

Migingio Island: A Case of the Severed Trade Relations Between Kenya And Uganda, 1991-2018

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the severed trade relations between Kenya and Uganda, 1991-2018 over Migingio Island. The study responded to the question; how did the severed trade relations change the human settlement and the economic activities and the social life on Migingio Island? The study was guided by the following objective: to trace the nature of human settlement on Migingio Island, 1991-2018. The study was based on theory of liberalism, theory of complex interdependence and finally the human consciousness which was advanced by Karl Marx. Karl Marx stated that the human mind is very dynamic. The decisions made by the human beings depend on the prevailing situation after having interacted with the environment. The researcher found out that, Migingio Island had been nicked-named 'Uganda' by Samo Fishing Group. Later Tembo and Kibebe named it Busingo in Kisuba language. When the Luo joined the fishing crew they re-named it Migingio. When Nsubuga, Lubanga, and Kalema joined the islander they organised to invade and seizure the island, they renamed it to **Kaguta Migingio Island**. The study recommends that the Ugandan Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF) could be removed from Migingio Island in the near future. These will ease the current problem on Migingio Island which is mainly attached to the Ugandan government.

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I. Introduction

Migingio Island is found in Lake Victoria. The main lands which are near to the island are Nyadhiwa bay in Homa Bay County and Muhuru Bay in Migori County.

The island's mainland is located off the Sori-Bay in Karungu division, part of Kenya's Migori district. Migori County and Homa Bay are found in the former Nyanza province which is located along Latitude $0^{\circ}15'N$ and $1^{\circ}15'S$ and Longitude $35^{\circ}15'E$ and $34^{\circ}E$. To the North, it is boarded by Western province, to the East, Rift Valley province and to the south and West on the Republics of Tanzania and Uganda respectively (Jaetzold, 2010). The island lies west of Pyramid or Elephant Island.

Conflict is inevitable in any given society. Moreover, conflict is positive in a society because it can provide the bases for societal transformation from social, political, economic, environmental point of view (Okoth and Ogot, 2002). The conflicting groups are the Ugandans and the Kenyans. The conflict between Kenya and Uganda over Migingio Island at a certain stage went violent with Uganda using its military force.

Conflict may turn into direct fighting involving the use of the fire arms. However, on Migingio Island the Ugandan based troops used its state machinery to reverse the activities of the Kenyans on the island.

In the current world there are many types of conflicts. Border conflict applies to cases where the territory under dispute could be within two or more countries. The disputed territory could be rich in one or more natural resources. The conflict which is experienced on Migingio Island is both territorial and economic. The conflict between Kenya and Uganda over Migingio Island was an economic cold war over the natural resource. It went violent when Ugandan government took arms and started terrorising the Kenyan fish folks. However, the Kenyan government was unconcerned. The conflict between Kenya and Uganda over Migingio Island is purely who should control the economically endowed Island with Nile perch. Territorial conflict is a wide spread phenomenon affecting the world.

However; most territorial cases are affecting the developing countries are resource based (Bannon and Colliers 2003). Most of these countries suffering from resource-based conflicts are based in low-level development traps. Most of them are in Africa whose countries are characterized by poverty, weak and corrupt government and violent conflicts reinforce one other. According to Summer territorial conflict is a dispute often related to the possession of natural resources like lakes, rivers, islands and mines. The citizens on the tiny island of Migingio have experienced severed (trade) relations. These problems strain the social relations amongst the

citizens on the island. People live in fear and suspicious of each other. Nobody trusts the other. Migingo Island hosts people of all walks of life, and in particular the fish folk from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The action taken by the Ugandan government has left behind a negative attitude and bitterness towards the Ugandans by the Kenyans on the island.

II. Methodology

The study employed descriptive research design which seeks to obtain information that describes a phenomenon by asking the individual about their perception, attitudes and values (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003,). The researcher employed stratified random sampling. In some cases the researcher used convenience sampling when there was a demand. Convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of accessibility (Bryman, 2001:97). The researcher's target population were fisher men, fish mongers, women actors, Beach management unit (BMU), local administration and soldiers, Kenyans and Ugandans on Migingo Island and Kenyan and Ugandan government. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire which was delivered by hand to each respondent . The questionnaire consisted of both open and close ended questions.

A structured interview was used and photographs were taken.

Data was presented in form of percentages, tables, figures, graphs and charts.

III. Results and Discussions

This chapter heighted and discussed the activities of the founders of Migingo Island and their passion for a better fishing haven. Their Ugandan friends Nsubuga and Kalema and how their Ugandan friends who had influential relatives in Museveni's government made life on Migingo Island to change abruptly. Without the knowledge of Tembo and Kibebe, Nsubuga organised to change the name of Migingo Island to Kaguta 1Migingio Island. This was to suit their inner economic ambition. This actually bore fruits for the Ugandan fishermen strategists.

History of human settlement on Migingo Island

Kenya and Uganda have enjoyed peaceful economic, political, and social relation for a long period of time. Fishing in Lake Victoria has taken place for a long period of time. According to Kibebe and Tembo fishing was going on well but with time their day's catch reduced drastically, so a solution had to be found (Kibebe and Tembo, Muhuru village, 2018). They started looking for new fishing grounds in 1991. Fortune was on their side when they discovered three unoccupied islands (See picture 2.1). The fishermen nicknamed the three islands as follows; the small one "Uganda" (present Migingo Island) the middle one "Kenya" and largest, "Tanzania". According to Kibebe the fishing crew could catch an impressive army of fish between "Uganda" and "Tanzania" island.

The discovered islands



Picture 2.1: The three unoccupied islands discovered in 1991 by the fishing crew
(Source: Research data 2018)

The fishing crew continued with their fishing activities. The fishing crew commuted from their homes to Migingo Island which was too expensive. The fishing crew of sixty drawn from Nyadhiwa Bay and Muhuru Bay decided to settle on the uninhabited island which they called Bugingo in their local dialect i.e. in Kisuba dialect. Bugingo Island that gave the fishing crew a good catch.

Later the island was dominated by Kenyan Luo fishermen who re-named it Migingo (Tembo, Muhuru, 2018).

In 1991 Kibebe and Tembo organised themselves into a fishing squad named Samo Fishing Group (SFG). At first when they were going for deep lake fishing the nearest landing bay was the one nicknamed "Uganda" (present day Migingo Island). The fishing crew led by Mr. Kibebe who was literate by then and had been serving in Uganda as a clerk in the office of the Attorney General. Kibebe was aware of the laws governing the human existence; he thought it wise to use legal means in order to settle on Bugingo Island. According to the fishing crew the location of Migingo Island was not known. They did not know whether Bugingo was in Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania. Kibebe advised Tembo to travel to Kisumu (by then the headquarters of Nyanza Province). Tembo did not hesitate but proceeded to Kisumu to seek for permission to use the island.

Upon reaching Kisumu the Director of Fishery by then Mr. Arunga was not sure about the exact location of Bugingo on the map of East Africa (Tembo and Kibebe, 2018). He was not sure if Migingo Island was in Kenya or Uganda. Due to this Arunga was forced to refer to the boundary between Kenya and Uganda during the Anglo-Germany agreement of 1914 which was emphasized in the British Order of Council of 1914 that separated Uganda Protectorate from East Africa and ultimately to Kenya colony (Her Majesty Government, 1926:27). Ross argues that the colonial maps are available at British National archives which assist Arunga to identify the location of Migingo (Ross, 2017:32).

After the bureaucratic processes in 1991 Tembo was required to pay a trading licence fee of seven thousands shillings only.

This was the legal fee required by then to operate such kind of business. He paid seven thousands shillings in order to be issued with trading permit and other traders were also issued the licences. Tembo was issued with another permit to construct structure on the island. Tembo was given the permit on 14th May 1991 to construct the structure (Tembo, 2018). The fishing crew constructed three structures without doors.

On 3rd September 1991 the fishing crew of sixty left for Migingo Island from their respective homes. Migingo Island which was bushy and unoccupied by then was inhabited with all kinds of snakes and various kinds of birds. The rock was not visible; however, the fishing crew cleared the bushes on the landing bay and managed to clear the bushes up to the top of the rock. The fishing crew managed to put up three structures where they could sleep at night. The Island was inhabited with many types of snakes which they managed to chase them away they could not kill the reptiles because as they cleared the bush the snakes moved into the lake, towards the largest island among the three islands "Tanzania" (present pyramid island). The three structures which were constructed didn't have door. Unfortunately at night as the fishermen were sleeping the snakes resurfaced.

The structures constructed Samo



Picture 2.2 Modified structures constructed by Samo Fishing Group in 1991

(Source: Research Data, 2018)

They did a lot of havoc by biting three fishermen who were sleeping near the entrance. One of the fishermen died instantly the other two survived after receiving medication at Muhuru bay dispensary (Migori County).

The fishing crew enjoyed high level fishing and had a huge catch on daily basis. The day's catch was shared amicably among the fishermen. The fishermen fished at any location within the waters of Lake Victoria but the landing bay was Migingio Island.

Later the fishing crew were joined by Ugandan named Nsubuga. There was no difference between the Kenyans and the Ugandans. Initially women were not allowed on Migingio Island because men remained naked throughout their stay. Kibebe, Tembo and the fishing crew fished for thirteen years without any panic at any single time.

In 2004 piracy incidents increased day by day this was because of the good returns whatsoever being realised on the Migingio Island. The pirates were mainly from Tanzania who had rifles ready for any eventuality. The pirates were interested in the fishing nets and boat engines. The Kenyan fishermen asked assistance from the government without any success. It is only the Ugandan government that responded to their cry. The pirates had their strong reasons for their work. The Ugandan Maritime soldiers managed killing the lake pirates who were mainly Tanzanians. With time the Ugandan Maritime soldiers had contained the lake piracy. As the Ugandan Maritime soldiers were combating the piracy, it came to their realisation the Migingio Island was endowed economically. Migingio Island which is a big rock does not have any agriculture potential; it remained calm regardless of the piracy in the lake (Mbaya , 2018). The fishing crew continued to co-operate for a common cause.

The brotherhood that had existed for long took a different angle when three Ugandans joined them. However, security interests and wealthy accumulation are timeless endeavours, even as ends, many sponsors invest in the long term success (Carothers 2006, and Vanderhill 2013). The three Ugandans prominent fishermen, boat builders and timber sellers namely Kalema, Nsubuga and Lubanga used to stay and operate their business from Remba Island, Kenya (3hours motorboat drive to Migingio Island).

Immediately they left Remba Island, they went back to Uganda and made plans with their relatives in Ugandan government to invade and seize the disputed Migingio Island.

Kang and Meernik assert that transformation of a rebel group can be an expensive one, requiring organization to capture resource streams that are not readily available within their environments (Kang and Meernik 2005:45). The saviours of the islander fish folk turned to be their long term tormentors.

Their plans materialised and on 12th June 2004 at around four o'clock, Kibebe, Tembo and the other fishing crew saw a big convoy of Ugandan soldiers and fishermen coming towards Migingio Island (Kibebe , 2018) and this was the time the cordial relations that existed took a different turn. The Uganda soldiers were carrying the Ugandan flag with them. They hoisted the Ugandan flag on Migingio Island. The Ugandan soldiers declared Migingio Island to be in Uganda in the Eastern part of Bugiri while in reality it is over 100 kilometres to the nearest main land to Uganda. Ugandans move is supported by the assertion that in 1895 the United Kingdom created the East Africa Protectorate territory between Indian Ocean and the Rift Valley which extends to Uganda.

However, Muchenge asserts that it must be noted that at the time Uganda authorities moved to the island in 2004 by deploying the police officers and hoisting the Ugandan flag, the island was still under the sovereignty of the state of Kenya (Muchenge, 2017:27).

In 1902, the Eastern province of Uganda Protectorate was transferred to East Africa Province (EAP) by the British Foreign Office. This marked the present day boundary, on the north of the Suam of Turkwel River, on the Eastern Escarpment of the river for much of the distance between Lake Rudolf and Lake Natron, and south (East Africa articles 123,124:10).

After the dramatic show the Ugandan Maritime Soldiers instructed the Kenyan fishermen on Migingio Island to look closely at the flag which was hoisted on Migingio Island.

Then the fishing crew were to identify which country's flag was hoisted on Migingio Island. Upon identification and affirmation that it was Ugandan flag then, they were given an ultimatum to vacate Migingio Island that is (Kibebe, Tembo and the fishing crew) who had living there since 1991. In addition they expelled the Kenyan fishermen for failing to pay licence fees and not using Ugandan processors for all fish caught within Ugandan territorial waters (Ross, 2017:666). They had no option but to leave Migingio Island to their ancestral homes. In 2004 he Ugandan Maritime soldiers took away all their property including fifteen boats, fifteen boat engines and six hundred fishing nets not mentioning the three structures which they had constructed. The Ugandan soldiers occupied the three structures constructed by the Kenyan fishermen. The three structures are the ones the Ugandan Special Unit (equivalent to Kenya GSU) and the Ugandan People's Defence Force are occupying to present. The Kenyan fishermen led by kibebe and Tembo had no option but to leave Migingio Island empty handed to their homes. The Ugandan soldiers gave them one motorboat to escort them to their respective homes. The fishermen were left to languish in dire poverty however; poor governance, conflict and

poverty are intertwined on several levels (Njigua, 2000:39). This made the SFG not to take their children to school as they had no funds to pay their school fees.

Kalema who was by then related to the Maritime Commander –in Charge of the Ugandan Peoples’ Defence Force (UPDF) namely Mr.Ssekiziyivu and Nsubuga was related to the minister of Fisheries, honarabl Mukisa (a Ugandan) in the Ugandan government by then. It is true that the political economy of Fisheries in Uganda is controlled by the ruling elites, implementation costs and industry interest (Subweb.diis.dk). After a successful invasion and seizure of Migingo Island, the Uganda settled there. This is after the successive removal of the founders of Migingo Island. The Ugandan fishermen renamed Migingo Island as **Kaguta Migingo Island** (it was named after the father of president of Uganda Museveni).

That marked a new beginning within the livelihood of the new Islanders as the founders of the island vacated. The Kenyan fishing crew was completely pushed of Migingo Island with a new team on the island, but it was not as easy as it was presented by the warlords of Uganda. According to Kibebe and Tembo these weird plans by their long time friends shattered their long term plans. They had enjoyed staying on Migingo Island for the last thirteen years peaceful. They had assumed Migingo Island to be their second home; all this was turned upside down.

Then Kalema was appointed the secretary and the patrol in charge of Kaguta Island. Nsubuga was appointed the Local Chief 1(L.C.1) chairman in-charge of collection of funds collected from the fishermen, fisher buyers and agents from Migori and Suba districts in Kenya (The current Migori county).

IV. Conclusion

The study established that Kibebe and Tembo who had a passion in fishing laid the foundation of Bugingo Island. They formed the SAMO fishing Group which later on constructed structures on Bugingo Island. The construction of the structure was done after getting permission from the headquarters of the former Western province in Kisumu. When fishing was so paying they were joined by Ugandans namely Kalema and Nsubuga. These two Ugandans changed the face of Migingo Island. The appearance of the sea-pirate on Lake Victoria created a insecurity on lake, this prompting frt an intervention to alleviate their negative effects on the fishermen from Kenya and Uganda.

The Ugandan Maritime soldiers assisted in the curbing of the sea pirates from Tanzania. The most unfortunate part is that they forget their original role and changed to be the owners of Migingo Island. This was not taken well by the Kenyan. The action of Kalema and Nsubuga ruined the good relation that existed between Kenya and Uganda on the island.

The Ugandan fishermen changed the name of Migingo Island and re-named it Kaguta 1 Island. The Uganda’s secret plan of invading and seizing Migingo Island was revealed by Kalema to his Kenyan friends. This was not taken well by his Ugandan comrades. Kalema was beaten by other Ugandan fishermen however; he was saved by his Kenyan friends.

Conflict of Interest: None

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Informants

Tembo Dalmas- *founder of Migingo Island at Mihuru village in Migori*, 20th November 2018.

Kibebe Gawa George- *Founder of Migingo Island at Mihuru village*, 20th November 2018.