely on humanitarian aid assistance in order to survive (Gladden 2020, 152; Ghorashi 2005, 185; Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827). As a result, negative connotations have been attached to refugees as they come to be seen as passive actors, patiently waiting until they can safely return home (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827). This is further reinforced as refugees generally have no right to work or to move freely in the refugee-hosting state, resulting in a lack of contribution to the host country's economy (Gladden 2020, 151).

However, Alloush *et al.* (2017, 334) have stressed that in practice the lives of refugees paint a much more complex reality. Scholars such as Kibreab (1993, 347) found that although there was dependence on the international refugee support systems in Somali refugee camps, refugees were agents who seized every opportunity to earn money (Kibreab 1993, 347). Furthermore, refugees often create the genesis of an economy within the camps that can extend beyond its borders and thus stimulate economic growth and development in the surrounding areas (Alloush *et al.* 2017, 334). Kreibaum (2016, 263) found this in Uganda as refugees close to local populations positively impacted the economy in terms of household consumption and public service supplies. However, this is only possible if refugees are given the proper support "in terms of land, agricultural inputs, and access to markets" (Kreibaum 2016, 263) by, for example, the state.

Furthermore, the Modified Model of Refugee Rentier States (see Figure 1) raises the argument that hosting refugees can be economically beneficial for a state (Micinski 2021, 7). This is because the model argues that "refugee-hosting states can leverage their importance to

regional stability by threatening refugee expulsion to extract additional aid from the international community" (Micinski 2021, 5).

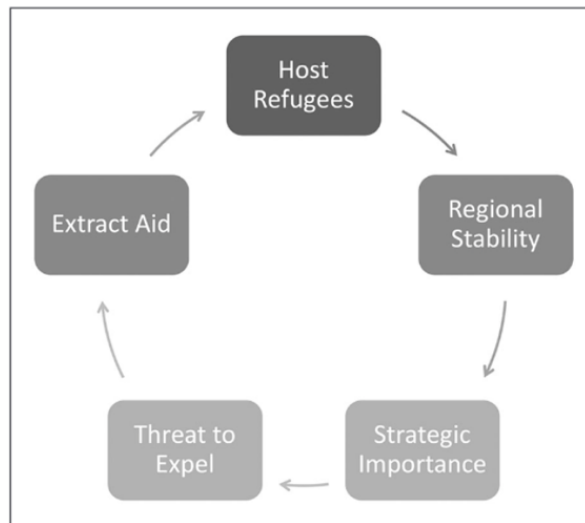


Figure 1: Modified Model of Refugee Rentier States (Micinski 2021, 6)

This model frames the mass expulsion of refugees in a foreign policy framework, shifting the outlook that states host refugees out of hospitality to one of strategic value to pursue their foreign policies (Micinski 2021, 5). This is because states are aware that hosting refugees can leverage their strategic importance as they are a regional stability factor, absorbing the shocks in times of insecurity (Micinski 2021, 5). Therefore, threatening to expel refugees can be seen as a strategic way to gain economic resources, as matters of insecurity and destabilization are unfavorable for states (Micinski 2021, 5). This strategy has been successfully used by Pakistan, who has been hosting 1.4 million Afghans, as through threatening to expel refugees in 2012, 2016, and 2018-2019, they were able to extract \$90 million dollars in additional aid (European Union Agency for Asylum 2022; Micinski 2021, 2-8).

By revisiting the economic burden vs. asset argument, this thesis aims to fill in the grey area that exists within this debate by looking at the support and resources that were available in the Complex and seeing what influence this had on refugees' abilities to contribute economically to Kenya. This will provide more insight into the cost-benefit of the complex and whether it was worth keeping it open. Furthermore, by looking at past behaviors by the Kenyan

government, insights can be given as to whether the announced closure of the Dadaab Refugee Complex was used as a way to extract additional aid.

## **2.6 Concluding Literature Remarks**

To conclude, this literature review covered a variety of topics and explored key themes, arguments, and gaps. It emphasized that although refugee camps in theory are temporary spaces, they can become long-term camps, developing their own organizational structures and thus becoming sustainable solutions. As a result, the notion that the closure of refugee camps is inevitable is challenged, leaving a gap to examine why the Dadaab Refugee Complex in Kenya closed at the specific time it did. Moreover, literature on bilateral relations and refugees revealed that the state of bilateral relations between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin can impact the status of refugees and vice versa. If signs of hostility grow between the two countries, this could negatively impact refugees and influence decisions on whether to keep refugee camps open. Furthermore, topics related to (in)security, threats, terrorism, and radicalization were explored, and it became clear that over time what and who is considered a threat has changed. This has been largely shaped by significant events such as 9/11, the increase in critical studies on security, and the rise of non-state actors such as terrorist organizations. Finally, literature on the refugee economic burden vs. asset debate revealed that there is a lot of grey area when it comes to discussing refugees and their impact, as the lives of refugees reflect a complex reality. Furthermore, the hosting of refugees may be economically beneficial. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to this debate by studying the Dadaab Refugee Complex as a case study. The approaches adopted here will be discussed in the methodology.

### **3. Methodology**

In this section, the research aim and its relevance will be identified, followed by an explanation of the research design and case selection. Thereafter, the research methodology will be discussed, followed by the data collection methods. Lastly, the methodological limitations will be acknowledged.

#### **3.1 Research Aim and Relevance**

In May 2016, the Kenyan government announced its intentions to close the Dadaab Refugee Complex by November 2016 after claims went around that the Complex was a threat to national security (Amnesty International 2016). However, their bid was overruled by the High Court in Kenya in February 2017 (BBC News 2017). Yet, fast forward 6 years later, the Dadaab Refugee Complex closed in July 2022, after an ultimatum from Kenya to the UNHCR was issued in March 2021 (Ministry of Interior Kenya 2021; Muiruri 2021). This thesis aims to understand why the Kenyan government decided to announce the closure of the Dadaab Refugee Complex in March 2021, after operating for over three decades. Therefore, this thesis will not only focus on the refugee camp itself and how it operated internally, but it will also consider the wider national and regional context and look at issues regarding economics, politics, and national security. As a result, a more holistic approach will be taken, as it merges various levels of analysis and disciplinary lenses together.

Investigating this is relevant and important as, since July 2022, it left more than 233,736 refugees and asylum seekers in a vulnerable position (REACH Initiative 2022). This is concerning considering that the Horn of Africa's environment continues to be fragile and prone to conflict with the Somali Civil War still ongoing and the Tigray War in Ethiopia only recently ending. Therefore, the decision to close the camps raises concerns as to what impact mass migration and the displacement of people will have on Kenya's national security and the Horn of Africa region.

#### **3.2 Research Design and Case Selection**

The research design chosen for this thesis is a single case study. A case study is a design that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context (Ebneyamini and Moghadam 2018, 1).

This phenomenon could range from a particular person to an event or decision that was made. In this case, the case study will focus on the Dadaab Refugee Complex and the Kenyan government's decision to announce its closure. A case study aims to study a particular phenomenon in-depth to get a holistic understanding. As a case study focuses on one particular matter, the likelihood of generalizing the findings tends to be uncommon (Ebneyamini and Moghadam 2018, 4). That being said, findings can be linked to existing debates and arguments within academic literature.

The Dadaab Refugee Complex in Kenya was chosen as a case study because, although it operated for over 30 years, relatively little attention was given to the camps and refugees. This is because, when looking at Western media coverage in the last two decades, a large amount of attention went to refugee camps hosting Syrian refugees in the 2010s. Furthermore, in the 1990s, much of the attention from the UN and the international community went to the unfolding events in, for example, Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) to name a few other notable cases. Therefore, by shining a light on the Dadaab Refugee Complex, this thesis hopes to give it the attention it deserves and provide insight relevant to the larger debate.

### **3.3 Research Methodology and its Operationalization**

The research methodology employed for this thesis is process tracing. Process tracing can be understood as a "within-case method that focuses on tracing causal mechanisms – the actual 'link' between a trigger (X) and an outcome (Y)" (European Consortium for Political Research 2018). Essentially, process tracing tries to unpack the so-called 'black box of causality' to understand the in-between steps, also known as causal mechanisms, that led to a specific action being taken. It is, therefore, often seen as a historical investigation as sequence, timing, and historical context play an important role in understanding how an event unfolded (Vennesson 2008, 231). Furthermore, as process tracing looks at a single case study, it lends itself to the collection of thick qualitative descriptions and data.

Based on the insights from the literature review, multiple factors were identified as potential causal mechanisms that contribute to refugee camps closing or remaining open. This thesis will investigate whether the same factors played a role in the Kenyan government's



decision for the Dadaab Refugee Complex. Specifically, the factors investigated can be broken down into organizational, economic, security, and political aspects.

Firstly, to refute the claim that it was inevitable for the Dadaab Refugee Complex to close, a look at the organizational structure of Dadaab is necessary. Within the literature review, Mahoudeau (2021) and the UNHCR Algeria report by the Global Compact on Refugees (2023) highlighted that the active involvement of refugees is important. This is because high levels of refugee involvement seem to increase the longevity and thus sustainability of refugee camps as it can bridge communication barriers between refugees and humanitarian agencies. This is beneficial as it allows humanitarian agencies to better understand the needs of the refugees, thus increasing the operational effectiveness of the camps (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). Therefore, the involvement of refugees in the organizational structure is identified as one of the causal mechanisms that need to be investigated to determine whether it was inevitable for the Dadaab Refugee Complex to close in the first place.

Additionally, signs of entrepreneurship, known as 'sheltering work' by agencies, can strengthen this claim as Kodeih, Schildt, and Lawrence (2023) found that forms of entrepreneurship 'sheltering work' reduced the dependency of refugees on aid agencies in the long run. This is because they provided refugees with the opportunity to create networks and gather resources necessary to help build their future (Kodeih, Schildt, and Lawrence 2023, 193). This suggests that if similar work can be identified when assessing the Dadaab Refugee Complex, it would weaken the claim that the closure of the Complex was inevitable.

Secondly, Gladden (2020) and Chau and Haugh (2020) point out that if refugees were seen as an economic burden rather than an asset to the hosting country, it would influence the government's decision to close the camp. According to Alloush *et al.* (2017), this can be determined by looking at whether refugees firstly took the initiative to create the genesis of an economy within the Complex and secondly were able to sustain and extend their economic activities to stimulate economic growth in surrounding areas. If these aspects cannot be traced back to Dadaab, it would suggest that the refugees were more passive and dependent actors. Furthermore, the Modified Model of Refugee Rentier States by Micinski (2021) offers another way to see whether the announcement was influenced by economic pressures. If past refugee threat expulsions, made by the Kenyan government, successfully generated more aid flows into

Kenya and economic support was low at the time, economic factors were likely a causal mechanism.

Thirdly, to claim that security aspects contribute to Kenya's decision, Schmid (2016) stressed that there had to be signs that Kenya was unable to handle the influx of refugees suitably. This is because Schmid (2016, 4) found that a refugee-hosting state's inability to handle large refugee influxes increased the risk of domestic and transnational terrorists and thus the perceived security threat. This will be examined by looking at periods when Dadaab received large refugee movements and seeing whether these periods can be linked to increases in the number of terrorist attacks. Furthermore, if evidence linked to terrorist infiltration and terrorist attacks within the Complex can be established, it would support Bossis and Lampas' (2018) argument that refugee camps closer to the borders pose a greater security threat as the proximity of the camps tends to be "outside the immediate reach of the host government" (40), making it more difficult for them to take swift action.

Fourthly, to understand whether political factors influenced the Kenyan decision, Pandey (2023) and Hastedt and Knickrehm (1988) highlighted that the bilateral relations between Somalia and Kenya are important. This is because Pandey (2023) stressed that the state of relations between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin matter and can have an impact on how refugees are seen and treated. Furthermore, refugee flows can take on a more political dimension when states are more hostile to one another (Hastedt and Knickrehm 1988, 260-261). Therefore, to determine whether diplomatic relations were tense and influenced the Kenyan government's decision, recent political events and developments need to have occurred that negatively impacted their diplomatic relations. If such negative political events can be identified closer to the time of the announcement, it would support the claim that political aspects were a causal mechanism.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Rich and comprehensive qualitative data was obtained in the following ways. Firstly, the focus was placed on collecting data on the organizational structure of the Complex. This was the initial point of departure as Dadaab's longevity was remarkable, and intriguing research could be conducted on its internal workings, organization, and sustainability. This was accomplished

by gathering information from within the camps and hearing the experiences of current or former refugees residing in the camps. This included podcast interviews with (former) Dadaab refugees, documentaries filmed in the Complex, livestreams captured within the camps by agencies, and reports from organizations such as the UNHCR and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). In addition to these primary resources, peer-reviewed secondary sources such as journal articles and books were utilized.

Secondly, more recent and contemporary sources were collected, including news articles from reputable sources such as The Guardian, BBC News, and Al Jazeera. These sources provided insights into the issues that Kenya was grappling with at the time and shed light on regional and international events that could have influenced Kenya's national agenda. Furthermore, reports, stories, and articles released by agencies operating on the ground between 2019 and 2021 were examined to gain a deeper understanding of the on-the-ground situation. These reports, stories, and articles were sourced from organizations such as the World Food Programme (2014), the World Health Organization (2020), the UNHCR (2007), and MSF (2020a). Additionally, since this was not the first time Kenya had announced its intentions to close the Dadaab Refugee Complex, an examination of previous announcements was conducted to comprehend the recurring issues within or around the camps.

### **3.5 Methodological Limitations**

One of the limitations of conducting process tracing for this case study was the availability of evidence (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021, 1412). Since the selected case was relatively recent and involved high-ranking authorities and individuals with significant responsibilities, confidential records pertaining to the closure of the camps and official government meeting transcripts have not been made public. This is because releasing such documents could jeopardize Kenya's national security and potentially expose their underlying motives, which could damage their reputation (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021, 1412; Kenya Law, n.d.). Consequently, it is important to consider the possibility of missing causal mechanisms.

Secondly, in an effort to gather additional rich and comprehensive qualitative data, attempts were made to conduct interviews with the Embassy of Kenya in The Hague and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on the ground. However, despite contacting the

Embassy and reaching out to various NGOs via email, no response was received. As a result, the amount of primary qualitative data collected was limited.

Thirdly, as this case study is not explicitly driven by a specific theory, this exploratory design primarily relies on the art of reconstruction and backward reasoning (Brecher and Harvey 2002, 171). This means that another researcher analyzing the same case study may construct a slightly different narrative compared to the one established in this thesis. It is possible for researchers to emphasize certain causal mechanisms over others, leading to varying conclusions.

Lastly, since this thesis focused on a case study within Kenya, there were instances when sources were in Swahili. Not being able to read or write in Swahili posed a constraint on the number of sources that could be used for research and data collection. Consequently, valuable insights from certain sources may have been overlooked.

## **4. Case Studies**

### **4.1 Organizational Structure of Dadaab**

In the following subsections, an analysis of how the organizational structure of the Dadaab Refugee Complex was established will be provided to gain a better understanding of the internal workings of the camp. Firstly, this subsection will discuss how the shift in Kenyan refugee policy in the early 1990s played a significant role in shaping the camp's operations moving forward. Secondly, the multi-level organizational structure that developed will be examined. This is important because the literature suggests that the level of refugee involvement within the camps can impact the sustainability of refugee camps (Mahoudeau 2021; Global Compact on Refugees 2023).

#### **4.1.1 Shifting the Responsibilities of Managing the Complex to the UNHCR**

In 1992, the responsibility for managing the Complex was transferred from the Kenyan government to the UNHCR (Chkam 2016, 82). The reason behind this transfer was the Kenyan government's changing attitudes and policies towards refugees (Bhagat 2020).

To provide some context, prior to the 1990s, Kenya did not have large-scale refugee camps, and refugee policies were mainly handled locally, with churches, aid organizations, and some support from the Kenyan government focusing on integration (UN-Habitat 2021, 22). However, this changed in 1991 after a coup d'état toppled Somali President Siad Barre, leading to an influx of Somali refugees crossing the border (Kumssa *et al.* 2014, 145-146). To accommodate the Somali refugees, three camps were established in Dadaab over a span of two years. Dadaab is located in the Garissa county in the northeast of Kenya (UNHCR, n.d.; Kumssa *et al.* 2014, 145-146) (refer to Figure 2). These three refugee camps – Ifo, Dagahaley, and Hagadera – formed the initial Dadaab Refugee Complex (UNHCR, n.d.).



Figure 2 (Ombour 2017)

As mentioned earlier, the Kenyan government had previously dealt with refugee policies, specifically regarding refugee integration in urban areas (UN-Habitat 2021, 22; Bhagat 2020, 443). However, by the 1990s, the government's openness and support for refugee integration significantly decreased (Bhagat 2020, 443).

Two developments can explain this change in attitude. The first is the arrival of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in Kenya (Bhagat 2020, 443). In the mid-1970s, sub-Saharan Africa experienced severe external economic shocks, which pushed Kenya, like many other countries in the region, into a recession (Robertson and Muzulu 1997, 214). Unemployment rates increased, economic growth declined, and the debt-to-GDP ratio drastically rose (Robertson and Muzulu 1997, 214). The introduction of SAPs provided the Kenyan government with the opportunity to secure loans from the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Robertson and Muzulu 1997, 214-219). However, the economic reforms associated with SAPs, coupled with the influx of Somali refugees, led to multiple financial constraints (Bhagat 2020, 443). One of these constraints was cutbacks in welfare funds (Bhagat 2020, 443), as "the costs of austerity were imposed on domestic social welfare sectors" (Lehman 1990, 52). The significant reduction in welfare support affected both the local poor population and incoming refugees, ultimately resulting in a decline in support (Bhagat 2020, 443).

Secondly, the influx of Somali refugees raised security concerns among the government due to the fear that ethnic Somalis, who had participated in the Shifta War, might have entered the country, posing a threat to Kenya's sovereignty (Branch 2014, 642). The Shifta War (1963-1967) was a secessionist conflict in which ethnic Somalis living in the Northern Frontier District fought against the Kenyan state, aiming to break away from Kenya and incorporate the district into a Somali state (Branch 2014, 642-644; Crisp 2000, 616). Additionally, the Kenyan government was concerned about increased crime rates, tensions between Somali refugees and local communities, and the potential for terrorism (Burns 2011, 9). These two factors ultimately led the Kenyan government to shift from a policy of integration to encampment, restricting refugees' freedom of movement to the camps (Agwanda 2022, 731). In response, resources started to flow in through international actors and donors to support the camps, and the responsibility for managing the camps was transferred to the UNHCR (Bhagat 2020, 443; Chkam 2016, 82).

#### **4.1.2 Three-Level Organizational Structure**

When examining the levels of organization within the Dadaab Refugee Complex, a multi-level organizational structure developed over the years. Specifically, a three-level structure could be observed, with the UNHCR at the top (Chkam 2016, 82; NonFiction Group 2022, 32:47-33:25; UNHCR 2012). The UNHCR constituted the first level of organization as they assumed responsibility for managing the camps from the Kenyan government in 1992 (Chkam 2016, 82). However, since managing the camps alone was too substantial a task for the UNHCR, they collaborated with numerous other agencies and organizations (see Figure 3) and delegated tasks and responsibilities among them (Chkam 2016, 82; NonFiction Group 2022, 32:47-33:25). For instance, the World Food Programme (WFP) was responsible for providing food and utilized the fingerprint records of Dadaab refugees, maintained by the UNHCR, to develop a biometric verification system that would track who had already collected food from the nine warehouses, thereby enhancing accountability (World Food Programme, n.d., 1-2; NonFiction Group 2022, 35:10-35:41). Furthermore, NGOs such as CARE implemented Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) projects, while MSF was in charge of delivering healthcare (Care Kenya, n.d.; Médecins Sans Frontières 2022). This division, constituting the second level of organization,

established the necessary organizational capacity and expertise to operate effectively (NonFiction Group 2022, 32:47-33:25).



Figure 3 (NonFiction Group 2022, 8:22).

Finally, refugees comprised the third level of organization and played a significant role in facilitating communication, organization, and day-to-day activities in running the camps (UNHCR 2012). This is because, since 1991, community leaders naturally emerged within the various housing blocks and acted as intermediaries and bridges between the community and the agencies working on the ground (NonFiction Group 2022, 49:18-50:24). The reason for this can be linked back to the strong influence of Somali kinship and clan culture that permeated the camps (Ikanda 2022, 389).

Somali culture influenced the third level of organization because, although there are numerous clans within Somalia, each with its unique characteristics, the role of elders appears to be a common thread among the larger clans, such as the Rahanweyn clan, who arrived in Dadaab in the early 1990s (Lewis 1994, 136). Elders held importance as they were often seen as the primary point of contact for seeking advice or reporting issues and typically took on the responsibility of organizing village affairs (Evason 2019; Lewis 1994, 136). As a result, refugees began relaying their messages through their community leaders within their housing blocks, contributing to the "smooth management of camp bureaucracy" (Jaji 2012, 228). Their significance was formally recognized in 2006 when the first elections were held, enabling refugees to vote for their local leaders (Yusuf 2013). Consequently, a hybrid organizational collaboration between refugees and Western agencies was formed, altering the internal dynamics and empowering refugees to play a more active role in camp management and self-



sustainability. This was further enhanced when agencies began integrating English and Swahili-speaking refugees into their projects (Horst 2008, 79).

## **4.2 Economic Developments**

In the following sub-sections, insights into how the economic environment within the Complex developed will be provided. Firstly, key developments that occurred within and outside the camps, which led to Dadaab's economic prosperity and increased self-sustainability, will be identified. Thereafter, the contemporary economic challenges related to maintaining the Complex's operations will be discussed to provide insight into the economic difficulties that likely impeded the Complex's sustainability and influenced the Kenyan government's decision to close it.

### **4.2.1 The Development of Economic Structures**

When examining the economic vitality of the Dadaab Refugee Complex, data suggests that the economic activities undertaken by refugees generated an estimated annual income of \$25 million (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827). In contrast to the narrative depicting refugees as passive individuals, the refugees in Dadaab appeared to be proactive agents who sought to build their future in times of uncertainty. To comprehend the transition from a lack of economic activities to a thriving economic landscape within the Complex, several factors need to be discussed.

Firstly, due to Kenya's policy of encampment, refugees were unable to integrate into the formal economy or obtain employment or business permits, which compelled them to establish informal businesses within the camps (Agwanda 2022, 731; Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827). One of the initial enterprises that emerged within the camps was the selling of surplus ration cards (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 841). The UNHCR and WFP introduced a food ration card (See Figure 4) within the camps, which refugees would have stamped on the days when they were scheduled to collect their food from distribution centers (NonFiction Group 2022, 35:10-35:41).



Figure 4: Food ration cards (UNHCR 2014)

The selling of food ration cards was made possible as refugees either took it from family members who had recently passed away and whose deaths were not recorded by the UNHCR, or from relatives who covertly escaped the camps (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 841). It provided an easy way to earn money, as food ration cards could be sold for \$100 each, depending on the family size (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 841).

Additionally, refugees swiftly identified and capitalized on "blind spots in humanitarian aid practices, norms, and values that support entrepreneurship" (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 838). For instance, the typical rations refugees received were basic and mainly consisted of rice, sorghum, maize, salt, beans, and vegetable oil (NonFiction Group 2022, 35:45-35:54). However, with the assistance of middlemen residing just outside the camps, refugees were able to trade these rations for livestock and products like milk (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 838; Diirad Films 2021, 5:55-6:16; World Food Programme 2014, 24-26). Refugees engaged in illegal import and export of goods from the camps by paying or bribing the camp guards (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 842). These trade-based interactions were beneficial for both refugees within the Complex and the locals in the surrounding areas, as new dishes were created and sold within and outside the camps. Over time, this led to the establishment of food markets and cafes, with locals benefiting up to \$14 million per year from this trade (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827; Diirad Films 2021, 4:08-4:20).

Furthermore, the introduction of more affordable and reliable internet connectivity, known as DadaabNet, expanded the economic opportunities within the Complex (NetHope, n.d.). International agencies such as the International Trade Centre (ITC) initiated projects

focused on capacity building and creating market linkages in the digital online freelancing sector (International Trade Centre 2018, 5). The ITC partnered with Celestine Ukpere Consulting to establish the Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative (RESI), which provided digital skills training and courses like digital entrepreneurship (ITC News 2020). Digital online freelancing was emphasized by many agencies as a means to overcome mobility limitations imposed on refugees (ITC News 2020). Success stories, like that of Abubakar Aden Hassan, a refugee who lived in the Ifo camp, earning \$1000 in his first year as an online freelance translator due to RESI, demonstrated the positive impact of this initiative (ITC News 2020). Consequently, the establishment of more reliable internet access throughout the Complex opened "a window to the external world for thousands" (NetHope, n.d.).

Lastly, the UNHCR and its partners promoted informal credit lines through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) (International Labour Organization 2019, 24). VSLAs consist of groups of individuals who collectively establish a savings pool and take small loans from those savings to use as capital for business startups (International Labour Organization 2019, 24; VSL Associates, n.d.). This microcredit model, aiming to create self-managing and capitalizing groups, is prevalent in refugee camps where formal banking structures may be limited, inaccessible, or not tailored to the needs of refugees (International Labour Organization 2019, 34). In Dadaab, the Equity Bank was the only bank present, and refugees had to meet specific criteria to engage in lending, depositing, saving, and transferring money (International Labour Organization 2019, 24). In contrast, any refugee could join VSLAs, enabling individuals with limited financial savings to increase their net worth (International Labour Organization 2019, 24). These factors, combined with the aforementioned points, contributed to the rise of refugee camp entrepreneurs within the Complex and the development of robust economic structures.

#### **4.2.2 COVID-19 and Donor Fatigue**

On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (World Health Organization 2020). The drastic events that followed were unprecedented. The movement of people was restricted as borders closed and lockdowns were announced, the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths increased rapidly, and

the pandemic led to the largest global economic crisis in over a century (World Bank 2022, 25).

Similar to the rest of the world, COVID-19 had a strong impact on Dadaab. An MSF (2020b) report, published in early October, revealed that access to basic services was heavily disrupted since the COVID announcement as the presence of agencies working in the camps reduced considerably. Furthermore, the WFP revealed that they were facing critical shortages as they exhausted all resources and needed "\$57 million to continue providing food and nutrition assistance to the country's refugee population between January and June 2021" (World Food Programme 2020). These food shortages were prominent as a Dadaab refugee and a worker from Refugee Strong, both residing in the Ifo camp, revealed during a livestream that food distribution now occurred every two months (Refugee Strong 2021, 38:41-39:10). This is in stark contrast to pre-COVID times when food rations were distributed every 15 days (Refugee Strong 2021, 38:41-39:10). Furthermore, the food rations distributed every two months were not sufficient, as the WFP was forced to reduce them by 40% (Médecins Sans Frontières 2020a).

Additionally, as a refugee crisis gets older, the needs of the population change. While food, aid, and basic shelter remain essential, refugees start to seek services that will help rebuild their lives (NonFiction Group 2022, 36:29-36:55). However, providing these services requires funding, and over the years, it has become increasingly challenging to attract agencies (Court 2017). The UNHCR expressed concerns about donor fatigue in the Horn of Africa as the international community's attention shifted towards other issues (Court 2017). These issues included, for example, the growing humanitarian crisis in Nigeria (United Nations Population Fund 2018), global protests including Black Lives Matter (Dreier 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic, and raging wildfires (Lindsay 2020). As a result, a combination of funding issues made it difficult to sustain operations within the Complex.

### **4.3 Security Aspect**

#### **4.3.1 Security Threats Linked to Al-Shabaab**

Since its establishment in 1991, the Kenyan government has expressed its national security concerns regarding the Complex and the refugees seeking safety within the camps. This is

because, although sophisticated systems were set in place by the UNHCR to track the movement of refugees coming in and out of the camps, it remained a challenging task due to the magnitude of the Complex (NonFiction Group 2022, 34:21-34:36) (see Figure 5). Consequently, it became increasingly difficult to inspect the camps and precisely know what was happening within them.



Figure 5: A 2011 aerial view of the Dagahaley camp in Dadaab (Mukoya 2016).

The argument that the camps were insecure was confirmed for the government through multiple cases, with the most impactful ones being the 2013 Westgate Mall attack and the 2015 Garissa University attack (Council on Foreign Relations 2022). This is because intelligence reports found evidence that the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, which killed 67 people, and the 2015 Garissa University attack, which killed 148 people, were planned in the camps by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab (BBC News 2017; Council on Foreign Relations 2022). Furthermore, one high-ranking official stated that the claim that Al-Shabaab militants infiltrated the camps was plausible as the bureaucratic machinery around the camps was relatively weak, with police officers often being attacked, and the ‘loyalty’ and ‘effectiveness’ of the security officers were questioned (Brankamp and Glück 2022, 536). With this information, attempts to close the camps in 2016 were made by the Kenyan government, but they were overruled by the Higher Court (BBC News 2017).

Since these attacks, the Kenyan government has been very reluctant to keep the camps open as Al-Shabaab not only infiltrated the camps but also potentially used them as recruitment grounds. Refugee camps seem to be ideal recruitment grounds for terrorist organizations as people are already in a more vulnerable position (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013, 627). Interviews with women identified as returnees from Al-Shabaab, conducted by Badurdeen (2018, 41), revealed that Al-Shabaab plays upon this vulnerability to lure women and children into their networks, claiming they would be able to provide them with a better life.

With this in mind, three recent events can help explain why the Kenyan government felt that the number of Al-Shabaab security threats was rising and that closing the camps would be in their interest. The first event occurred on the 5th of January 2020 when Al-Shabaab attacked the Kenyan Defense Forces military base near Manda Bay used by both Kenyan and US troops (BBC News 2020; Lopez 2022). Although Al-Shabaab has been known for conducting strikes and attacks, this was the first time Al-Shabaab attacked US forces in Kenya (BBC News 2020). The attack killed 9 Kenyan forces, 3 American forces, and left 17 Americans injured (BBC News 2020).

The second event concerns the withdrawal of US troops from Somalia (Dahir 2020). In December 2020, former US President Donald Trump announced that efforts were undertaken to reduce the American presence in Somalia, and by the 15th of January, 700 troops would be withdrawn from Somalia and return home (Cooper 2020). This move sparked fear in the region and among Western officials as they were aware that this could have negative implications for counterterrorism efforts, as US troops were assisting Somali forces in operations against Al-Shabaab (Dahir 2020; Al Jazeera 2020c).

Finally, on the 5th of March 2021, 400 prisoners, many of whom were Al-Shabaab members, escaped from a Somali prison in Bosaso after Al-Shabaab militants attacked the prison and killed seven security officers (Bureau of Counterterrorism 2021). Despite the shared efforts of the international community to counter terrorist threats and violence in the region, terrorist groups have continued to fight back and pose a security threat (Bureau of Counterterrorism 2021). This has been notable in Kenya, as "the proportion of non-state violence ... that can be attributed to jihadists rose from 0% in 2007 to nearly 44% by 2020" (Piombo and Englebert 2022, 1178).

## 4.4 Political Developments

### 4.4.1 Increasing Diplomatic Tensions

Relations in the Horn of Africa have always been complex and characterized by deep-rooted rivalries (Henneberg and Stapel 2020, 340; Chau 2010, 67). When looking at Somalia-Kenya relations, the long-standing political tensions relating to border disputes and internal power struggles significantly intensified at the end of December 2020 and early 2021 (Chau 2010, 67). This is because in December 2020, Somali Information Minister Osman Dubbe publicly accused Kenya of "meddling in [their] internal political affairs" and "ignoring ... previous calls to stop violating [their] sovereignty" (Al Jazeera 2020a). Particularly, the Somali government had been eager to remove Kenyan influence and their forces, who had been present since 2012 under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), from the Jubaland region (Hujale, Soi, and Ali 2021, 13:22-13:40) (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: A simplified map highlighting Jubaland (Owuor 2020)

The Jubaland region has been of particular importance and attracted competing regional interests, as it was declared a semi-autonomous region in 2013 (Mwangi 2016, 120). Within the region, there was always a desire to maintain clan dominance in governing processes, and when clan-based governing elites saw the successful formation of Somaliland and Puntland, it inspired them to make Jubaland a federal member state in southern Somalia (Mwangi 2016,

122; Reuben, Lutomia, and Kimokoti 2021, 214). Furthermore, it is a region known for its large and unexploited oil reserves and strategic ports, making it increasingly compelling (Mwangi 2016, 123-124). Therefore, when Kenya heard about their desire, it was no surprise that they pushed and advocated the idea as they saw geopolitical and economic opportunities arise (Mwangi 2016, 122). They were able to do so because Kenya had ties across the border with various Somali clans, including the Ogaden and Darod, whose members and branches were also present in the northeastern part of Kenya, strengthening the ties between them (Yusuf and Elder 2013).

However, the Kenyan government framed the formation of Jubaland through a security lens, claiming that by making Jubaland a semi-autonomous region, it could act as a buffer 'state' and security zone between Kenya and Al-Shabaab-controlled territory (Mwangi 2016, 122-124). This would be beneficial for the Horn of Africa as it would make it increasingly difficult for Al-Shabaab to spread to Kenya and Ethiopia, limiting their reach and thus power in the region (Mwangi 2016, 121). In addition, arguments were made that it had the potential to act as an ideological buffer zone to prevent Islamic radicalization from spilling over into Kenya (Mwangi 2016, 122-124). This is because "nearly 50% of individuals adhering to Islam lived in the Northeastern counties" (Kamer 2022) of Kenya. However, when zooming out and looking at the total population in Kenya, Muslims only make up around 10% of the population (Kamer 2022).

Therefore, although these reasons were framed in the interest of the region, it was clear that behind closed doors, Kenya has used the region to gain more political and economic leverage. This was highlighted six months before announcing the closure of Dadaab, as statements were released accusing Kenya of interfering in the Jubaland elections, making the landmark agreement that was reached in September 2020 invalid (Al Jazeera 2020b). In that agreement, it was agreed that the House of the People and members of the Senate would be elected through the holding of "indirect elections in two locations in each state" (The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2021, 2) and in the capital Mogadishu. However, as Kenya was accused of interfering in Jubaland's elections, it made the agreement made between the federal government of Somalia and federal member states invalid (The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2021, 2; Al Jazeera 2020b). This action seemed to be the last straw for Somalia, as it led them to cut diplomatic ties with Kenya in December 2020, calling all Kenyan diplomats to leave the country and all Somali diplomats in Kenya to come back home (Al Jazeera 2020a).



These diplomatic tensions further increased in March 2021, as it marked the start of the hearings for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case regarding a disputed maritime delimitation in the Indian Ocean (International Court of Justice, n.d.). Back in August 2014, Somalia had filed an application against Kenya via the ICJ as there were disagreements regarding an Exclusive Economic Zone of 42,000 km<sup>2</sup> (International Court of Justice, n.d.; Chan 2018, 195). An Exclusive Economic Zone is "an area of ocean... beyond a nation's territorial sea, within which a coastal nation has jurisdiction over both living and nonliving resources" (Ocean Explorer, n.d.). The reason why political tensions between Somalia and Kenya increased was that, right before the start of the hearings, Kenya announced its withdrawal, as they felt that there was bias against Kenya and an averseness of the ICJ to delay the hearings due to the COVID-19 pandemic (International Court of Justice, n.d.; Al Jazeera 2021). This withdrawal was heavily criticized by the Somalis as the case was already delayed multiple times and conflicted with the procedural norms and rule of law (Al Jazeera 2021). As a result, this heightened already tense Kenya-Somalia diplomatic relations and likely influenced Kenya's decision, as 10 days later Kenya announced its intentions to close Dadaab.

## 5. Analysis

The aim of this thesis is to understand why the Kenyan government decided to announce the closure of the Dadaab Refugee Complex in March 2021, after operating for over three decades. Based on the literature, multiple factors were identified as potential causal mechanisms that could have played a role in the announced closure decision made by the Kenyan government. Throughout this thesis, they were broken down into four aspects, namely: organizational, economic, security and political. To determine which factor(s) likely influenced the Kenyan government's decision the most, all potential causal mechanisms will be held against the criteria earlier established in the methodology and the strength of the aspects will be analyzed to determine which factors likely weighed more in the decision-making process.

### 5.1 Organizational Aspects

To refute the claim that it was inevitable for the Dadaab Refugee Complex to close, Mahoudeau (2021) and the UNHCR Algeria report from Global Compact on Refugees (2023) highlighted that the active involvement of refugees in the organizational structure of Dadaab is necessary. This is because they found a pattern between high levels of refugee involvement and the longevity, and thus sustainability, of refugee camps (Mahoudeau 2021; Global Compact on Refugees 2023). The reason for this is that by bringing refugees into the organizational structure and management of refugee camps, they claim it increases the communication between refugees and humanitarian agencies (Global Compact on Refugees 2023). This is beneficial as it allows humanitarian agencies to better understand the needs of the refugees, thus increasing the operational effectiveness of the camps. Throughout this thesis, evidence found that refugees had an active role within the organizational structure of Dadaab. Since the start, community leaders naturally emerged within the various housing blocks and acted as an intermediary and bridge between the community and the agencies working on the ground (NonFiction Group 2022, 49:18-50:24). It was clear that their role contributed to the "smooth management of camp bureaucracy" (Jaji 2012, 228), as in 2006, the UNHCR and humanitarian agencies organized the first official elections, in which refugees could vote for camp, section, and block leaders, revealing that their roles were taken seriously (Yusuf 2013).

However, the role of refugees should not be overstated as the UNHCR and humanitarian agencies remained the key actors who managed the Complex from the top-down

(Chkam 2016, 82; NonFiction Group 2022, 32:47-33:25). Nevertheless, in light of the aforementioned evidence, refugees played a significant role in fostering communication from the bottom-up, which in turn contributed to the longevity potential of the Complex as it increased the ability of humanitarian agencies and the UNHCR to understand what refugees needed.

Furthermore, the strength of the claim that it was not inevitable for the Complex to close increases when referring back to Kodeih, Schildt, and Lawrence's (2023, 192-193) work, which argued that refugees can become increasingly self-sufficient and less dependent on aid agencies in the long run when signs of entrepreneurship 'sheltering work' are present. This is because signs of entrepreneurship 'sheltering work' were present within Dadaab. This was evident as the ITC partnered with Celestine Ukpere Consulting to establish the Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative (ITC News 2020). RESI created a space for refugees to learn about setting up digital entrepreneurship and businesses, and refugees profited from this (ITC News 2020). Abubakar Aden Hassan, who followed the RESI program, is a prime example of how entrepreneurship sheltering work helped expand his networks, restructure his day-to-day activities, and reclaim his agency to become more self-sustaining, as he was able to earn \$1000 dollars in his first year as an online freelance translator (Kodeih, Schildt, and Lawrence 2023, 192-193; ITC News 2020).

Therefore, when looking at both criteria, the strength of the claim that it was inevitable for the Complex to close due to a lack of sustainability in organizational structures and activities on the ground seems to be weak.

## **5.2 Economic Aspects**

To claim that economic factors led Kenya to announce the closure of the camp, the literature hinted that refugees needed to be seen as an economic burden rather than an asset (Gladden 2020). Specifically, evidence is needed to counter Kibreab's (1993) and Alloush *et al.*'s (2017) findings that refugees were economic agents who created opportunities to earn money and extended their economic activities to benefit and stimulate economic growth in surrounding areas. However, as the discussions in the case studies revealed, Dadaab refugees were the exact opposite and validated Kibreab's (1993) and Alloush *et al.*'s (2017) claims. This is because data

revealed that economic undertakings by Dadaab refugees generated an estimated income of \$25 million annually (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 827). Furthermore, Dadaab refugees used blind spots in humanitarian aid practices and exchanged, for example, their basic WFP food rations for other products with local communities outside the camps, through the help of middlemen (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 838-842; Diirad Films 2021, 5:55-6:16). As a result, trade-based interactions were established that benefited both the refugees and the local communities (Chaux and Haugh 2020, 838-842). Therefore, the rich economic activities within and surrounding the Complex seem to refute the claim that refugees were an economic burden, thus reducing the likelihood that economic factors led Kenya to announce the closure of the camp.

However, when referring back to Micinski's (2021) Modified Model of Refugee Rentier States, it was plausible that economic factors influenced Kenya's decision as Kenya needed additional aid to keep the Complex running. This is because COVID-19 strongly impacted the Complex and hindered its ability to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees as the WFP faced critical resource shortages and needed "\$57 million to continue providing food and nutrition assistance to the country's refugee population between January and June 2021" (World Food Programme 2020). Furthermore, food rations were cut by 40% (Médecins Sans Frontières 2020a). Reports by MSF (2020b) highlighted that the presence of agencies working in the camps reduced considerably on the ground. Moreover, when looking at the timeline, previous threats to expel Dadaab refugees in 2015, 2016, and 2019 led to a total of \$200 million in additional aid to be extracted, thus strengthening the plausibility of the argument (Micinski 2021, 8).

Yet, the main criticism I have towards the Modified Model of Refugee Rentier States is that the model presumes that the international community is financially able and willing to donate additional aid. However, when looking at the economic landscape at the time, 60% of advanced economies in 2021 were still recovering from the shock waves the COVID-19 pandemic caused economically (Micinski 2021, 8; World Bank 2022, 2-25). Additionally, the UK, which was one of Kenya's main foreign aid donors, announced their plans to reduce aid spending by 21% in 2021 and 2022 to spend that money on recovering their economies (Micinski 2021, 8; Loft and Brien 2022). Therefore, the likelihood that the Kenyan government decided to announce the closure of the Complex to extract additional aid weakens, as it was clear that states were more concerned with their national economy. Furthermore, as will be

highlighted in the next subsection, security aspects seemed to carry more weight in Kenya's decision than extracting aid did, considering their sustained national security concerns.

### 5.3 Security Aspects

Security aspects seemed to play a significant role in Kenya's decision to announce the closure of Dadaab, as intelligence reports found that two major terrorist attacks – the 2013 Westgate Mall attack and the 2015 Garissa University attack – were planned in the camps by Al-Shabaab militants (Council on Foreign Relations 2022; BBC News 2017). The perceived national security threat Dadaab posed for the Kenyan government seems to be legitimate, according to Bossis and Lampas' (2018) work, as the Complex was located in a remote region, close to the Somali border and more than 400km removed from Nairobi (DistanceFromTo, n.d.). This contributed to Kenya seeing the Complex as a national security threat, as the Complex was out of the immediate reach of the Kenyan government, making it easier for terrorists, such as Al-Shabaab terrorists, to infiltrate the Complex (BBC News 2017). This suggests that the proximity of the Complex itself contributed to the Kenyan government seeing the Complex through a security lens. Additionally, with recent developments relating to the US announcement to withdraw troops from Somalia, the Al-Shabaab military base attack and the release of 400 Al-Shabaab militants, this did not ease the Al-Shabaab threat perceptions in the eyes of the Kenyan government (Dahir 2020; Bureau of Counterterrorism 2021; BBC News 2020).

Furthermore, Schmid's (2006, 4) claim that a refugee-hosting state's inability to handle large refugee influxes increases the risk of domestic and transnational terrorists seems traceable to Dadaab. This is because, a year before the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, the Complex held around 485,000 refugees, which was five times the number of refugees it was built for (UNHCR 2017, 29; Garvelink and Tahir 2012). The UNHCR revealed signs that Kenya was unable to suitably handle large influxes of refugees from the 2011-2012 Horn of Africa crisis, as extension camps, such as Kambioos, were still awaiting government approval (Garvelink and Tahir 2012). This meant that, in the period leading up to the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, the Complex was not only overcrowded but refugees were also staying in extension 'camps' that were not officially recognized yet or had the necessary amenities in place (Garvelink and Tahir 2012). This seems to confirm Schmid's (2016, 4) findings that the inability of refugee-

hosting states to handle large increases the risk of transnational terrorism, as 9 months later Al-Shabaab militants attacked the Westgate Mall, killing 67 people (Council on Foreign Relations 2022). As a result, based on Schmid's (2016) work, the perceived security concerns the Kenyan government had towards the Complex seemed reasonable.

That being said, the argument that terrorist organizations use displacement flows as opportunities for radicalization and as a recruitment pool, posed by Böhmelt and Bove (2020) and Milton, Spencer, and Findley (2013), can only be speculated within Dadaab as no evidence was found that Al-Shabaab recruited refugees within the Complex. However, it can be claimed that the Kenyan government was concerned about the potential increase in Islamic radicalization and its spill-over into Kenya, given that approximately 50% of individuals who adhere to Islam reside in the Northern-East counties around the Complex (Kamer 2022; Mwangi 2016, 122-124). This is because “the proportion of non-state violence ... that can be attributed to jihadists rose from 0% in 2007 to nearly 44% by 2020” (Piombo and Englebert 2022, 1178). However, due to a lack of evidence a link between these statistics and activities within the Complex cannot be made.

#### **5.4 Political Aspects**

According to Pandey's (2023) and Hastedt and Knickrehm's (1988) work, to claim that political factors led Kenya to announce the closure of the Complex, growing hostility between Somalia and Kenya had to be evident. This is because Hastedt and Knickrehm's (1988, 260-261) found that the hosting of refugees takes on a more political dimension when bilateral relations between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin become hostile. Throughout this thesis, it became apparent that hostility between Somalia and Kenya grew, and in turn negatively impacted the status of Dadaab refugees because in December 2020, Somalia cut all diplomatic ties with Kenya (Al Jazeera 2020a). Somalia ordered all Kenyan diplomats to leave Somalia and ordered all Somali diplomats in Kenya to come home after they accused Kenya of rigging the Jubaland elections (Al Jazeera 2020a). These accusations seemed reasonable as the region has been of high interest to Kenya due to its unexploited oil reserves and strategic ports (Mwangi 2016, 123-124). Furthermore, Kenya's presence in the region has been notable, with Kenyan forces being stationed in the region as part of AMISOM since 2012 (Hujale, Soi and Ali 2021, 13:22-13:40). Furthermore, their influence remains present as they have

maintained ties with various Somali clans, including Ogaden and Darod, whose members and branches remain present in the northeastern part of Kenya (Yusuf and Elder 2013).

Additionally, tensions heightened when Kenya withdrew from the ICJ disputed maritime delimitation hearings, a case filed by Somalia against Kenya in 2014, claiming that there was a bias against Kenya (International Court of Justice, n.d.). This withdrawal was heavily criticized by Somalia as the case was already delayed multiple times and the withdrawal conflicted with the procedural norms and rule of law (Al Jazeera 2021). As a result, this added to the already high diplomatic tensions between Kenya and Somalia.

The claim that heightened diplomatic tensions between Somalia and Kenya negatively impacted the status of Dadaab refugees is strengthened because Kenya announced its intentions to close the Complex 10 days after their ICJ withdrawal. Specifically, the timeline of events that occurred four months before the announcement strengthens Pandey's (2023, 415) argument that the state of relations between the refugee-hosting state and the country of origin matter and can impact how refugees, and thus refugee camps, are treated. Therefore, it can be established that political aspects likely played a large role in Kenya's decision.

## **5.5 Sub-Conclusion**

In summary, it was found that, while organizational and economic factors were measured, security and political aspects seemed to be the primary drivers behind Kenya's decision to announce the closure of the Dadaab Refugee Complex. The perceived national security threat the Complex brought in relation to Al-Shabaab, combined with the deteriorating bilateral relations between Somalia and Kenya, seemed to play a more substantial role in shaping the Kenyan government's decision than economic factors had. Organizational factors seemed to challenge the claim that the closure of the Complex was inevitable as a whole.

## 5. Conclusion and Further Research Avenues

To conclude, this thesis investigated why the Kenyan government announced its intentions to close the Dadaab Refugee Complex in March 2021, after operating for 31 years. Through the use of process tracing, this thesis aimed to uncover the causal factors which led the Kenyan government to release the tweet, which ultimately led to its closure in June 2022. Based on existing academic literature, multiple factors were identified as being potential causal mechanisms that could have played a role in the announced closure of the Complex by the Kenyan government. Throughout this thesis, they were broken down into four aspects, namely: organizational, economic, security, and political aspects. From the in-depth case studies and analysis, it can be concluded that security and political aspects were the primary drivers that played into Kenya's decision to announce the closure of the Complex.

The evidence that Al-Shabaab militants in the past planned major terrorist attacks within the Complex steered the Kenyan government to start viewing the Complex through a security lens (Council on Foreign Relations 2022; BBC News 2017). Additionally, the remote location of the Complex and closeness to the Somali border increased Kenya's perception that the Complex was a security threat as it was out of their immediate reach, making it easier for Al-Shabaab terrorists to infiltrate the Complex. Recent developments, such as the withdrawal of US troops from Somalia, the release of Al-Shabaab militants from Somali prisons, and the Al-Shabaab military base attack, further intensified feelings that Kenya's national security was being threatened. Furthermore, political aspects revealed that four months before the Kenyan government announced its decision to close the Complex, political tensions between Kenya and Somalia increased. In early December 2020, Somalia cut diplomatic ties with Kenya and in March 2021 tensions heightened when Kenya withdrew from the ICJ hearings case. Therefore, when linking these findings back to the literature, this thesis highlighted how there was an interplay between geopolitical dynamics and the action taken by states regarding their decision on whether to close a refugee camp. In this specific case and at that specific time, the Kenyan government prioritized their own national security and geopolitical interests over that of the refugees.

Considering that the Complex only recently opened again in January 2023, after being officially 'closed' since June 2022, a potential avenue for further research could be to explore why the Kenyan government decided to reopen the Complex. Research could focus on the



international community and the potential role it played in ensuring that Kenya reopened the camps. However, the research could also investigate it from a legal perspective, discussing whether the announced closure was legal in the first place, considering the principle of non-refoulement. Overall, there are many potential avenues for further research that could help deepen our understanding of why the Kenyan government decided to close and now reopen the Complex and its impact on Kenya's national security and regional stability.

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