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Title: Territorial Conflicts in East Africa: Uganda-Kenya Contestation over Migingo Island, 1926 -2009.

Abstract: The maritime question has been a veritable subject in international relations as scholars, policy makers and politicians continue to search for drivers behind the ever-escalating contests over renewable and non-renewable resources. East Africa has experienced many territorial conflicts with scholars, journalists and politicians predicting their escalation following the discovery of natural wealth on borderlands. For more than a decade, Uganda and Kenya have been involved in a low-intensity territorial contest over Migingo, a rocky islet on Lake Victoria. This thesis examines the Uganda and Kenya conflict over this island in the period; 1926-2009. It historicizes the ideational structures that shape the Migingo controversy, given the fact that scholarly works on territorial conflicts mostly deal with their materialistic triggers. It further analyzes the broad historical drivers of the controversy, the significance of the Island and the implications of the conflict on the ordinary people in their environs and the entire East African region. Using a qualitative approach with a historical research design that amalgamates archival records, oral interviews and documentary sources and being guided by the constructivism theory of international relations, the study centrally argues that the Uganda-Kenya contestation over Migingo is not about land but about fish. Migingo is not a mere rock as wealth abounds around it in the form of fish. Access to fisheries resource explains the “benefits beyond territory” that have restrained both countries from war and that can jeopardize that fundamental interest. While the rocky Island is fixed, without any direct utilization or economic value, the waters around it have fish. This is a renewable and mobile resource that whoever owns the water around the island has control and ownership of the fish in the waters. Fish, therefore, becomes a strategic resource. The study hoped to contribute to scholarship on territorial conflicts, borderlands and inter-state relations in East Africa. Particularly, it has challenged the widespread assumption that colonial borders were well defined with colonial maps as an authentic tool of evidence in positioning any territory. And therefore, owing to the ambiguous primary documents, contradictory view points and literature about the ownership of Migingo, the study proposes negotiation as an alternative resolution mechanism other than reliance on colonial maps to address this maritime conundrum. The other viable solution rests in fast- trucking a regional political integration that can neutralize problems such as contests over the tiny islet of Migingo.

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Opponent: Professor Peter John Opio,

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