

Regulating Refugees

Technologies, Bodies, and Belonging in Kenya

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“The fingerprints will always pop up,” lamented Aba, a young woman dressed in a long, colorful cotton dress that she curled around herself protectively as we spoke. We were seated on a mattress propped up on the floor of her small sitting room in an apartment in Nairobi that she shared with her two young children and a roommate who, like Aba, identified as a Somali refugee. Aba was from the port city of Kismayu, Somalia, a former stronghold of Somalia-based insurgent group Al-Shabaab that fell to government hands in 2012 following a battle led by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)¹ and Somali government troops. Aba made her way down to Nairobi in 2010, following her brother who had migrated two years earlier, and settled in Eastleigh, a neighborhood widely known as the social and economic hub for Somalis in Kenya’s capital city (see Carrier 2017). Migration patterns such as Aba’s are common, as the border between Kenya and Somalia has been historically porous, and strong cross-border cultural, social, and economic links have long facilitated the flow of goods, money and people between the two countries (see Little 2003; Lochery 2012). Many Somalis have leveraged this fluidity as a survival strategy: they alternately claim Kenyan origins to avoid police harassment and claim Somali origins to receive food and medicine reserved for refugees. Since the Kenyan state adopted biometric technologies like fingerprint and iris scans to manage its refugee population, however, Somali-born refugees in Kenya like Aba have had more trouble maintaining these fluid identities. Once Aba’s fingerprints had been recorded biometrically, they would, as she said, “always pop up.” From the perspective of the Kenyan state, such fluid identities were a problem to be solved, and data-driven technologies were an important part of the solution.

This chapter narrates the experiences of people like Aba alongside an analysis of bureaucratic practices, procedures, and policies to highlight how new sociotechnical systems are reshaping the Kenyan state's techniques of territorial and social control, as well as the actions of the populations perceived to pose challenges to this control, in surprising and contradictory ways. While refugee management has long been a bureaucratic exercise for states and multilateral institutions like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Kenya example foregrounds the datafication of refugee identity as an emergent element of this bureaucratic politics in an increasingly digital age.

Information has become a critical new currency for stateless peoples, serving as a key mediator between states, refugees, and technologies. In Kenya, for refugees to navigate the refugee status determination (RSD) process successfully and achieve their goal of being resettled in a third country, they must become adept at acquiring the information that will tell them which data points to include in their encounters with the state during the RSD process and how to structure that data. Well-informed refugees assume the *de facto* role of data scientist—collecting, recording, cleaning, structuring, and safely storing data points about their lives and journeys, curating them for and re-presenting them to the state. In more analog times, before bureaucratic offices in global capitals like Nairobi were outfitted with biometric fingerprinting, iris scanning, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies, refugees worked through extended kin and community networks to alternately leverage and evade forms of bureaucratic state regulation. Now, as the refugee experience becomes more intimately entangled with the politics of data management, social networks are most useful when they enable refugees to more effectively shapeshift to mirror the new digitally mediated demands of state regulation. As I will show, the stories refugees narrate to the state bureaucrats who have the power to christen them refugees or exclude them as “aliens” takes on a modular, abstract quality, conforming to the functionality of the mediating technology itself. At the same time, as I discuss below, refugees also leverage more flexible technologies like social media platforms WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to form modular narratives of a different kind, for example, gendered romantic scripts that they activate in a hopeful effort to circumvent and subvert the state's exclusionary procedures—with varying degrees of success—in order to regain control over their lives.

The Government of Kenya's new digital methods of refugee regulation and refugees' attempts to navigate them are enmeshed in a sociotechnical system that includes biometric and geospatial technologies and the bureaucrats who deploy them; mobile phone and SIM card

registration regulations and the shopkeepers and mobile network operators who enforce or ignore them; and social media platforms and the transnational groups that leverage them. In this chapter, I explore these intersections of the technological, social, legal, and bureaucratic to understand broadly how new technologies of population regulation encode and decode information about bodies, citizenship, and belonging; how they impact refugees' freedom of movement, legal status, and economic opportunities; and how they are used by refugees to attempt to circumvent state restrictions, creating alternative configurations of sociality and security in the process.

The empirical data that forms the basis of my claims was collected during six months of field research in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2018, and virtual follow up research in 2019.² Field research included surveys distributed to Nairobi-based refugees; social media data collection, primarily via WhatsApp; in-depth interviews with refugees, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government stakeholders; and participant observation at Refugee Status Determination interviews at the Refugee Affairs Secretariat at Shauri Moyo, as well as at various refugee-led community-based organization (CBO) meetings, government-led community events, and the World Refugee Day festivities.³ Research participants were representative of the broader Nairobi-based refugee population and were chosen based on factors including national origin, age, gender, and neighborhood of residence. Other than in specific instances where I indicate otherwise, in this piece I employ a social definition of refugeehood rather than a legal one, that is, I use the term "refugee" to mean anyone who describes themselves as such. I do this because the process of conferring refugee status under the law, and the ways in which that process is shaped by emergent social technical systems in the context of broader regional and geopolitical histories, is the object of my analysis; I do not wish to reify the category as I interrogate it. Many of those whom I call "refugees" in this piece are legally classified as "asylum seekers."

Regional Political and Geopolitical Histories and the Securitization of Migration

Starting in 2012, powerful figures in the Kenyan government stepped up efforts to stymie the flow of refugees into the country, largely under the guise of enhancing Kenyan national security in the wake of a number of kidnappings of European nationals (tourists, Kenyan residents, and aid workers) and small-scale attacks claimed by, or attributed to,

Somalia-based group Al-Shabaab. While Kenya had been partnering with the United States (and to a lesser extent the UK and other allies) in some capacity to improve its counterterrorism capabilities since Al-Qaeda's attack on the US Embassy in Nairobi in 1998, US support increased dramatically after the rapid rise of Al-Shabaab, which by 2010 had become a powerful regional political force and by some accounts a legitimized (though not necessarily legitimate) government actor in the regions of Somalia it controlled, with a particularly impressive record of generating revenue by taxing the Somali population. By 2011, Al-Shabaab's attacks in Kenya had begun to seriously damage the nation's tourism economy⁴ and the Kenyan government responded both militarily—by invading southern Somalia under Operation Linda Nchi (Kiswahili for “protect the nation”)⁵—and politically, by calling for the restriction of refugees' rights.

Kenya's Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), the body then responsible for refugee policy and administration, enacted such restrictions by threatening to enforce Kenya's “encampment policy” (Garlick et al. 2022), which requires all refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas to relocate to one of the country's refugee camps in the barren, economically depressed northern section of the country.⁶ The DRA also administratively separated Somalis from other refugee populations, instructing Somali refugees to go to Dadaab refugee camp and all others to go to Kakuma refugee camp.

This policy generated intense criticism from human rights and civil society groups, and in July 2013, the Kenya High Court at Nairobi ruled it unconstitutional on the grounds of the freedom of movement clause and principle of nonrefoulement outlined in Kenya's Refugees Act (Garlick et al 2022). Nevertheless, the government doubled down on its enforcement of the policy in 2014. In March, Interior Cabinet Secretary Joseph Ole Lenku issued a directive (Press Statement 2014) ordering all refugees residing outside the refugee camps to go to them immediately and asked Kenyans and refugees to report those who were flouting this directive. To enforce this directive, he sent five hundred law enforcement officers to urban areas.

The government dubbed this plan Operation Usalama Watch (*usalama* means safety or security in Kiswahili), justifying it on both public and national security grounds. Refugees living in Nairobi at the time described it as a campaign of terror. Police officers beat down their doors in the middle of the night and forcibly took Somali Kenyans and sometimes refugees of other nationalities to Kasarani, a football stadium that had been turned into a makeshift detention facility where some were held for multiple days. The ethnic Somali neighborhood of Eastleigh

was one of the main targets, though other areas with a large number of Somalis were also heavily impacted.

Abdul, a thirty-year-old Somali refugee who fled to Kenya as a teenager in 1999 and lived in Komarock, a neighborhood of mainly Somali and South Sudanese residents, describes his experience being detained:

During [Usalama Watch] we spent most of the time hiding, moving from one place to another trying to escape the police. I was among those people who were arrested and taken to Kasarani. Without money, you can't get out, you have to bribe the police. If you're a kid, you pay 5,000 shillings (approximately US\$50) and if you're an adult you pay 10,000 shillings (approximately US\$100). If you have an ID that you got illegally, they might ask you for 20,000 shillings (approximately US\$200).

Some [without money were deported] to Somalia . . . I was lucky because a Kenyan friend of mine who is my neighbor paid 10,000 shillings for me and I was released. But after two days, the police came to my door and knocked again . . .

Abdul's story, a version of which was repeated by many refugees with whom I spoke, reveals the tension between protecting the nation and terrorizing portions of it, and the police's ability to profit from generalized insecurity.

At least 357 people were deported during Usalama Watch⁷ (Freedom House 2015) in what would become a harbinger of things to come. The government continued to attempt to restrict the ability of Somali refugees to stay in Kenya, including by introducing amendments to the Refugees Act of 2006.⁸ An attack by Al-Shabaab on Garissa University on 2 April 2015, in which almost 150 Kenyans were killed, prompted a fresh wave of anti-refugee sentiment, including threats made by the Minister of Interior to shut down the Dadaab refugee camp completely and repatriate all of its residents. He called Dadaab a "nursery for terrorists" and claimed that the Garissa attack, as well as the 2013 attack on the Westgate, the posh Nairobi mall popular with Western expatriates, had been planned from Dadaab camp (this has never been proven) (Rawlence 2016). Shutting down Kenya's refugee camps then became the rallying cry of Kenya's national security establishment.

Amid growing political pressure from the international community, Kenya's Ministry of Interior eventually ceased efforts to amend the Refugee Law, but never abandoned its overall goal of pushing refugees outside of Kenya's borders. Working in tenuous partnership with UNHCR, which had become skittish about Kenya's pronounced desire to abandon its commitment to protect refugees altogether, the

government shifted its focus to procedural elements of refugee management: it limited refugee registration opportunities, enforced mobile phone and SIM card registration regulations, and incorporated biometric and geospatial technologies into the refugee registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process.⁹ Some of these decisions explicitly targeted refugees (like procedurally refusing Somalis the opportunity to register as refugees at registration centers), while others served broader national security goals (like enforcing registration requirements for all mobile money accounts). All resulted in the de facto restriction of refugees' ability to make a living or move freely throughout the country. Aba's lament about her fingerprints "popping up," mentioned at the outset of this chapter and explored in more depth below, is one example of this kind of de facto restriction in practice.

The Kenyan government worked with UNHCR to incorporate data-driven technologies more prominently in its RSD processes, symbolically casting the decision of who resides and thrives within Kenya's boundaries as an objective, technical one. New technologies were leveraged in the RSD process in myriad ways; for example, GIS technologies were used to verify the empirical accuracy of refugees' stories about their migration journeys. At the time, Kenya was admitting refugees from particular areas of the Great Lakes region (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda) on a prima facie basis; if refugees could "prove" they were from one of the specified areas, they were granted legal refugee status (more below). Biometric data, meanwhile, which was collected at the time of registration, was used to verify refugees' identities and narratives over time. Each time a refugee was called to the RSD office for an interview, new data was added to the refugee's file and compared against data recorded in previous interviews; any perceived discrepancies were notated. Repeat visits were used to ascertain credibility, and data inconsistencies usually disqualified refugees from being resettled to a third country (most refugees' primary goal) as well from being granted refugee status to remain in Kenya. Utopian sentiment about digital technologies being vehicles of transparency were at an all-time high in Kenya at this time, as news about social media platforms' enabling role in the Arab Spring energized a nascent Kenyan technology sector that had risen from the ashes of Kenya's 2007/08 post-election violence on the grounds of increasing transparent and accountable governance and preventing future political violence (Poggiali 2016). Techno-utopianism became a surprisingly effective ideological alibi of Kenya's national security establishment, as digital technologies' strong symbolic association with objectivity, transparency, and accountability made any process that centered them difficult to attack on political grounds. Their power when invoked as a critical part of the RSD

process was in their ability to render the profoundly political act of managing perceived threats to the body politic as an apolitical activity.

Out of all the refugee populations in Nairobi, Somalis posed a particularly robust challenge to digital methods of ordering and categorizing political identity, primarily because, as I mentioned at the outset, they had become accustomed to embodying a fluid, rather than a fixed identity. Much is at stake in these citizenship categories and their regulation. Prominent Somali Kenyans have benefited handsomely from the cross-border migration of people and money over the past decade—specifically through the trade in sugar, charcoal, and rice. They have garnered political support by controlling territories populated by ever increasing numbers of ethnic Somali migrants. Regulating the movement of ethnic Somalis in this context thus means regulating political and economic power.

Digital Surveillance, Social Control, and Somali Identity

“Because of security reasons we decided that it was good to screen [Somalis and Burundians¹⁰] so that we get the full information, the documents, like passports” said Maina, the head of security operations at Shauri Moyo, Nairobi’s main site for RSD since the Kenyan government took over from the UNHCR in 2016. “It is for our *own* security, staff security,” Maina emphasized, explaining why Somalis should receive extra security screening at Shauri Moyo. “Because you can’t know how they operate,” he continued. “You might think, ‘this is just a person who is single, [but] we have seen even when they attack other countries, even America or Europe, they use young kids.’ This assumption that Somalis’ allegiance to the Kenyan nation could not be trusted and that they were particularly effective at hiding sinister motivations and even terrorist proclivities was widespread among government bureaucrats. “They talk like you,” a prominent government figure responsible for refugee management told me, speaking of the fact that many ethnic Somalis speak Kenya’s national language Kiswahili and the local urban dialect *sheng*. “It’s easy to lose track of them,” he reiterated. “So it would be very easy for Somalis to just become Kenyan.” If the government did away with the encampment policy, he continued, there would be no “refugees” because all Somalis would become Kenyan by falsely claiming Kenyan citizenship.

The deep-seated fear these men expressed about Somali integration was the product of decades of tense regional history—at Kenyan independence, ethnic Somalis living in what is now Kenya’s northeastern province attempted to make the territory part of Somalia, resulting in

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a bloody conflict known the Shifta Rebellion. The northeastern province became an official part of the new Kenyan nation; resentment remained deep on both sides. Since the nation's founding, Somalis have had a tense relationship with Kenya's central government, often describing feeling like second-class citizens; they have had a particularly hard time gaining access to standard bureaucratic documents like ID cards. Biometric identification was a tool the Kenyan state could use to systematically track Somalis and make it more difficult for them to "become Kenyan." It enabled the Kenyan government to fix Somali identities in place, forcing them to choose whether to be Kenyan or Somali, but not both. For those Somalis who chose to register as refugees, after completing the enhanced security screening at Shauri Moyo, they would start the multiyear RSD process, claiming an exception to be able to stay in Nairobi rather than travel to live in Dadaab. They would often visit Shauri Moyo every few months for years for different interviews, but never receive the refugee ID: a laminated card, renewable every five years, that is the culmination of the RSD process. Many of those who qualified as refugees under the definitions of the 1951 or 1969 Conventions would never complete the RSD process because they did not have the transport funds for repeat visits to RSD headquarters, could not afford to take days off work that were required for each visit, and/or did not have the funds to bribe various gatekeepers to obtain the required documentation. Others simply got frustrated and tired with the slow-moving, often dehumanizing process, and saw little value in obtaining a refugee ID. "I have been [to Shauri Moyo] two dozen times and I still don't have the card," one young Somali man told me. "I decided to just leave it [i.e., stop trying]. [The Kenyan government] is just playing with us."

Many give up pursuing asylum through official channels, deciding that their best option for a stable life is, echoing Maina's fears, to register as a Kenyan. This was the case for Aba, the Somali woman I mentioned at the outset of this piece, who spoke about her fingerprints "popping up." Two years after Aba arrived in Nairobi, in 2012, she initially visited the UNHCR to register as a refugee. Her goal was to be resettled in Canada, where her brother lived at the time. He had agreed to be her sponsor, meaning that he would be financially responsible for her in Canada. She told the UNHCR she was underage (seventeen years old), a white lie which allowed her to quickly receive a mandate allowing her to remain in Kenya.

Armed with a mandate and confident that her brother's offer to sponsor her in Canada would enable her to move quickly through the resettlement process, Aba told me that she had "high hopes that [she] would leave the country." Shortly after registering, she met a Somali Kenyan

man in her neighborhood, and they soon married. Unbeknownst to her, changing one's marital status during resettlement presented new bureaucratic hurdles in an already cumbersome, drawn-out process. New identities could not be transferred easily from one bureaucratic domain to another, as Aba learned when she was told she would have to start the resettlement process from the beginning: new documents needed to be collected and issued, new appointments needed to be made with the relevant officials, and new interviews needed to be conducted (Wirtz 2015).¹¹ Aba's brother became angry and frustrated with her for what he described as "creating these new roadblocks," and he stopped facilitating her resettlement. Her case stalled. She had two children in Kenya with her husband, but the marriage did not last. When I met her in 2017, Aba was single with few prospects of fulfilling her dream of leaving the country.

After making a few failed attempts to find a husband in Canada through Facebook, Aba did what so many Somali migrants before her have successfully done, attempt to become Kenyan. She took the over ten-hour bus journey to visit her friend, a Somali Kenyan whom she knew via social networks in Eastleigh, who worked at an ID processing center in Habaswein, a town in northeastern Kenya populated almost exclusively by ethnic Somalis. He offered to help her get a Kenyan ID, a process that would be tricky on her own, since she did not speak fluent Kiswahili nor have a tuberculosis vaccination scar, two telltale signs that she was not Somali Kenyan, but rather Somali (Balakian 2016). When Aba arrived at the ID center, however, her friend took her fingerprints and told her he could not help her as she had already registered as a refugee. Her fingerprints, he told her, had "popped up." "Biometrics," she told me, shaking her head as she recounted the experience. "If I did not have my fingerprints at UNHCR today, I would have a Kenyan ID." From the perspective of the Kenyan state, Aba's case is an example of the newly digitalized RSD process working as intended. Biometrics, in the state's view, were a bulwark against Somalis becoming Somali Kenyans—they were preventing the "enemy" from without from becoming the enemy within.

Social Networks and the Circulation of Identity: Mobile SIM Card Registration

Not all new techniques of refugee management led to such intractable results for Somali refugees. When the Kenyan government began requiring all mobile phone users to officially register their SIM cards in

2010, many refugees became disconnected from the network. As I will describe below, this meant they also lost access to their main way to get income. Because SIM card registration was not tied to the biometric system, however, refugees were able to circumvent these technological restrictions by leveraging their social networks and appealing to a more fluid, malleable expression of identity.

According to the Communications Authority of Kenya (2022), as of June 2022 there were over 64.7 million active mobile phone SIM card subscriptions in Kenya, a country with a population of 52.57 million. There were 37.2 million active registered mobile money subscriptions, resulting in value transfers of over KSh1.1 trillion (Kenyan shillings) (approximately US\$9 billion). Most of these transfers were conducted via mobile phone company Safaricom's mobile money platform called M-Pesa (*pesa* means money in Kiswahili). A financial technology that allows users to store electronic currency—converted from cash—on their mobile phones, M-Pesa enables currency to be transferred to other M-Pesa users, used to pay for goods and services such as bread or electricity, and converted back into cash. The technology provides a significant service for the millions of Kenyans who do not have access to traditional banking structures and who primarily work in the informal economy. For refugees who are shut out of the formal labor market due to restrictive laws, and unable to legally open bank accounts, M-Pesa is a lifeline. This changed in 2010, when the Communications Commission of Kenya began requiring all M-Pesa SIM cards to be registered, giving users until October 2011 to produce national or foreigner IDs in order to keep their accounts operational.¹²

M-Pesa relies upon a network of agents who man both small kiosks and large storefronts; these agents—over 600,000 of them as of March 2022—change cash into electronic currency and load it onto a user's SIM card, and they can also change the electronic currency on a user's SIM card into cash. For the first time, Kenyan residents' ability to perform mobile transactions became linked to their identities and their official legal status as Kenyans or foreigners. In the years immediately following this new regulation, refugees could produce a document (called a "mandate") from UNHCR verifying that they were legally in the country. This changed in 2014, when Safaricom—M-Pesa's parent company—started quietly shutting down refugee accounts.

Salah, a Somali woman in her midtwenties, traveled from Mogadishu to Nairobi in 2015 after her brother was killed in crossfire. After relying on a chain of smugglers to shuttle her across the border and through a myriad of police checkpoints, she arrived in Eastleigh, the neighborhood with the highest concentration of Somalis in Nairobi. Once there,

she started a small business reselling clothes that had been sent to her by her aunt, who lived in a refugee camp in South Africa. Selling inexpensive consumer goods is a common way that refugees make money in Nairobi. These goods include everything from clothes to peanut butter to car parts to snacks eaten by Muslims on Ramadan. Salah relied on M-Pesa to receive money from customers throughout Nairobi and even in other parts of Kenya. That is, until her account was mysteriously shut down.

Salah recalls no longer being able to send or receive money through M-Pesa and being told by her local M-Pesa agent that they did not know why she was being denied. They could not help her because the accounts were being shut off by Safaricom's corporate office. While it is unlikely that Safaricom specifically targeted refugees, and human rights organizations with whom I spoke suspected they did not,¹³ the Kenyan government made clear in numerous public statements that the regulatory restrictions on SIM card registration was necessary to stem growing insecurity in the country. Such regulations, government figures said, would help them better track nefarious communication-based and financial transactions that were aiding and abetting terrorism. This decision was made after police reports were released claiming that the Al-Shabaab militants who planned and executed the attack on Westgate, the upscale mall frequented by foreigners, in September 2013, were communicating via unregistered SIM cards.

While her own account was no longer operable, Salah continued to receive money in exchange for her clothes by borrowing her Kenyan friend's ID and using her account. Almost all of the more than 160 refugees with whom I spoke reported having their M-Pesa accounts shut down, and almost all reported using the national IDs of friends, neighbors, and family members to register for SIM cards, move money, and withdraw and deposit cash. This was possible because unlike the RSD process, which relied on biometrics for verification, mobile money required one's identity to be verified by an agent who checked the ID against the account information. The agent could fail to recognize the discrepancy in appearance between the photo on the ID and the person standing in front of them, or they could choose to look the other way. Identities could circulate rather than being forced to remain fixed in place.

If the Kenyan government's aim was to use SIM card registration to better track digital identities and transactions—particularly those made by Somalis—this mode of digital regulation had the opposite effect. Somali refugees leveraged their historical social ties to Somali Kenyans in order to assume the identities of family members, friends, and other

community members. Indeed, I noticed when sending research participants small amounts of money via M-Pesa—our mutually agreed upon compensation for their time and data—Safaricom’s automated confirmation messages often displayed unknown Somali names. In using social ties to circumvent electronic regulation, refugees could continue to participate in the economic life of Kenya and sustain themselves financially despite the restrictions on refugee work and SIM card registration. Should SIM card registration ever become tied to biometric IDs in the future, however, refugees’ ability to circumvent restrictions on moving money would be severely curtailed.

Becoming a Refugee in Kenya’s Digital Age

The path to legal refugee status in Kenya is long and cumbersome. Those attempting to formally register for the first time need to arrive at Shauri Moyo during early morning hours and present themselves to a security guard stationed outside the building. They often wait for hours before passing through the turnstile and metal detector leading them to the interior of the drab indoor-outdoor space surrounded by high metal fences. They are then ushered into a sparsely decorated room with a wooden desk, a computer, and a chair, where they are asked to place their fingers on the surface of a machine that resembles a cell phone, and have their fingerprints recorded both biometrically and via the traditional ink method. They are asked to align their eyes with a device that resembles binoculars to have their irises digitally scanned. Finally, they are asked to provide biographical data points, including their name, nationality, date and place of birth, profession, the names of relatives with whom they were traveling, and the date when and place where they entered Kenya. This is the beginning of what is known as the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process.

Biometric authentication became a formal part of the RSD process in early 2017 when the UNHCR introduced it to the Kenyan government as a way of more precisely recording refugee registrations. The Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS), as UNHCR called it, was created to “strengthen the integrity of existing processes and significantly improve efficiency for operations. Being able to verify identities,” UNHCR (n.d.) argued, “is extremely important and a matter of human dignity.” It was not lost on the Kenyans staffing the RSD office that BIMS was one more way, along with CCTV cameras, to mitigate the fraud that had long plagued the RSD system in Kenya (UNHCR 2017). Large scandals had engulfed UNHCR in Kenya in recent years, as staff

members had been found to be selling fake IDs to refugees in exchange for money or sexual favors.

The Kenyan government attempted to adopt the technology as part of its domestic governance plans in January 2019, when it introduced the national ID called *Huduma Namba* (“service number” in Kiswahili),¹⁴ claiming it would replace the national ID card system by December 2021 (Kimuyu 2020).¹⁵ The *Huduma Namba* card captures citizens’ personal data from government service delivery providers such as the National Health Insurance Fund, Kenya Revenue Authority, the National Social Security Fund, as well as national identification cards.

The program garnered criticism from Kenyan digital rights advocates and broader civil society for its lack of personal data protection regulation and concerns that it would exclude certain populations, including Somalis, from receiving essential goods and services. Kenya’s High Court agreed, ruling on January 30, 2020 that the program needed a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework to be able to continue (Open Society Justice Initiative n.d.). This debate is part of a continent-wide battle over new technologies and how they will impact the relationship between the public and the state. On the one hand, there is the allure of collecting standardized digital data in contexts in which paper recordkeeping has been logistically difficult, poorly managed, and ill-suited to an increasingly migratory population, and in which “digital” signifies transparency, development, and democracy. On the other hand, increasing concerns about data protection have emerged following an explosion of new forms of digital surveillance, from financial technologies that track consumer data to facial recognition technologies that attempt to reduce urban crime.

The Kenyan government’s support for biometrics merged the discourses of security and science, presenting the image that biometrics would make Kenyans safer and healthier as a nation by fixing peoples’ identities in place. By playing up associations with scientific transparency and objectivity, the government attempted to shift the discussion around biometric identity verification from a political one to a technocratic one. A Kenya Ministry of Interior Twitter post from 19 January 2021, for example, shows photos of what look like Kenyan doctors—outfitted in lab coats, gloves, masks, and clear plastic disposable hairnets—staring intently at a computer screen in one photo and large ID printing machines in another; the caption reads “UPDATE: Mass printing of *Huduma Namba* cards is underway. If you registered, you will soon receive an SMS notification prompting you when and where to collect yours.” The experts decked out in full medical gear signal both the fear of a contaminate and a reasoned, scientific response to it. It is

within this symbolic universe that refugees and other outsiders—those ineligible for a national biometric ID but forced to record their physiology just the same—are implicitly coded as vectors of disease, foreign viruses that through the biometric ID card could be appropriately expunged from the nation and the benefits of citizenship.¹⁶

Kenya's Ministry of the Interior has lauded biometrics more broadly for bringing transparency and objectivity to an RSD process that has long been criticized for being subjective and messy, rife with corruption and inefficiency. The Huduma Namba Secretariat is housed under this Ministry, the same government body that announced Usalama Watch and has repeatedly threatened to shut down Kenyan refugee camps. With biometrics and geospatial technologies, outsiders, the office has intimated, would no longer be able to hide. Yet while the Ministry claims biometric technologies will bring refugee identities to light, they are in fact creating "refugee identity" as a modular set of discrete data points, relegating refugees' actual experiences and narratives about them to the shadows.

New Information Economies: Refugees as Data Scientists and Geographers

This datafication of refugee narratives has spawned a new RSD information economy in Kenya; many refugees participate in multiple WhatsApp groups dedicated to sharing information about navigating the RSD process, including what to say—and not say—in your interview. Refugees test hypotheses about what stories work best for granting protection and resettlement and enlist geography tutors in order to be able to adequately answer questions about place and space asked by state bureaucrats. It is their social networks that enable refugees to meet the demands of the technologies, enabling them to reproduce the linear, consistent narratives demanded by the RSD process.

Many refugees differentiated between their "real story," the experiences they had before entering Kenya, and their "UN story," the narrative they crafted and repeated to officials throughout the RSD process. They called it their "UN story" because it used to be the United Nations and not the Government of Kenya that handled the RSD process. Many refugees told me that every time they visited Shauri Moyo, they would write down in detail what they were asked and what they said in their interviews. That way the information would be consistent for the next time. Jean, a Congolese man with dreams of immigrating to Australia, relayed how he kept copies of the narrative he told UNHCR during his

interview on paper and on his computer so he “could not forget it . . . If your explanation to UNHCR is not clear,” he said, “they’ll reject your claim. Then you can’t be assisted as a refugee.”

New refugees arriving in Kenya are often advised to hire someone to coach them through this process and to help them compose a compelling story. A Congolese refugee named Paul described how his own narrative missteps led him to help other refugees write their RSD stories. “Other refugees used to tell me, ‘if you’ve been waiting three years for your refugee ID, you told them a bad story! You should say this, and this, and this and it will go better,’” he recounted.

Many people told me to create a story of ethnic conflict. To say, “my mother is a Munyamulenge from Congo [an ethnic group in Congo] and my father is a Mufulero [another ethnic group in Congo]. Rwandese don’t like me, and Banyamulenge don’t like me because I’ve spent a lot of time with my father. I’m seen as the enemy.” You say things like that. Because it’s known that many Banyamulenge say they’ve been kicked out of Congo by the Wafulero and the Wabembe. It makes your case go much more smoothly. That story of ethnic conflict has helped so many people.

Now Paul charges a small fee to help newly arrived refugees create clear, place-based narratives in which ethnicity maps neatly onto geography for their RSD interviews.

The most highly prized “coaches” are those who are able to access information crucial to aligning refugees’ narratives with resettlement chances. For example, the priorities of nations who accept resettled refugees change from year to year—for example, one country might give preference to victims of gender-based violence one year, while another might give preference to LGBTQIA+ individuals. Those who learn this information first wield a tremendous amount of power, as the information helps new arrivals shape stories that will increase their chances of undergoing a quick RSD process and successful resettlement to a third country. This is one way entrepreneurial and savvy refugees close to the RSD process—translators, community leaders, and staff at implementing partner organizations that perform refugee service delivery—can make a small amount of money under challenging economic circumstances. The exchange of funds is not always blatantly contractual; as relationships develop, it is often expressed as a “thank you” for sharing helpful information with members of the community.

Rwandese are one of the groups that most commonly seek out this coaching. In 2013, the United Nations invoked the Cessation Clause, which stated that Rwandese refugees around the world should return to

Rwanda, as the country had been deemed safe (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme 1997). From this point on, they were prohibited from registering for refugee status in Kenya.¹⁷ Banyamulenge—an ethnic group who live primarily in a section of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and share cultural and linguistic traits with the Rwandese—were being resettled on a *prima facie* basis, based on their being targeted by other Congolese who claimed that, due to their historical relationship with Rwanda, they were not “real Congolese.” As a result, it became common for Rwandese refugees who were unable to register to pretend to be Banyamulenge in order to receive a refugee ID. In order to succeed, they often hired other refugees to coach them on Congolese geography and customs. Knowing this, the staff administering the RSD interviews were particularly probing with those they thought might be Rwandese. The following story illustrates the importance of geospatial technologies in their decision-making and the kinds of refugee narratives determined to be credible or not credible as a result.

Charles, who had recently arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo, entered Shauri Moyo looking like he had gotten dressed up for church, sporting a yellow golf shirt under a navy-blue sweater and a fitted wool blazer the color of sawdust. His beige pants were impeccably clean and ironed. He carried a pink plastic folder filled with documents. Charles was called into the RSD room first while his wife waited outside, a practice that was often used by RSD interviewers to see if the husband's and wife's stories aligned. Zaituni, the RSD interviewer, wore thick foundation and expertly drawn eyeliner, a black hijab, and a flowing buibui that nearly covered the black patent leather shoes whose pointed toes peeked out from underneath the fabric. She read the man a consent form and ran through the standard biographical questions that started all RSD interviews—his nationality, ethnicity, date and place of birth, the date he crossed the border into Kenya, the names of his relatives and his relationship to them. During this portion of the interview, Zaituni checked his responses against his case file, ensuring that the information he provided when he first registered was the same as he recounted that day.

Then she started entering new information into his file on her computer. “Where did you pass until you reached Kenya?” she asked him. Charles started narrating his experience, which started in 1996 in Congo shortly after his parents died and it became unsafe for him to stay in his village. He told a story that weaved together different elements: multiple national border crossings, first into Rwanda and then Burundi; the acquaintances and strangers who helped hide him at different crucial moments; government policies toward refugees and how they forced

him into and out of refugee camps; and how he met his wife. Zaituni spoke with kindness, but was clearly frustrated with Charles's complex, meandering narrative. "You need to go in order," she interrupted, a common request in RSD interviews; "tell the story in terms of this happening, then that happening, then that happening."

Zaituni: In 1996, you fled Congo. Where were you living?

Charles: [gives name of a place]

Zaituni: You said your parents were killed. Who wanted to kill all the men there?

Charles: Interahamwe [a Rwandan militia composed of ethnic Hutu that helped carry out the Rwandan genocide].

Zaituni: Who were Interahamwe?

Charles: We don't know. They called themselves that. They were speaking Kinyarwanda [the main language of Rwanda].

Zaituni: Do you know why they wanted to kill you?

Charles: I don't know but they were saying that we were Banyamulenge [a Tutsi ethnic group in the Congo with historical ties to Rwanda]. That's what I think.

Zaituni: What are the ethnic groups of Interahamwe?

Charles: I don't know but they were speaking Kinyarwanda.¹⁸

Zaituni: If they're speaking Kinyarwanda and you speak Kinyamulenge, there's a similarity to the language?¹⁹ What is the reason they wanted to kill you?

Charles: Because we were of the Tutsi clan, maybe that's why.

Zaituni seemed satisfied with this answer and moved on to another topic.

Zaituni: You said Rwandese helped you cross the river. What river was it?

Charles: [provides the name of the river]

Zaituni: Which place were you heading to?

Charles: [provides the name of the place]

Zaituni: Where in Rwanda were you staying?

Charles: [provides the name of the town]

Zaituni: How long did you stay in Rwanda for?

Charles: I cannot remember. If I guess, it was about one year.

Zaituni: What did you do on a daily basis in Rwanda for one year?

Charles: Nothing. I was living a very bad life. There was no food, I was sleeping badly.

Zaituni: Do you have documents from Rwanda, Congo, or Burundi?

Charles produces a large laminated document from his pink folder. It had UNHCR written on it and confirmed that he was living in a refugee camp in Burundi. He also produced a small laminated refugee ID card from Burundi. Zaituni indicated she would make a copy of both.

Zaituni: When you were coming to Kenya, which places did you pass?

Charles: [indicates a journey from Rwanda, to Uganda, to Kenya]

Zaituni: Was there a way of coming to Kenya without passing through Rwanda?

Charles: I don't know where I should pass. A person helped me come here.

Charles continued telling his story, including details of how he was captured by a pro-Burundian militia, and had been brought to a forest and watched people get killed and thrown into a pile of dead bodies. Charles's story demonstrated that he knew he should distance himself from Rwanda; he claimed to know very little about the country, its geography, and its political history, despite having spent a significant amount of time there. At the same time, however, Charles's narrative confounded the bureaucratic order of the RSD interview: from Zaituni's perspective, he provided both extraneous data points and ones that did not fit neatly into the RSD interview's bureaucratic logic.

In his landmark book *The Body Keeps the Score*, psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk (2015) explains how trauma impacts memory, noting that humans organize traumatic memories differently from benign or happy ones. Van der Kolk (2015: 192–93) describes a study in which he asked participants to describe both positive events in their past, such as weddings, births, and graduations, as well as traumatic ones, such as rape, violence, and domestic abuse. The participants narrated the positive events “with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Nobody said that there were periods when they'd completely forgotten any of these events.” When it came to the traumatic events, by contrast, their memories were “disorganized.” “Our subjects remembered some details all too clearly (the smell of the rapist, the gash in the forehead of a dead child),” Van der Kolk recounted, “but could not recall the sequence of events or other vital details (the first person who arrived to help, whether an ambulance or a police car took them to the hospital)”.

When read through the lens of van der Kolk's important research, the aims of the RSD interview worked at cross purposes with the brain's processing of traumatic memory. Zaituni's demand to Charles, that he narrate his story of fleeing death threats in his home country, witnessing the violent murder of friends and acquaintances, traversing challenging terrain and national borders without papers, living in and out of refugee camps, being captured by a militia, being separated from his wife, and attempting to evade surveillance and threats in Kenya “in order . . . in terms of this happening, then that happening, then that

happening” flew in the face of a scientific understanding of how brains process traumatic memories. The demand for coherence and linearity conformed to a certain kind of bureaucratic ordering that at this time also included spatial information. Some refugees referred to this portion of the RSD interview as the “geography test,” and savvy refugees provided data points they suspected the interviewer would find credible about the spaces and places they referenced.

Zaituni: Do you remember anything about the Congo where you were living?

Charles: I experienced a very bad life there.

Zaituni: Do you remember anything about where you were staying? The village? The features of it. I want you to tell me everything about the village. Tell me about it.

Charles: The village was in the hills. There were also rivers. One was called [name of river]. Another river was called [name of river]. Some neighboring villages. One was called [lists two villages]. Those were nearby villages. Also [names another village].

Zaituni: What about Rwanda? Tell me more about Rwanda.

Charles: I don’t know it very well, just where I was staying in [village]

Zaituni: What used to stand out from [village]? Tell me something that stands out.

Charles: It was just near the border. There was a border between [village] and Congo.

Zaituni: [village] was a border town?

Charles: Yes, that’s the only thing I can remember.

Zaituni: What was found in [village]?

Charles: I never liked that place. I used to sit at home. I can’t say many things about [village].

Zaituni’s questions were attempting to verify two main things: whether Charles was Rwandese, and whether his geographic knowledge demonstrated that he was from Congo. Charles’s credibility was determined by measuring the place- and space-based information he revealed against the geographical, topographical and infrastructural features, and distances represented on the GIS mapping technologies that RSD officers like Zaituni had been instructed to use. Hailing from particular geographic regions of Congo granted you *prima facie* status in Kenya.

Mentioning his stay in Rwanda, as Charles had done in his interview, significantly complicated his case, despite the fact that he repeatedly tried to downplay his knowledge of the country. When pressed,

he revealed information using tentative language: the “only thing he [could] remember” about the town in Rwanda in which he stayed for a year was that it was on the border with Congo. This is in stark contrast to the information he provided about the Congo, which was detailed and provided without qualifiers.

A “credible” interviewee described clear correlations between ethnicity, nationality, and geography as represented on GIS systems. Those whose stories did not fall neatly into established categories or patterns of movement faced additional hurdles to gain state protection. “Charles’s case will be complicated by the Burundian wife,” Zaituni told me after he had left the room, intimating that it was difficult to “place” Burundianness in his story. With so many additional hurdles to deal with, I left the room sensing that Charles’s prospects for protection were dismal; he had likely entered a bureaucratic process of seemingly endless interviews. I thought about how many times he would likely return to Shauri Moyo in the same outfit. I wondered if he knew the narrative blunders he had made.

I often wondered what the Kenyan staff at Shauri Moyo thought about refugees’ narratives given what they knew about how identity and circumstance mediated one’s experience of a place. The rainy season might change a thirty-minute journey from school to home into a three-hour trek, and a local bus, which makes frequent stops and prioritizes keeping the vehicle filled to capacity, might transform what would be a fifteen-minute journey on an express bus into two hours. A Somali Kenyan might take thirty minutes longer to cross the city of Nairobi because of how frequently he would likely be stopped by the police. While the Kenyan staff knew that these contingencies would introduce variability into experiences of time and space, they had been trained to analyze refugees’ stories against the maps using a set of uniform, mathematically calculable reference points, which presumed that transportation times remained the same regardless of the time of year and that all people experienced the same obstacles or lack thereof in moving from point A to B.

GIS technologies introduced a supposedly scientific, objective means of verifying the credibility of refugees’ stories. Yet what these technologies verified was not refugees’ credibility, but rather the correlation between their stories and the representations of space and place rendered on the digital maps. These representations were themselves filtered through understandings of distance, borders, and topography that were culturally and temporally contextual, despite the fact that they were imagined and articulated as global and universal. The technologies regulated refugees, rather than verifying their narratives.

Resettlement “The Legal Way”: Reclaiming Agency via Online Romance

Leveraging social ties and technologies to find a romantic partner online was one way refugees circumvented the state regulation of the RSD process. I met Jean, a young, educated Congolese man, in the dark, damp two-room apartment in Kayole, an informal settlement in Nairobi, that he shared with his sister; the smell of dried fish, which he sold to members of his various WhatsApp groups, permeated the room. Jean had been in Kenya since 2012 and told me about his plans to get resettled in Australia. He recounted how he told a Congolese friend who had been recently resettled to “look for a lady for [him] over there” through one of the large networks of Congolese churches. His friend searched for women with children, as they are perceived as less attractive prospects for men and thus potentially more willing to engage a foreigner.

This arrangement was often seen as mutually beneficial due to the cultural cache a man from Africa was perceived to provide to a Congolese Australian woman. Jean explained: “If I’m in Australia, I can’t take a Congolese girl from there to marry. But I can go to Congo to take her because the one in Australia, maybe she has been . . .” “Exposed!” my Congolese research assistant interrupted enthusiastically. “Exactly,” Jean said. “So from [the West, Congolese] look for a husband or wife from Africa.” Refugees like Jean capitalized on cultural stereotypes of Africans from the West as being “corrupted” by Western values in order to enhance their own eligibility.

The first woman Jean’s friend proposed to did not pan out: she had three children from three different fathers, and said if she married Jean she would only promise him one additional child. They attempted to negotiate, with Jean offering to have two additional children with her, provided that they divorce once he reached Australia. She said if he did this, she would threaten to take Jean back to Africa; he moved on without making a deal.

Jean was soon introduced to another woman, Brigitte, with whom he started chatting regularly on WhatsApp. They had been talking for seven months when I met him, and Jean had started calling Brigitte’s daughter, who had just turned two, his own, even changing his WhatsApp profile picture to a photo of the girl. He had been gaming out two different potential plans that involved Brigitte: go to Australia “the refugee way,” which meant being resettled via an organization in Kenya, or “the legal way,” which meant marrying Brigitte in Kenya and waiting for her to

apply for family reunification so he could join her in Australia. The “legal way” was faster, he noted, as it would take only about a year after they got married in Kenya and Brigitte found lawyers in Australia to draw up the paperwork. “It would be better if she went back [to Australia] pregnant,” he recounted to me. “That will make it easier. Then she can say, ‘I am pregnant by him, so he’s coming to take care of the baby, he’s the one who will be taking care of the baby once he is in Australia.’” “[The women] have to spend one or two months [in Kenya], so that they can go back [to Australia], and they’re pregnant already.”

“This is a very specific process!” I said, chuckling at the degree to which the process of family reunification seemed to mirror the Kenyan state and UNHCR’s bureaucratic process of resettlement, with its own set of rules and procedures, and social relationships mediating the process in ways that could enhance or dampen one’s chances. At the same time he was negotiating with Brigitte, Jean was in the final part of the refugee resettlement process through UNHCR. This involved first getting the appropriate document from Shauri Moyo, which he brought to the UNHCR offices.²⁰ There, he was asked to write a summary of his journey to Kenya, his biographic information, and his reason for leaving his country. Two months later, UNHCR called him for an interview to expound upon his story and provide his biographical data again. After the interview, they gave him an appointment to come back after six months. After returning six months later, he was given another paper asking him to come back in another six months. “If there’s not a decision about your case when you go there, they just give you another paper,” he clarified, repeating a process communicated by many other refugees. After two years of appointments every six months, Jean was given a “mandate” in 2014, the document stating that he had been determined as a viable refugee and could stay in the country legally. After receiving the mandate, Jean had to return again to Shauri Moyo to receive the refugee ID. Once he received the refugee ID, he was told he had a “protection case,” meaning that his security was found to be compromised in Kenya, and he was invited to begin the resettlement process.

Many refugees developed an arsenal of strategies for getting abroad. It was common for refugees to have open resettlement cases with UNHCR, work hard to cultivate relationships with NGOs and CSOs (civil society organizations) that could recommend them for resettlement, and simultaneously establish relationships with Africans and/or Westerners abroad who could marry them and bring them abroad through the family reunification process.

Conclusion

The different forms of digital regulation I discussed in this chapter—biometrics, geospatial technologies, SIM registration, and social media—differently articulate and shape information about bodies, citizenship and belonging in Kenya. These technologies change the ground upon which citizenship claims can be made and policed, but not in ways that are predictable or uniform. Biometric technologies made embracing fluid identity categories—a Somali survival strategy in the face of long-standing state violence and exclusion—more challenging, forcing Somalis to consider whether they would rather be a “refugee” or a “Kenyan.” Geospatial technologies and mobile money regulations, on the other hand, paradoxically created their own fluidity, as refugees were forced to claim or use false identities in mobile money and WhatsApp networks, as well as fabricate personal stories of their refugee journeys. These false identities also circulated in social networks that were mediated by technologies, like the marriages mediated by WhatsApp. These technological mediations made refugees’ ability to circulate and access information, and articulate a proscribed constellation of data points, critical to their being able to claim a legal identity and resist the state’s efforts to exclude them. Cryptopolitics was at the center of all of these dynamics, as digital regulation relied on and helped to produce shadow identities, systems, narratives, and relationships.

Technological surveillance has long been a way that states have managed and regulated populations they perceived to challenge their power—from lantern laws in antebellum America to facial recognition technologies in Xinjiang, China. What makes contemporary sociotechnological systems different from their predecessors, however, is that they make possible ever more sophisticated forms of state social control. While introducing biometrics into the RSD process alone has not enabled the state to fulfill its stated desire to expel refugees from Kenya’s borders, if biometric data were joined with other forms of data, for example, SIM card registration numbers and social media accounts, this kind of control would become more possible. Examining digital regulation and its effects invites us to consider the kind of relationship between states, citizens and stateless people we want to see, and the limits we may wish to place on state power, in an increasingly digital age.

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Notes

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1. AMISOM is a peacekeeping mission in Somalia that was created by the African Union's Peace and Security Council in January 2007 and approved by the United Nations. The Kenyan Defense Forces were formally integrated into AMISOM in 2012.
2. This research was generously funded by a Facebook Protect and Care Grant. None of the raw data collected was distributed to Facebook, and the entirety of the research process—including research design, hiring and training of research assistants, procurement, budgets, operations and logistics, data collection, analysis, and dissemination—was conceived of and managed by me with support from my research assistants and no involvement from Facebook. I thank the British Institute of Eastern Africa (BIEA) for being the home institution for this research in Kenya and for assisting with remuneration for my research assistants.
3. I thank my three wonderful research assistants: Safari Eddy Ntachompenze, Halima Hassan, and Hassan Ibrahim Hassan for their dedication to this project and their openness to learning about and operationalizing new research methods and approaches. This research could not have been completed were it not for their skills, expertise, and tendency to embrace humor in the face of challenges.
4. The rise of piracy off the coast of Somalia was also hurting the Kenyan shipping industry, see Robert McCabe (2019). There were reports of pragmatic cooperation between pirates and Al-Shabaab.
5. Operation Linda Nchi led to retaliatory terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab, including the high-profile multiday siege on Westgate, the upscale Nairobi mall, in September 2013 in which sixty-seven people were killed, and the attack on Garissa University in April 2015, when 148 people were killed and over seven hundred students held hostage.

6. Kenya's two main refugee camps are Dadaab, which is in Garissa County and houses mostly Somali refugees, and Kakuma, which is in Turkana county and is more diverse, but houses predominantly South Sudanese refugees.
7. At least three of those deported were registered as refugees. However, many more were likely unregistered Somali refugees, as Somalis had great difficulty at the time registering for refugee status in Nairobi. Some may have also been Kenyan citizens, as Somali Kenyans have notorious trouble obtaining official forms of documentation (see Lochery 2012).
8. On the grounds of it being unconstitutional, the Constitutional and Human Rights Division of the High Court of Nairobi struck down the December 2014 amendment to the Refugees Act of 2006, which stated that: "(1) The number of refugees and asylum seekers permitted to stay in Kenya shall not exceed one hundred and fifty thousand persons. (2) The National Assembly may vary the number of refugees or asylum seekers permitted to be in Kenya. (3) Where the National Assembly varies the number of refugees or asylum seekers in Kenya, such a variation shall be applicable for a period not exceeding six months only. (4) The National Assembly may review the period of variation for a further six months." (Security Laws [Amendment] Act No. 19 2014)
9. States often employ procedural regulations in concert with more conventional, straightforward methods of national exclusion such as enforcing borders, enacting deportations, and/or changing citizenship laws.
10. While Burundians were also asked to undergo a second security screening, this appeared circumstantial and time-bound, related to a recent prison break near an area that many Burundians passed on their journey to Nairobi. Somalis, by contrast, were consistently described by the Shauri Moyo staff as a persistent security threat.
11. Elizabeth Wirtz analyzes how these bureaucratic requirements kept women in abusive relationships with spouses despite wanting to leave, because they did not want to compromise their resettlement process by getting divorced.
12. The Kenya Information and Communications Act of 2013 made it a criminal offense to fail to register one's SIM card, with a fine of up to KSh100,000 (Kenyan shillings) (approximately US\$1,150) and/or up to six months of imprisonment. Nevertheless, the deadline to register was pushed back multiple times, most recently to 15 October 2022.
13. People speculated that refugee accounts were getting shut down because the numerical system used for official refugee IDs is different from the system used for Kenya national IDs. In other words, if this is true, it would mean that Safaricom's algorithm only recognized information corresponding to valid Kenya national IDs and would disconnect others, flagging them as potentially suspicious.
14. Officially called the National Integrated Identity Management System or NIIMS.
15. This date has been delayed as Huduma Namba has been mired in controversy, but as of November 2022 the government still planned to move forward with this plan.
16. This is part of a broader discourse that links viruses, both medical and computer, with foreignness and illegality (see Helmreich 2000).
17. Refugees who revealed to me that they were from Rwanda reported being surveilled and threatened inside Kenya, varying their movement patterns to avoid being "disappeared" like Rwandese friends and acquaintances they had known.

18. It is highly unlikely Charles would not have known that Interahamwe was an ethnic Hutu militia group.
19. Kinyamulenge is the language spoken by the Banyamulenge (Congolese with historical ties to Rwanda). It is nearly indistinguishable from Kinyarwanda.
20. At that time, UNHCR and the Government of Kenya did not yet have integrated refugee status determination processes.

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