The Contending Claim Over Abyei by Sudan and South Sudan: Challenges Ahead

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This article focuses on examining entangled factors that complicate the claim over Abyei and have thereby hindered any peaceful settlement of the dispute on the county. Many works of literature that presented the conflict in Abyei as natural resource conflict or identity-driven within a broader picture of conflicts in Sudan are factually flawed and poorly explained the nature and causes of the conflict. This paper contends that multiplicity of factors has reinforced each other, thus these factors in unison created a stalemate and continuing claim over Abyei. In examining these interwoven factors, the paper employed a qualitative approach to conduct the study. Both primary and secondary data sources were used adequately. Various academic pieces of literature, researches, and conference reports have been used as secondary data sources. Key informant interviews were used to gather primary data to test secondary sources. Hence, the study comes up with three basic findings. First, claim over Abyei has been sustained by the elites' manipulation of identity for their political and economic goals that hinder peaceful co-existence among communities in Abyei. Second, the competition over resources chiefly oil and locally, pasture and water complicated already fragile and tense relation by alluring national actors that even more protracted conflict on the ground to control these resources. Finally, the double standard in U.S. policy towards Abyei, by and large, helps Khartoum to continue its obstruction tactics to maintain the status quo.

Keywords: Abyei, *Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, government of Sudan, government of South Sudan, identity

Background

After the end of colonial rule, Sudan has been engaged in tragic wars that brought about horrific impacts on the socio-economic and political development of the country (Ahmad, 2010). Following the end of colonial rule in 1956, the First Civil War broke out and came to an end in 1972 after the *Addis Ababa Peace Agreement* (Tadesse, 2012). The agreement brought relative stability to Sudan by granting southerner's little autonomy (Johnson, 2011). The conflict between both sides re-erupted in 1983 and continued until 2005 and brought unbridled human suffering and destructive impact on the country (Ahmad, 2010). The conflict raged since independence turned deadly when Omar Hassan al Bashir took power in a bloodless coup in 1989 (Johnson, 2011). The Civil War in Sudan has ravaged human life and resulted in disruption of socio-economic system of

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the country since its eruption (Tadesse, 2012). The *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* (CPA), which was signed after a prolonged and protracted civil strife marked a decisive moment in the history of Sudan as it brought new developments (Salman, 2013). The CPA states that the people of South Sudan can determine its future through voting, in a referendum, after an interim period of six years (Ahmad, 2010). The January 2011 Referendum is a watershed since it resulted in the birth of South Sudan as the youngest country in the African continent and became independent from the Republic of Sudan (Varma, 2011). Contrary to the expectation of peace in both Sudan, after the separation of the south, the view of peace on the ground remained looming and seething due to the fact that decisive issues yet remain unresolved (Institute of Security Studies [ISS] Seminar, 2011). There are critical issues remain to be resolved, which encompass issues of citizenship, oil sharing, border demarcation, and the contest over Abyei, a disputed region that threatened peace after both states broke apart (ISS Seminar, 2011).

Abyei is an oil-rich precarious region, which is situated geographically between both Sudan. It has emerged as a source of tension and discord since Sudan's independence from colonial rule (Salman, 2013). Abyei becomes a flashpoint of conflict due to the interplay of a range of factors, like resource control, and also elites have stalwartly played identity politics that turned the conflict horrendous. Thus, while competing for resource control in the region, group living in the area divided along the ethnic line in which Misseriya become surrogate for government of Sudan and the Ngok Dinka joined Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army and continued to fight alongside them (Abdalla, 2010).[1] Due to its precariousness and flux, Abyei resembles "Kashmir" territory which is being claimed by India and Pakistan (Johnson, 2011). With the split of Sudan into two states, new challenges to peace began to appear among which Abyei become the tight spot.[2] Abyei is located at border-lands between the two Sudans and was granted autonomous administrative status under the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* (Blanchard, 2012). This region is the abode to Ngok Dinka, the largest ethnic group found within South Sudan; this group and others have fought lengthy war with Khartoum regimes (Salman, 2013).[3] Abyei also hosts the grazing and seasonal migration area of the Misseriya and other nomadic tribes whose livelihoods depend on the area's rich resources (Abdalla, 2010).

The current claims and counter-claims over Abyei go back to the first phase of the 20th century after Sudan was subjected to British colonial rule (Salman, 2013). The historical cause of Abyei conflict was the colonial administration in which, the British transferred Abyei in 1905, to Southern Kordofan. The transfer of Abyei, to be ruled as part of South Kordofan, was seen as a panacea to the Misseriya exploitation of the Dinka (Saeed, 2015).[4] The term of the agreement stipulated in *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* led towards the creation of Abyei Boundary Commission, in 2005 and the decision of Abyei Boundary Commission (ABC) was considered final and binding on both sides (Thomas-Jensen & Fick, 2009). Nonetheless, the decision of the ABC was rebuffed by the National Congress Party (NCP) that took Sudan and Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) on a standoff track which culminated in violent conflict in 2008 (Skovsted, 2014).

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[1] See also Salman (2013) and Sorbo and Ahmed (2013) on how oil politics and competition for other resources reinforces ethnic cleavage that leads to destructive war.

[2] Enough project. Peace in both Sudans, available at https://enoughproject.org/files/peace_both_sudans.pdf, 2011.

[3] Moreover, Blanchard expounded that conflict has been flared up locally due to the claim and counter claim of ownership over Abyei by both Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya. Most often Dinka claimed that Abyei is home of Ngok Dinka alone however this claim was challenged by the Misseriya.

[4] Greenidge (2011) in his essay of Abyei from the shared past to contested future pointed out that separation would the way out for both groups to live in peace side by side.

The year 2008 ushered in a brutal clash and assault on Abyei people while the Sudanese army demolished Abyei town which resulted in the death of many individuals and internal displacement of over 60,000. This contentious interaction between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka remained unbroken and spurred upon the Abyei claims of both ethnic groups (Skovsted, 2014).

Thus, this paper argued that interlocking factors are surrounding the contention over Abyei and potentially impacted conflict dynamism and thereby hindered any peacemaking efforts. To this end, a qualitative approach was employed throughout the study. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized in advance. The study has tried to implicate the root causes of conflict and claim over Abyei to the constructivist view of identity theory and competition over resources.

The Notion of Identity and Identity Conflict Theory

Identity is a subtle notion and, is differently understood by many people. Identity refers to a combination of self with a united group (Deaux, 2001). The notion of identity could also be treated as the spot of the orientation of a person in which they attach their social world, and make myriad assemblage relationships with others (Hale, 2004). Thus, the narratives that identity would by itself be the cause of conflict seem misleading. Because of this, identity is a socially constructed reality that serves as a vehicle for political elites creed to justify their actions (Doucey, 2011). There are contending theoretical assumptions about the causes of ethnic conflict. These include primordialist and constructivist theories of ethnic conflict (Coetzee, 2009).[5]

Primordialist Theory

Primordialism affirms the existence of primitive human character upon, which ethnic identity founded and according to this theory, the ethnic conflict could be explained as of natural differences, like culture, language, religion, and race.[6] The theory declares that inclination towards intolerance and chauvinism is innate to human nature than making political interest as an issue of convergence (Blagovejich, 2009). Political interest and the occurrence of self-identification among ethnic groups are rooted in history (Blagovejich, 2009). In the same vein, primordialists argue that ethnic tie is intrinsic and determined by knowledge and experience one person could acquire from family and social group to whom that particular person belongs (Llobera, 1999).

Constructivism

Constructivism deals with the social construction of reality, and as a theory, it holds that the force of ethnicity and nations are the bi-product of modernity and built for economic and political motives. Ethnic identities are fluid and changed over time (Chandra, 2006). Constructivism claims that changes in ethnic identities could be a creation of political and economic phenomena that are desired to enlighten groups (Stein, 2011).[7] Constructivists situate the impetus of nationalism and ethnicity in material elements that are economically and politically motivated (Kaufmann, 2012). Constructivism stipulates that ethnic identities are socially constructed for explaining ethnic violence (Fearon & Laitin, 2000).

Resource-Based Conflict Approach

Political mobilization and competition over resources would cause destructive quarrel, if not managed

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[5] Also, see Hale's (2004) theories on causes of ethnic conflict in order to fully comprehend about the nature and how various factors entangled together in fuelling ethnic tension.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Chadra (2012) also described how socially constructed realities exploited mostly by the elites to attain any goal that they desire to achieve.

appropriately. At the time, when the available resource is meager, it is easy for the political elite to exploit the nascent ethnicity as a cause of conflict (Blagovejich, 2009). It could, thus, be argued that unfair allocation of need and resources would lead to ethnic mobilization, and entail a competition for resources both for the opposition and incumbent political entrepreneurs (Zartman, 2004).

Abyei as a Bone of Contention Between the Sudan and South Sudan

The issues of identity and resources, in the Abyei region of Sudan, have nurtured and aggravated, Sudanese protracted civil conflict along with the border areas. Identity and resources are intensely interrelated fault lines of conflict in Abyei, and combined with political elites exploitation of identity and resources as the shaping forces of the ongoing crisis in the region.

The Nexus Between Identity and Conflict Over Resources

There is a dynamic and the possible connection on how resources and identity politics informed one another in fuelling conflict. The mere existence of abundant resources could not itself ignite violent conflict without being entangled with other factors, like identity issues (Asal, 2007). The group that discriminated against in a political system would presumably consider ethnic identity as having political salient (Asal, Findley, Piazza, & Walsh, 2016). Regrettably, political elites, though not often, most of the times, appeal to such exclusion from a political system that would consecutively enable them to precipitously and convincingly link exclusion based on identity to an unfair share of resources (Asal, 2007). Moreover, it is vividly and profoundly clear that unfair apportion of resources would reinforce elites political agenda through mobilizing mass supporters from their behind and thus they use it as a contrivance to legitimatize political violence—that those elites aspire to pursue (Asal et al., 2016).

There is no doubt that the role of natural resources in fueling conflict could be attributed not only to its economic treatise but more significantly, it tends to play a seemingly strong emblematic role on the accounts of ethnonational narratives (Green, 2010). Such account of the ethnonational view of resource conflict has been and is deeply entrenched in social relations at the local levels and thus framed based on an ethnic identity that would, in turn, assist premeditated political interests of actors (Aubert, 1963).[8] The prevalence of precious natural resources would have the capacity to further propel a sense of distinctive identity (Chandra, 2006). Natural resources extraction is said to be the most driving force in forging a collective identity that would entail in disruptive conflict (Annegret & Pierskalla, 2015).

The conflicts that have been instigated initially by resource exploitation further compounded by other extra causal factors, like ethnic identity and the elite's manipulation of identity as a tool to gain their political agenda (Green, 2010). Social identities are bendable and can thus be connected to natural resources through the action of individual agents and deep engagement of elites for their political gains (Green, 2010). The *abundant resource war* description has presented the notion that the more available easily taxable and lucrative natural resource and then, the more it entice the attention of the national elites and opponents (Le Billon, 2001).

Ineluctably, natural resources accessible in abundance could be seen as an incentive to the belligerents and thereby augment the probability of competition over resource rheostat (Keen, 1998). The causes of north-south borderlands conflicts that have plagued Sudan for so long could go beyond the usual explanation of identity

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[8] See also Green (2010) and Rothman (1997), both of them argued that local social relations are linked to ethno national identity that are entrenched and rooted in competition for resources.

centered problem. Instead, the identity tale of conflict in Abyei, in particular, and Sudan, in general, was dovetailed with political economy; more importantly, unremitting elites intervention to control resources (De Waal, 2014).

Abyei as a Scene of Conflict: Identity as a Tool of Elite Manipulation

The constructivists look more to the contextual dynamics, and historically constructed identities and the decision-making the task of agents are determinant (Green, 2010). The constructivist aptly recognized the structural factors, the behavior of a certain group of people, and the individual actor's decision and forging of identities as instrumental in molding the feature of the conflicts (Fearon & Laitin, 2000).

Several scholars on North-South Sudanese conflicts have portrayed it as a conflict of identity. Of course, as decolonization materialized, Arabization and Islamization have exalted in the north. The move in the north found to be distasteful to the southerners and finally ended up by luring them to mount a resistance against Khartoum (Nascimento, 2009). But this piece argued that narrating Sudanese north-south conflict as an identity-driven war has been flawed and superficial. The account that describes Sudanese conflicts, as the continuum that lies, in between, identity and resources failed to recognize elite manipulation of identity and resources that largely serve leaders' political agendas. Viewing the conflicts that have fought in Sudan in the lens of ethnic identity seems profoundly being bewildered. The picture of ethnic identity that has been drawn and used during years of conflicts between Khartoum and southern insurgence intended not to unveil the real causes of the war (Bercovitch, 2003).

Ethnic identity has perceived role to play in fueling vicious conflict, but such a role of identity may be secondary. Ethnic identity can prolong and further aggravates violent conflict when it is in unison with other causal elements (Olayode, 2016). The government of Sudan and Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army have pretentiously communicated to the heart and the mind of the people along the borderlands. In this regard, mainly the regimes in Khartoum have masked their political agenda; when they have overtly succeeded in tempting local people to capitalize on identity and religion as sources of incongruity (Sørbø & Ahmed, 2013).

The political elites' steering tactic has sown tension and potently created a very polarized society and political environment. After the creation of such a tense relationship among the local population, furious conflict devastated the entire border areas and communities grudgingly descended into a bloody war (Sørbø & Ahmed, 2013). Identity has been keenly renovated or deconstructed by the successive regime in Khartoum as part of the state-building venture. The state-building came with the schema of identity that has drastically fomented and swelled up ethnic allegiance and antagonism (Woodward, 1990). Both military and civilian wings of government in Sudan have desperately used identity as "game card" to secure and advance their political power; this identity card has then amplified social fragmentation and caused conflict (Tubiana, 2008).

In the conflicts that have been fought in the Blue Nile, Abyei areas of South Kordofan and southern Darfur, the Numeiri regime had strategically linked itself with Arabization and backed both militarily and logistically Arab murahileen in those regions (Mohamed Salih, 2010). The continuation of the perpetual conflict along the border areas is to be closely connected to elites' pitting of certain groups against the other as witnessed in Darfur, Abyei, and the Nuba (Sørbø & Ahmed, 2013). In the very unfamiliar fashion, southern people including groups traditionally claimed to be enemy have galvanized in concert and confronted the continued manipulation of elites. The rebels in Darfur, SPLM in South Kordofan have joined together and relentlessly resisted the shrewd move of the regime in the north (Sørbø & Ahmed, 2013). Successive regimes in Khartoum inherited a divide and rule policy from their colonial masters, the British, and the Arab identity continued to be used as the

key national pride by which the regimes have recruited soldiers in the name of Arabism.[9]

The Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army, in its history of struggle against Khartoum, has appealed to the ethnicity and color of the skin. This move helped Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army to mobilize groups that felt victimized and marginalized by the northern governments (Jimenez, 2008). Ethnic groups harboring similar causes get involved in the Abyei conflict and other border-lands disputes for a long time. For instance, the rebels from the Nuba Mountains, Darfur, and the Blue Nile have been involved on the ground that they are marginalized by the central governments, like their southern compatriots (Sørbø & Ahmed, 2013). Since the early 1980s, with the increasing presence of Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army military in the South Kordofan, the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains, the Khartoum elites engaged militarily that has changed the nature of conflict on the ground (Ylonen, 2005).

Conflict Over Resources in Abyei

Resource conflict remains key to ethnic and perceived nationalist tensions elsewhere in Africa. The vast majority of conflicts that eroded the tenacity of the African continent are resource-driven and, resource always comes first as a motivating factor for ethnic disparities and human agony (Mbugua, 2012). The claim of ownership over Abyei is said to be caused partly by resources, which has evolved as a contentious issue between Sudan and South Sudan. The situation on the ground has worsened on the whole due to the contentious relationship among the Misseriya and that of the Ngok Dinka.[10] Sudan, after getting political independence from the British, has been galvanized by resource conflict and identity crisis that was fueled by exclusion and marginalization of certain groups by the central government (De Kock, 2011).

Competition Over Grazing Lands and Water Resources as Sources of Conflict

Natural resources are both tangible and intangible physical factors that can attach the population to the territory in which they live (Abdalla, 2010). The role of natural resources in provoking conflict could be viewed beyond its explanation of economic values. Natural resources' role could be symbolic in ethnonational discourses that are profoundly rooted in local social ties and shaped along ethnic lines to serve as a political instrument (Green, 2010). Conflict in Sudan has been intensified with the northern elites' expansionist policy deeper into the southern part of the country to exploit accessible resources that the major portion of which went to beneficiaries in the Norths (Salman, 2013).

The life of the communities in Abyei province is directly attached to natural resources as the people living there are either pastoralists or agro-pastoralists (Abdalla, 2010). The Misseriya will not accept any referendum without their participation; the denial of which will result in the loss of their right to graze their cattle. Conflicts among the local communities of Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka occurred perennially over grazing and pasture land (Mbugua, 2012) on which the daily life of communities in the Abyei area highly depended on. Abyei is ethnically trapped between the competing communities of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya (Abdalla, 2010).

These ethnic groups fear each other on the perception that the conduct of Referendum in Abyei would result in zero-sum-game and presumed that this would imperil peace instead of healing a wound. Because of the distrust and mutual fear regarding the holding of Referendum among both communities, they are trying to avoid sharing of resources among themselves (Human Security Baseline Assessment [HSBA], 2015).

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[9] Interview with Brouk Mesfin, Senior Researcher for Institute of Security Studies, Addis Ababa, February 4, 2014.
[10] Interview with Abebe Muluneh, head IGAD Security Sector Program, February 14, 2014.

Especially, the Misseriya believe that any attempt to conduct the Referendum on Abyei would carry, with itself the danger of complete loss of their traditional grazing right (Abdalla, 2010; Salman, 2011). The Misseriya and Ngok Dinka put natural resources at the heart of their conflict and explain their spurn of all-inclusive Abyei Referendum, which is contrary to the provision of *Abyei Protocol* (Iyekolo, 2011).

The Discovery of Oil and Its Role in the Abyei Conflict

The conflict over the Abyei region is also connected to the broader competition over oil resources to, which the North and South Sudan are parties (Tawl, 2011). The discovery of oil in Sudan around Heglig in 1978 provoked a second-round war, and the peace achieved has short-lived, and the relation between north and south deteriorated and turned into acute violence (Kinyanjui, 2011). Since then, oil became a snapshot of politics and central to Sudan's governance test. One may fall out and wrangle under the swathe of ethnic or regional disparity but under the surface, the competition is over who could able to controls the immense oil and natural gas resources and revenues resulting thereof (Bassey, 2011).

The exploration of oil in Abyei in 1978 has changed and given a new image to the ongoing conflict in the region since independence (Attree, 2011). The revenue from oil found around border fringes allowed the government of Sudan to finance its military and continue to jeopardize and marginalize the South (Adar, 1998). Notwithstanding the wide array of factors that derail peace in Abyei, the key issue that complicated the conflict and made the National Congress Party not to compromise is oil. The oil blocks lie within the disputed Abyei region that has long been and remains the subject of strife among rival parties to gain control of the area (O'Ballance, 2000). Consequently, the political stalemate since the late 1970s is heavily influenced by oil politics (Ross, 2004). The rivalry on oil around the border belts leads to the abrogation of the *1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement* and the redeployment of the army in these provinces (Sudan Country Profile, 2010).

The Numeiri regime, after the oil discovery in the south, has engaged to divide the southern region into three provinces as a means to get control over more oil-rich areas (De Kock, 2011). The oil deposit in Abyei and other border-lands became the killer force as successive regimes of the north have increased their military expenditure using money obtained from oil revenues against the southerners (Gonzalez, 2010). During the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* period, oil is said to be the main cause of unfolding conflict in the region (International Crisis Group, 2007). Abyei is the most oil-rich areas of Sudan with almost one-fourth of the total oil production in the country (International Crisis Group, 2007). Under *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* issues of oil in Abyei and wealth sharing have dealt with separately with much importance given to the oil since conflict among warring parties has been more related to it (Saibel, 2012). As the richly endowed oil fields lie in the southern provinces, successive Sudanese regimes conducted major military operations to situate these areas under their control. Oil began to attract the attention of both governments and rebels (Ylonen, 2012).

During several occasions, the government forces invaded the region repeatedly, and civilians were targeted to make the area free for exploitation (Ylonen, 2012). President Omar Al Bashir has publicly briefed his cabinet that South Kordofan is under the total control of the Sudanese Armed Forces (Varma, 2011). Long-term economic and geopolitical interest in controlling as much as possible of Sudan's oil fields remained at the heart of north-south enmity. After the separation of South Sudan from the north, contention over the oil-rich region of Abyei remains a challenging issue among both countries (Arya, 2009).

The crisis along the north-south border particularly in Heglig Province worsened entailing a fierce conflict that broke out in 2012, because of the claim presented by the National Congress Party and the government of

South Sudan (HSBA, 2013). This claim has driven the Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army to carry out a military strike on the Heglig oil field. The Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army claimed to be responding to the Sudanese attack on Unity state (United to End Genocide, 2012). The North and South Sudan heavily depend on finance from oil extraction. The large amounts of oil deposit found within the Southern provinces while the passage and refining facilities are situated in the north (Widdatallah, 2012). On January 20, 2012, government of South Sudan reached a drastic decision to stop oil production for an unknown period, and this measure was taken in response to the alleged illegal confiscation of the south's oil by the government in the north (United to End Genocide, 2012). The government of Khartoum denied the allegation by saying that confiscated oil was in compensation of unpaid fees for the previous shipment (United to End Genocide, 2012).

For the National Congress Party, permanent loss of Abyei would potentially have disturbing consequences. North Sudan is dependent on oil for its revenues and as such permanent loss of Abyei would have a huge impact by increasing stress on the already unstable economy of the north (Craze, 2011). On the other hand, the loss of Abyei to South Sudan, in the eyes of the regime in the north would have a security implication that is intertwined with its economic importance. The Misseriya groups who are traditionally strong allies of the regime in the north have benefited less from their alliance with the regime due to the neglect by the National Congress Party (Spittaels & Weyns, 2013). Therefore, there is a strong voice of dissent and opposition against the regime by members of the Misseriya ethnic group whose livelihood is based on cattle herding (Craze, 2011).

The Misseriya heavily rely on Abyei, to herd their cattle, especially in times of drought since they pass through the region in search of pasture and water (Craze, 2011). The National Congress Party has promised the Misseriya to protect their traditional grazing rights in the region by deferring or avoiding, if possible, the conduct of a referendum. The regime in the north assumed that any attempt to conduct a referendum over Abyei would prevent the Misseriya from using the province to graze their cattle (Concordis International, 2010). It is envisaged that this would make the regime fail in delivering on its promise and can end up with the breaking apart of the relation between the National Congress Party and the Misseriya (Concordis International, 2010). Unquestionably, this would pose strong challenges to the survival of the government in the north.

Double Standard in U.S. Policy as a Challenge to Settle the Abyei Issue

Direct and persistent U.S. support and commitment to peace in Sudan has been crucial since both parties were encouraged to sign the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* through the strong involvement of stakeholders (Dagne, 2005; Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, 2006). At the beginning when the government of Sudan and Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army signed the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, the United States was the key negotiator and player that helped both parties to end 22 years of conflict. Initially, the U.S. was a key actor in ensuring the implementation of the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* (Angelo & McGuinness, 2012). The United States pledged to support the implementation of the *Abyei Protocol* that provided for the conducting of the Abyei Referendum at the end of the six-year interim period. Although the Abyei Referendum was envisaged to take place alongside with South Sudan's Referendum in 2011, this never happened because of incongruity over who are the eligible voters in the Referendum (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010). Despite clear explanation given under the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* concerning who eligible voters are the government of Sudan resorted to playing procrastination tactics in a move to disavow the conduct of the Abyei Referendum indefinitely (Skovsted, 2014).

The Abyei border demarcation remains a flashpoint and, caused the continuation of stalemate during the interim period (Curless, 2011). It is to be recalled that the *Abyei Protocol* precisely provided for the establishment of a panel of experts to which, the mandate to demarcate the boundaries were given (Baetens & Yotoba, 2011). Hence, based on the agreement of both sides, the Abyei Boundaries Commission was established (May & Kumar, 2013). The Abyei Boundaries Commission's demarcation had been finalized before the expected Referendum to be conducted, and according to the ABC's mandate, its decision was final and binding. In the year 2005, the Abyei Boundaries Commission presented their findings on Abyei's border demarcation, and a verdict delivered shunned by the National Congress Party (Ward, 2012).

The rebuff of Abyei Boundaries Commission's decision by the regime in the north further complicated situation on the ground, following which, in 2008, the combined forces of Sudan Armed Forces and the Misseriya invaded and destroyed Abyei town (Rendón & Hsiao, 2013). The bellicose nature of the National Congress Party resulted in the complete dismantling of, the Abyei Boundaries Commission decision; that is unprecedentedly against the spirit of, the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* that puts clearly that Abyei Boundaries Commission decision as final (Apando, 2015).

After the invasion, both sides have agreed to take their dispute to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The Permanent Court of Arbitration after tedious legal adjudication delivered its verdict that reduced the size of Abyei. The Ngok Dinka and the Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army accepted the ruling but government of Sudan and the Misseriya once again rejected Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling (Salman, 2013). Given shrewd move of the government in Khartoum, as the guarantor of the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, the United States did nothing to make the regime in the north to alter its position; instead, it pressed government of South Sudan to give further concession to the north on Abyei (Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, 2014).

Instead of insisting on implementing the *Abyei Protocol*, Scott Gration, the then U.S. special Envoy to Sudan forwarded a new proposal which calls for the partition of Abyei between both sides (May & Kumar, 2013). This newly proposed plan for the division of Abyei suggests a double standard United States policy. The early position of the United States had been the implementation of the *Abyei Protocol*, and whereas, in 2010, this stand was replaced by the partition of Abyei.[11] The partition proposal was later supported by Secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry, both of whom pressured Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army and government of South Sudan to compromise more by giving more land to the north.[12]

It is worth mentioning that the ambiguous stance on the part of the U.S. seems tit-for-tat in a move to convince Khartoum to accept the outcome of the South Sudan Referendum. The unwelcoming stand of the U.S. has surprisingly sent a chilling message to the people of Abyei; thus in chorus bolstered the image of government by shifting the blame on Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army as uncollaborative (Johnson, 2011). In a nutshell, the call for the partition of Abyei prevaricates the spirit of the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* and remains one of the enigmas of peacemaking in the region.

Conclusion

Post-colonial era Sudan has been at war with itself. The wars that have been fought between the successive regimes in the north, and southern mutinous factions, mainly Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army was the major one. The claim over ownership of territories has been deep-seated at the heart of long lingered

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[11] Interview with Ambassador Omer Salih Abubakr at Sudan Embassy, Addis Ababa on April 1, 2014.
[12] Interview with Ambassador Omar Salih Abubakr, Addis Ababa, April 1, 2014. See also Sudan Tribune (2012).

conflicts that marred post-independence internal politics of Sudan. Among these territories, Abyei has continued to be the focal point where the belligerents have converged together over its control. The trajectories of conflict that have ravaged Abyei region of Sudan rooted in multilayered factors that protracted the conflict. Albeit expected *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* that internationally endorsed, brought to an end bloody conflict between the regimes in Khartoum, and southern resistance forces, it fails to adequately address the conflict.

Hence, this paper has examined thoroughly into the continuation of competition over Abyei among the warring groups and how the inability of actors to deliver the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* in general and that of *Abyei Protocol* lead to stalemate, destruction and lengthened the war post *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* period that dashed the hope of peacemaking in Abyei County. First, this piece highlighted the dilemma of peacemaking stands on the exploitation of identity. The elites attracted local communities around ethnic, and religious identities that twisted relation of local communities along with elites' dictation. Subsequently, ethnic identity has been manipulated and exploited for political gains.

In addition to identity, claim over Abyei has compounded sternly because of rivalry over resources control mainly, oil. Finally, this piece has analyzed how the impotence of the international community especially, the ever-shifting position of the United States has failed Abyei. Thus, the researchers forwarded the following recommendations based on the above findings. There are a lot of opportunities that have forsaken by the parties to curb unfolding crisis related to competition over Abyei peacefully. In the first place, accepting both Abyei Boundaries Commission and Permanent Court of Arbitration verdicts as it is given, under the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, is the way out of such chaotic competition on Abyei. The guarantors of the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* should truly reaffirm their commitments towards the implementation of the *Comprehensive Peace Agreement*.

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