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Trade, peace-building and hybrid governance in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands

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ABSTRACT

Trade and markets in weak states are often discussed in relation with violence, security and peace-building. A case in point are marketplaces in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands where communities separated by insecurity and hostility meet, not only to trade but also to negotiate and exchange information. This does not imply that establishment of such markets automatically results in peace and stability. Based on new empirical research on the Amieth market in Abyei – an area contested by the two Sudans – I argue that such markets rely on security guarantees negotiated between a set of heterogeneous societal groups and that the overall impact of such border markets is largely determined within a context of hybrid security governance. The conclusion emphasises that without a proper analysis of this context, external assistance to such borderland markets might just as well enable violent conflict actors as being a tool for peace-building.

KEYWORDS

Sudan; South Sudan; trade; civil war; peace-building; hybrid governance

Introduction

The countries of Sudan and South Sudan are ravaged by famine, displacement and violence. Two wars were fought in South Sudan before it became independent in 2011. In the now curtailed Sudan, three interlinked internal conflicts ravage the regions of Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile; in 2013, another devastating civil war started in South Sudan. Struggling to simplify a complex and obscure context, foreign media, diplomats and aid agencies explain the occurrence of these conflicts as the result of machinations of corrupt leaders or as the clashes of incompatible groups of people (northerners vs. southerners; Africans vs. Arabs; Christians vs. Muslims, etc.). Within such a perspective the cross-border markets in the borderlands between the two Sudans appears to be improbable anomalies; these are places where 'hostile communities' trade across frontlines in situations of intense insecurity, including civil war, and where the reach of national governments is contested or non-existing.

One of these assumed anomalies is the Amieth market in Abyei – close to the border between the two Sudans. It was established in 2016 and, in less than a year, a remote empty plain was transformed into a thriving expansive marketplace where many long-distance merchants arrive daily with their trucks and where people from local communities trade and provide various kinds of services. While most merchants deal in regular goods, weapons

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and other contrabands are also sold at the market. The explosive growth of the Amieth market is a result of a paucity of trading corridors between the two countries. The market is also a meeting place for the local peace council. However, the linkages between Amieth market and security and peace-building are complex, and there are significant variations in how the market impacts people involved. And, although the blossoming of trade is generally perceived as a positive development, there are misgivings and unaddressed challenges: there has been an upsurge in violent crimes, traffic accidents and prostitution in the area. Furthermore, conflict actors are deeply embedded in the market reaping profits from trade as well as tax revenues, and the market has been attacked by armed gangs and militias who wish to shut it down.

The apparent complexities this case reveals in the linkages between trade and peace-building is part of a large discussion of the role of the private sector in weak and conflict-ridden states. Within this emerging field of study, Miklian et al. have already provided a preliminary taxonomy of different business practices, which may impact peace-building.¹ Importantly, the private sector is heterogenous and while some businesses need stability and might dampen conflict, other kinds of enterprises drive violence and thrive in war zones. Hence, as explained by Berdal and Mousavizden, nuance is required:

The challenge lies in identifying an appropriate role for the private sector, both foreign and domestic, in building sustainable peace, not as a silver bullet or magical solution to the multiple challenges of conflict-affected societies but as a potential ally in efforts to consolidate peace through stimulating entrepreneurship, attracting significant investment, facilitating local economic activity and reinforcing incentives for peaceful behaviour.²

This kind of nuance is also necessary when considering external support to border markets in weak states, such as the two Sudans.

Amieth market is the empirical focal point for the following discussion of the different dimensions of trade and peace-building in the borderlands between the two Sudans. The main source of data for the Amieth case is 28 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted during 2017, which were collected with the assistance of Kush Inc.³ These interviews are complemented with various reports on trade, livelihoods and peace-building in Abyei and previous fieldwork in surrounding borderlands. Most of the interviewees are key informants interviewed individually or in groups, who have been selected because of their personal and unique role in the establishment and running of the peace market. Categories of key informants include local authorities, traders, NGO staff, chiefs, peacekeeping operation, youth and women. Considering that the data on the Amieth market was collected only a year after it was established and that the investigation was exploratory in nature, there are clear limitations as to what kind of questions it is possible to answer with the available material. Future avenues of research are outlined in the conclusion.

Seen as a whole, the markets in these borderlands might be an example of traders and trade interaction having a peace-building effect. But, it is difficult to isolate the peace-building factors since borderland markets in the two Sudans are intrinsically linked to other aspects of livelihood and deeply connected to the overall political developments in the two countries.

The argument presented here is that while these markets impact the political-economy calculus in the areas in which they are established, they are not intended as vehicles for peace-building. Rather, they are products of weak and hybrid governance

structures and may engender both conflict and peaceful co-existence. However, facilitation and operation of these markets can be adjusted to reduce violence and enhance their impact on peace and stability. This analysis resonates with Meagher's observation that hybrid governance of the kind evident in Abyei is ambiguous and might engender both benefits and problems.⁴ The article is structured so that the first section below provides a brief historical background for conflict, peace-building and border trade in the two Sudans. The subsequent section is an exploratory close-up of the Amieth market using new evidence to discuss this as an example of trade in these borderlands, while the final main section zooms out again and, using evidence from Amieth and other border markets, discusses more generally the impact of trade and markets on peace and security. The conclusion summarises the discussion and draws up some broader academic and policy implications.

Markets and peace-building in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands

Trade routes and market places have a long history in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands.⁵ War and insecurity has seldom halted trade, but influence who are involved in trade, the goods offered and the strategies used to bring these goods to the buyer. Throughout history, people living in these borderlands have moved with their cattle between seasonal grazing areas. Make-shift trading posts are established in cattle camps, bringing people together for barter and talk. The introduction of a monetary market economy in Sudan's peripheries, especially in today's South Sudan, has been slow and closely related to the violent imposition of foreign rule.⁶ The expansion of trade engendered new dependencies and vulnerabilities, but also generated new opportunities and facilitated physical and social mobility. Over time, people in the peripheries adjusted to life at the ragged end of trade networks.

Before the secession in 2011, South Sudan experienced two civil wars (1963–1972 and 1983–2005). Especially the second war was highly disruptive due to insecurity, destroyed infrastructure and general reduction in productivity, and it resulted in a reorganisation of livelihood and trade.⁷ In the borderlands the conflicts had a detrimental effect on social and political development as the warring parties – especially the government in Khartoum – armed ethnic groups and raised local militias, which were sent out to burn villages and loot and displace neighbouring groups. People selling cattle had to trek far. Smuggling across frontlines and international borders were often the only way to bring goods into areas supervised by local rebel leaders. The second civil war was considerably more intense than the first; the rebels were stronger and better organised; the frontlines were clearer and movement of people and goods more regulated. The parties used blockades and siege strategies to weaken the opponents and their civilian support base. Today's borderlands between the two Sudans were then far away from any international border and became isolated. In main garrison towns merchants from the North still sold food and other necessities, but the people in the smaller towns and in the country-side controlled by the rebels were by and large cut-off from trade networks. In *The Benefits of Famine* David Keen reveals how Sudanese traders exploited shortages in South Sudan during the 1980s to sell food at a very high price.⁸ Collusion with government actors was an important criterion for this scheme to work. Still, the level

of central control over the blockade policy was limited and there are many stories of how people, especially women, travelled into the garrison towns to sell local produce and then bought ammunition and gathered intelligence for the rebels. Although benefitting the rebels, such trade also helped feed government soldiers in besieged towns and thus undermining the strategy of starving them out.

In the 1990s the political landscape of the borderlands became increasingly chaotic as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) splintered and local warlords constantly shifted alliance between the rebels and the government. Rural markets were organised in SPLM/A-controlled parts of the borderlands, for instance in Warapac, Warawa, Manyiel, Pankot, Barpakeny, Nabagok and Malual Tit. With the facilitation of local peace committees and the blessing of rebel commanders, merchants from northern Sudan were escorted to these markets bringing food and other trading goods, while the traders mostly bought cattle.⁹ It was claimed that the facilitation of trade spurred a number of related initiatives such as building of infrastructure and the establishment of boards of commerce at the county level. Foreign observers and organisations soon latched onto the phenomenon and sought ways in which assistance and publicity for these markets (and for their organisations) could be provided.¹⁰ However, a retrospective study of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal by Katie Rickard demonstrated that the history of peace markets was more complex: apparently, the main motivation for the rebels to set up the markets was to establish new sources of military supplies; smugglers from northern Sudan became one of several make-shift solutions.¹¹ Although civilian South Sudanese used the market as well, the main actors were local SPLM/A commanders and Misseriya militia leaders. The security and administration of the markets were all in the hands of these local elites, and, in the case of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, dominated by the strongman Paul Malong (and he would continue to play a major role both locally and the national level).¹² Thus, these findings place the 'peace market' firmly within the militarised political economy of South Sudan.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 turned this situation upside down: security was improved and oil revenues rapidly increased the purchasing power of many South Sudanese. Northern Sudanese traders rushed in and, especially in the northern part of today's South Sudan, goods from the north dominated the market. But, also Juba was supplied by barges coming up the Nile from Khartoum. Goods were also brought in from the South via Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia. The process which led to the establishment of South Sudan as an independent state in 2011 was marked by tension and even open conflict with the regime in Khartoum. This involved a trade blockade, and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese from Sudan. As a consequence of this blockade and improved road access to East Africa, trade with Sudan reportedly shrunk considerably over the following years. However, as the economic crisis in South Sudan deepened during 2015 and the civil war spread southwards towards the border to Uganda and the DRC, relations between the Sudans improved and there was increased pressure to re-open cross-border trade. This is the immediate background for the establishment of the Amieth market in 2016.

Developments north of the border have followed a somewhat divergent path. With re-ignition of war in the Nuba Mountains in the province South Kordofan in 2011, markets have cropped up along the front lines. These are called *sumbuks*, and represent

a practice, which can be traced back to the previous civil war. Today's versions of these markets are organised in a similar fashion to the historical one, but, due to tighter government control in the war zone, the trade is clandestine and run more or less as smuggling operations.¹³ The main source of information on current *sumbuku* is a study by Elhassab Omer et al. from 2016.¹⁴ It explains that *sumbuk* traders move with cars and motorcycles and once they reach the front line they are escorted into the areas controlled by the rebel group SPLM/A-North to a randomly selected spot where exchange of goods takes place over a short period of time. The *sumbuk* are outlets for the produce of alluvial goldfields in the SPLM/A-North territories and this is what makes it possible for people to pay for the goods brought by the smugglers. Moreover, the report mentions anecdotal evidence of collusion between *sumbuk* traders and Sudanese military and civilian official in three different ways: investing in the enterprise and receive a share of the profit; military officers might take a contingent of soldiers and engage in the trade themselves; or, they provide the smugglers with information on checkpoints etc.¹⁵ This kind of collusion is consistent with similar findings related to the political economy of weak states like the Sudan.¹⁶

A key contextual factor revealed by this overview of border trade is the impact of Sudan and South Sudan's weak governance structures. In strong states central governments control trade and border-crossing and thus also the potential use of trade as a peace-building instrument.¹⁷ In contrast, governments in weaker states are characterised by: limited bureaucratic capacity and lack of control over their territories and populations; considerable security challenges, at times at the level of civil war; most economic activity is unregulated and untaxed and the formal economy centred around export of a few key commodities.¹⁸ However, as Migdal aptly points out, in weak states individuals are not left to fend for themselves: 'weblike societies have survived with social control dispersed among various social organizations having their own rules rather than centralized in the state or organizations authorized by the state'.¹⁹ Such actors and networks fill governance vacuums in weak states. Indeed, there is often collusion between key player within these web-like societies and the officials inhabiting executive positions within the formal state.²⁰ Such 'big men', in what is often characterised as systems of neo-patrimonialism or shadow states, would in fact stand with one foot in each of these worlds; a 'store front' formal governance structure both lend a hue of legitimacy to the activities of the people in the network and is means to access the resources made available through the state apparatus.²¹ Using the politics of the two Sudans as a point of departure, Alex de Waal has taken this one step further. He has developed the notion of a 'political market place' where elites at different level, in a game of constant renegotiations, barter their own and their followers' loyalty to the highest bidder. As a part of this debate around the politics of weak states and the power of the society, the notion of 'hybrid governance' has increasingly gained purchase. This is a way to describe the blend of formal and informal – state and non-state – institutions regulating politics and economic activities within weak states.²² Moreover, in the bitter, and now stalled, process of defining South Sudan's border with Sudan, hybrid governance strategies constituted an essential factor.²³ In the below analysis of Amieih market we will see how hybrid solutions in the Abyei area also play an important role in the complex brokerage processes by which borderland markets are established and regulated.

The historical overview also demonstrates how weak states such as the two Sudans are marred by various degrees of local-level violence. People may live in situations of acute insecurity, which are not necessarily formally recognised as civil war. Such situations have been characterised by scholars as ‘inter-war’, ‘no war no peace’ or ‘complex emergency’.²⁴ In the peripheries and borderlands of weak states, insecurity and low-intensity organised violence is typically a permanent state of affairs where central government control is patchy at best. Borders are barriers, but also fields of opportunity and people living in these kinds of borderlands carve out niches of agency and develop various ingenious ways in which cross-border interaction can be exploited to the advantage of the people living in these areas. The newly established international border between Sudan and South Sudan is porous to the extreme and the areas between the 9th and 12th degree longitude is arguably developing into a ‘third Sudan’, its main characteristics being shared climatic zones and being peripheral to the two ‘metropolises’ Khartoum and Juba.²⁵ To navigate this dangerous and unpredictable terrain while also securing a profit, business actors need particular negotiation skills and networks, and they may also have interests in contributing towards local appeasement initiatives. As demonstrated in the next section, the case of the Amieth market is a well-suited illustration of these tendencies.

The Amieth market

Abyei, where the Amieth market is located, is a focal point of political contestation and military battles. Historically this relatively small geographical area has taken on a considerable importance in relations between Sudan and South Sudan; the 2005 peace agreement stipulated that the people of Abyei through a referendum was to vote on whether they were to belong to Sudan or South Sudan. Due to take place in early 2011, the referendum was blocked by Sudan which sent in the army to occupy the area. A peace keeping mission, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), was subsequently mandated to maintain security in the area. Despite the absences of large-scale violence, tensions remained high and there have been smaller clashes, robberies and murders. This has left Abyei in a state of limbo where there is little will from either governments to find a solution to the impasse. However, while the national level actors can live with an unresolved situation in Abyei, this political gridlock is a direct threat to the livelihood of the people living there.

The establishment of Amieth market

A typical example of the above-mentioned long historical relationship between borderland peoples is that of the Ngok (a Dinka sub-group) who are permanently settled in Abyei and the Misseriya who consider seasonal access to pasture and water a customary right. Both groups are cattle herders and organised along segmentary clan lanes with a hierarchy of ‘traditional leaders’ (government chiefs imposed during the colonial period) tasked with handling disputes and negotiations on behalf of communities. There are however a number of other influential elites both at the local and national levels who also play a key role in trade and commerce in the area.

Historically, negotiation of passage has taken place against the backdrop of violence; conflict might ensue if no agreement is reached. Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, such conflict has been stoked by political elites both at the national and regional level. This kind of manipulation was intensified with the discovery of oil in Abyei in the late 1970s. Hostilities reached a climax during the second civil war when elements of the Misseriya group were mobilised to secure road and rail links to Wau in Bahr al-Ghazal, and these Misseriya elements created free fire zones along the routes south, using a mix of massacre, looting and abduction.²⁶ Relations between Ngok and Misseriya improved somewhat in the interwar years 2005–2011, but communication subsequently broke down when South Sudan became independent in 2011 and tension between the national elites were high in subsequent years. A group of Misseriya chiefs describe the situation thus: ‘war and combat was the order of the day during that period, if a Misseriya find a Dinka guy he will kill him and raid his cattle and vice-versa. There was no peace, no communication and very rare attempts of contacts’.²⁷ Since 2016, relations between Ngok and Misseriya leaders have improved, however, and trade has played a key role in this process.

The immediate background for the Amieth market can be traced back to a peace agreement between the Ngok and the Awalad Kamil section of the Misseriya in February 2016. One Ngok chief explains that the process of negotiating the peace agreement started with them receiving an invitation to go to the town of Aweil in September 2015. This was during talks between the Awalad Kamil and Malwal (another Dinka sub-group). The Ngok and Awalad Kamil leaders then agreed to convene a conference in Abyei. However, the Government of Sudan sabotaged the planned conference and ‘arrested, tortured and took most of them [i.e. the Misseriya delegation] to Kobar prison’.²⁸ The rationale for Sudan government’s hostility towards the plans to open the market was probably the desire at that point to maintain the trade blockade against South Sudan. Meanwhile, the dry season began. The Misseriya cattle herders were severely affected by a drought and needed access to water and pastures further South. The Ngok were pressured by the Misseriya as well as foreign organisations to agree to meet inside the Abyei ‘box’ (the contested area). In February 2016, a meeting with delegations of ten from both sides finally took place in Noong, a village north of Abyei town. They agreed on the following principles: mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, control of militias, compensation for stolen cattle and murders, and to ‘allow the Misseriya herders access to water, pastures, and grazing in Abyei area, and to cease all hostilities between the two neighbouring communities and allow free movement between North and South of Abyei’.²⁹

In the early stages of the Ngok-Misseriya peace talks there had been discussions over setting up a market, but the two communities did not agree on a location. The Ngok wanted it to be in Langar (Difra) or Todach. They argued that since the market could be a source of insecurity it should be far away from their settlements. The Misseriya wanted it to be in Abyei town and claimed they would be safer there than in a remote place. Negotiations were, however, overtaken by events. During the February meeting, Misseriya traders came with some goods to Noong, which they also brought with them when the Misseriya and Ngok chiefs travelled around Abyei to inform about the peace. Noong thus became the initial site for the market, which expanded rapidly over the next months. Later, around June–July 2016, when the rainy season approached, the market was moved to Amieth, north of Abyei Town, which gave access to an all-season road.

Evidently, a number of developments gave impetus to these peace talks and the establishment of the market. Drought and several years with limited access to the southern pastures had become an existential threat to the Misseriya herders and they needed to negotiate passage through Abyei. The Ngok wanted security and the opportunity to re-settle and farm north of Abyei town, an area that had, due to the conflict, been a no-go-zone. Further, the Ngok and other South Sudanese needed a corridor, which could give them access to wage labour in urban centres in Sudan.³⁰ Finally, access to trading goods, especially food, and opportunities to sell livestock was an important concern. Relations between Sudan and South Sudan improved during this period and the government in Khartoum turned a blind eye to the trading activities; indeed, in November 2017 Sudan and South Sudan reached an agreement to open four trading and customs points along the border and trade has reportedly increased after this.³¹ Concurrently, due to insecurity, bad roads and a collapsing economy, trade with Uganda and Kenya had been significantly reduced since 2014, and especially the northern parts of South Sudan were severely affected by shortages. All of these factors contributed towards facilitating the rapid growth of the Amieth market.

The operation of the market

The expansion of the Amieth market is remarkable and its economic and social ramifications go far beyond the vicinity of Abyei. At a very basic level, it has improved access to food and trading goods. An Abyei youth explains: 'before, you could not even get tea, because there were no goods in the market, and there was no food, but now, there is food, so it is something good for the community'.³² It is difficult to estimate the volume of trade generated by the Amieth market, but the distance traders are willing to travel, the amount of trucks arriving and the diversity of goods give an indication of the size and significance of the market. In 2017, about 70 trucks arrive daily from the South, and 30–40 from the North. In addition, people offer different kinds of services such as accommodation, food and beverages, manual labour, security. Due to the increased value of the dollar, the number of trucks from the north dwindled in autumn 2017 to about 16 daily. Amieth market also supplies traders in Abyei town, the administrative centre, and has improved their businesses considerably.

The main trading goods are staple food, livestock and household necessities such as salt, soap and clothes. Cattle bought by Sudanese traders are transported to Khartoum and some are exported to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In addition to livestock, southern traders sell timber, charcoal, wild fruit, gum Arabic, gold, scrap metal, used cars, refrigerators and generators, clothes and fuel. Electrical appliances and telecommunication products have in recent decades become increasingly in demand in South Sudan. Typically, such will be bought in periods of affluence while being the first possessions to be liquidated in times of want. The sale of used cars and electrical appliances thus indicate that Southerners liquidated their assets because of food shortages. Northern traders sell sorghum, but also cement, steel, furniture, medicines, sugar and oil. Some specialise in changing money. Illegal goods are also traded such as weapons, proceeds from poaching (ivory, leopard skins) and drugs (marijuana, hashish). These goods are sold by South Sudanese and bought by the Sudanese.

There are basically three categories of people selling goods in the Amieth market: the large-scale merchant with fleets of trucks and large warehouses serving many markets; the local trader and peddler who often buy their stocks from the big merchants; and, the farmer, cattle herder and local crafts man selling their own products. Most of the southern traders come from nearby areas such as Wau, Aweil, Kaucjok and Bentiu, but also from further south (Juba, Yambio, Rumbek, Tonj, Yambio and Maridi); most northern traders come from Khartoum, but also Darfur, Suk Libya, Omdurman, Muglad, El Obeid, Babanusa and Kadugli in the Nuba Mountains. In addition, agents of the two national governments and foreign organisations are present in the market. The latter are for the most part engaged in relief and peace-building activities. Foreign aid organisations and the UNISFA are among the actors engaged in facilitating the market and trade and movement of people in general. All these actors have roles in a number of interwoven conflicts and they are linked to the markets in multiple ways.

The composition of the Amieth market is a consequence of the general security challenges in the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands. The level of insecurity and conflict impacts the kinds of traders operating in the market and from where the goods are coming, as well as the type, price and amount of goods available. Indeed, war has been the impetus for establishing improvised markets in the borderlands: if there were peace and security, these activities would have taken place in the larger towns and not in the middle of nowhere. A case in point is that after the signing of the pace agreement in 2005 the various 'peace markets' in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal shrunk and the towns of Raga, Aweil, Wau, Bentiu and Gogrial became the main trade centres.³³ Also, as is evident from these historical cases and the current *sumbuk* trade in the Nuba Mountains, the higher level of risk and insecurity in the area, the more likely it is that traders themselves are conflict actors or that they need to work closely with warlords and the military. In contrast, there is no open war in Abyei and consequently the Amieth market is mainly a market where goods are sold in the open and with tacit acceptance by the governments of Sudan and South Sudan.

Different groups of people benefit from the market in multiple ways. It creates work for idle youth and women operate in the market as petty traders and tea brewers. For instance, a widowed female trader from the Misseriya sells warm meals, which has given her enough money to send kids to school and university.³⁴ Government soldiers from both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as rebels from the SPLM-in opposition (IO), come to buy food at the market. Sudanese soldiers in civilian clothing, many believed to be from security branches, are exacting bribes from traders and come to trade themselves. The soldiers are suspected of collaborating with bandits that ambush people outside the market. Thus, despite the opportunities the market creates, it has also brought many challenges and reactivated old conflicts.

Peace-building impact of borderland markets: insights from the Amieth case

The borderland markets are established chiefly for the purpose of trade, transport of people and the various facility and hospitality services provided for their users, without which there would be no meeting place and nothing to govern or collect revenues from. But the market and those using it cannot operate without protection and the blessing of people controlling the area and the routes leading to the market. A minimum

requirement is that institutions and groups controlling the territory must make land available and provide a certain element of protection and policing. When a borderland market thus combines security guarantees and larger volumes of trade, it becomes a secure haven where people who would otherwise not be able to meet can exchange information and negotiate. Arguably, the meeting place aspect is not altogether superfluous in relation to trade and security. As we have seen, at the fringes of weak states such markets are a result of negotiations between different stakeholders and are dependent on maintaining good relations between them. Moreover, the existence of a neutral haven is useful for many of the stakeholders and give them another reason to support the continued existence of the market. In the following, we will discuss challenges generated by the operation of the Amieth market and how these different aspects of the market manifest themselves in the process.

Challenges to peace: tensions, insecurity and violence generated by the Amieth market

Violence, crime and other security challenges related to the Amieth market is partly rooted in the general problem of the formal governance vacuum in Abyei mentioned above. This opens up for a multi-faceted and negotiated hybrid governance, but where the different actors involved have diverging interests. In the case of the Amieth market, the interests of long-distance traders and the local residents do not always mesh. To the long-distance traders from the two Sudan's the market is primarily a convenient and secure meeting point. While for the local population, the mercantile activities might provide improved access to key commodities as well as opportunities to sell products, to find employment and engage in other income generating activities. But, there are also a number of challenges which can, at least in the eyes of some local residents, outweigh these benefits.

Although the February 2016 Ngok-Misseriya peace accord paused conflicts over grazing and improved general security in the area, the increased interaction generated by the market created new sources of tension along this line of conflict. Firstly, Misseriya leaders demanded influence on management of the market and reportedly want to change the name of the market to Fad el-Azras.³⁵ The process of allocating plots to set up shops proved controversial. An informant claims that in the beginning, some Misseriya constructed 254 shops and hired these out to Ngok traders and later they built 1,000 additional shops: 'Dinka Ngok has got no ownership of shops or even pieces of land, they only rent from the Misseriya [...] the Missiriya are now building illegitimately'.³⁶ Another informant says that 'anyone can build [shops] by force, especially Misseriya groups'.³⁷ As explained by a third informant, many consider it a problem that the Misseriya claim a privileged position in the market.³⁸ Secondly, people in Abyei complain that 'Arabs have the money and they control the market according to their will',³⁹ which for example resulted in them dictating currency exchange rates being used.⁴⁰ This market control has made it difficult for local merchants to compete with northerners. Thirdly, some consider the market a hub for criminals. An informant claims to know of criminals killing a man and they 'looted about 3 million SSP [South Sudanese Pounds] from the local exchange bureau'.⁴¹ Also prostitution takes place secretly in the evening after the market is closed, which several Ngok respondents

consider a threat to the moral fabric of the community. Finally, one young girl explains that several people get killed in road accidents and robberies.⁴²

The market has also increased tension between the Ngok and the Twic, a Dinka subgroup to the South of Abyei. This is portrayed as a dispute over land ownership but appears to have been triggered by Twic leaders' desire to receive a cut of the revenues collected from the market. People from Twic express that they feel vulnerable since they have become dependent on supplies coming through Abyei. If the Ngok leaders were to block this access, conflict would ensue. In 2017 a violent clash between Ngok and Twic resulted in security forces in Abyei arresting several people from Twic and held them captive in Abyei town.

Violence exacerbates the tension created by the market. Larger incidents cause the market to be shut down for weeks.⁴³ This is a problem for the traders from the south whose cattle need fodder and water; for vendors of fresh food their stocks will rot; people in transit get stranded and are burdened with additional expenses. Various armed militias are said to be behind the violent incidents; once a militia group even shelled the market with rocket propelled grenades. The militia of Thomas Thiil is identified as a major threat to the market, although other groups are also mentioned, such as the Rapid Support Force, from Sudan, the Baggara Militia, Abyei Liberation Front, the Dabang, even the Sudan Armed Forces. Several among the Ngok state that the Government of Sudan and the Misseriya have recruited these groups to attack trucks heading back to Abyei.⁴⁴ However, the militia led by Thomas Thiil was apparently raised among the Twic Dinka and one young adult from Abyei said that there were also people from Abyei who were members of militias, but that they were not allowed to talk about it.⁴⁵ It is equally probable that some of these outfits are gangs of criminals operating autonomously, rather than military units under anyone's command.

Such insecurity incidents have lead people to question if the market is beneficial at all and some want to shut it down altogether.⁴⁶ For instance, one youth claims that the security problem is so grave that Amieth market is 'not helping the people of Abyei' and that it is only for the people further south.⁴⁷ Several of the chiefs perceive that the Ngok community has no benefit from the market and that the goods the Ngok buy in the market are just small stuff they could have gotten from elsewhere.⁴⁸ This brief discussion demonstrates that security issues surrounding the Amieth market is partly a consequence of the operation of the market, but they also reflect the broader conflict structures of the borderlands of the two Sudans.

Protecting the Amieth market

As with the rest of the Abyei area, the overall security at the Amieth market has been managed by UNISFA. But, its capacity to deal with the tensions and security problems listed above is limited. It established a station in the market and patrol the market itself and tried to control the roads leading to it. In one instance UNISFA forces killed one attacker in the market, while several others got away. The capacity to patrol outside the market has been very limited. An informant states that UNISFA protected people traveling from Abyei to Diffra, but one Ngok youth suggests that UNISFA should have done more to provide security along the roads and to hold the Misseriya accountable.⁴⁹ Together with the chiefs, UNISFA established a security committee to provide additional policing capacity and the peace-keepers provided training and cars, but since the members of this local outfit were

not issued weapons and lacked means of communication they could not stave off militia attacks. The peace committee and Concordis International, a foreign NGO, advise that the force should be under UNISFA direct command and be given arms and uniforms.⁵⁰ There is a chiefs' court in the market to deal with local disputes and minor crimes. It has the power to fine and UNISFA has provided a container, which is used as a prison for minor cases. But, there is no system to handle major crimes. The UNISFA do not have the authority to prosecute perpetrators and there have been situations where apprehended criminals are set free after 72 hours. A representative of UNISFA explains that this is because there are no formal institutions in charge of law and order, and no person can be imprisoned without a proper trial.⁵¹ The Ngok has established a civilian administration of the Abyei area since 2011, with close ties to the Government of South Sudan, but UNISFA is hesitant to recognise this administration and does not allow South Sudan police to operate in Abyei.

A shared characteristic of borderland markets is that there are few if any rules or regulations for its operation. The Abyei administration, controlled by an informal political-military elite, benefits from tax revenues extracted from the market and seems to have a regulatory role. The collection of these fees has however been selective: Misseriya traders reported that they go to the market because of the co-operation with people of Abyei, the low taxes, they were not hindered by check-points and payed no bribes or clearance when transporting the goods; other Sudanese and South Sudanese traders claim they have had problems with expensive bribes and taxation, especially at check-points on the way to the market. There seems to be no connection between the collection of taxes and fee and investments in security and infrastructure in the market; revenues have foremost been a source of wealth accumulation for local elites.

Indeed, opportunities for big men to generate revenues from the markets constitute a key element in explaining why the borderland markets such as Amieth emerge. The political calculus for these elites will be to balance profit maximisation with ensuring that traders find it sufficiently attractive to use the market. The elite controlling the market must also strike a balance between having a sufficient number of political factions on their side to protect it, while minimising the number of strongmen who have a claim on revenues. This is also the dimension which has the largest conflict potential in the event that control becomes a bone of contention between competing elites. While control of the markets might not be a zero-sum game, it would be naïve to assume that everyone benefits from markets. The opening of a new market can ruin a pre-existing monopoly situation, lower prices, and reduce collected revenues from other markets. Hence, some elites may have vested interest in either denying others access to the revenues generated through trade or to destroy a market altogether. For instance, Misseriya traditional authorities did not receive revenues and indicated that they are side-lined and neglected.⁵²

Furthermore, conflict actors at the national level may see markets through a larger strategic lens and seek to deny the other party access to the benefits and opportunities these generate. Especially the Government of Sudan has a long history of targeting the civilian population and their livelihoods as part of their counter-insurgency strategy. Blocking trade is one element in starving out the population living in rebel-controlled areas. And, vice-versa, rebels have sought to maintain sources of revenue and a pool of civilian population in their areas through attracting both trade and foreign assistance. Many believe that the Government of Sudan in fact sees the market as a threat to its authority, and therefore tries to stop co-operation between the Misseriya and the Ngok.⁵³

Peace-building and Amieth market

It is as a site of interaction and negotiations that the peace-building aspect of the Amieth market is evident. We may identify two dimensions in this regard. Firstly, it was necessary to negotiate ground rules, security arrangements and arbitration mechanisms for the establishment of the market and its continued operation. Thus, the desire to facilitate trade gave impetus to re-establishing contact between communities in conflict and to build confidence and mutual interdependence. Not only has the market brought together conflicting communities of the Ngok and sections of the Misseriya, but also people from farther afield like Kaya in South Sudan and Omdurman in Sudan. Reportedly, the market has also had a positive impact on some militia leaders and their followers, who might benefit more from trade and job opportunities instead of violence and looting. Two informants further stated that former criminals in Abyei are now earning a living in the market.⁵⁴ The market is, moreover, a place to gather information and can both defuse and generate rumours. However, a representative of UNISFA said that despite successful communication between representatives of the Ngok and the Misseriya, the arrangement concerning the Amieth market is not primarily motivated by a desire to build peace, but the need to access resources and facilitate exchange of goods and services.⁵⁵ In consequence such improvised arrangements does not provide permanent solutions to security challenges in the area. More durable solutions would require long-term security guarantees from the two Sudanese governments which would in turn necessitate a resolution to the larger Abyei dispute.

Secondly, as a safe zone the market facilitates various other negotiations and meetings, which might not be directly related to the operation of the market; 'without the market, peace cannot go on'.⁵⁶ In the case of Amieth market, negotiation of livestock migration and the opportunity for people to travel across conflict lines are the most important peace-building activities taking place. This is foremost linked to negotiations of grazing rights and of corridors for the movement of cattle further south, which have been facilitated by UNISFA. Settlement security and movement of people are also important aspects of these negotiations. Since it is located north of Abyei town, the establishment of the market has resulted in re-settlement of Ngok further north over the Kiir River to places like Miyen Kor, Dokora, Noong and Amieth itself. These were areas abandoned because of insecurity. Furthermore, with permission and protection from leaders of the Misseriya it became possible for South Sudanese to travel to Sudan through the 70km ungoverned stretch between Abyei and Jabateen. 'Amieth market has become a route to northern Sudan through which thousands of South Sudanese [use to] travel [...] to Khartoum because it is much cheaper than air travel'.⁵⁷ Safe travel has also enabled people to seek medical help in the Sudan. Even deserted South Sudanese soldiers after selling their weapons in the market use this route to escape to Sudan.

The above discussion demonstrates that the establishment and operation of rural border markets like the one in Amieth require a certain level of security and establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms and, moreover, that such markets have the potential for facilitating various other kinds of peace-building activities. As explained in the conclusion below, active external support might maximise these effects and keep negative consequences at a minimum.

Conclusion: might there be 'trade for peace' in weak states?

Rural markets have had a galvanising effect on Abyei and other border areas; these markets change the political and economic calculus for a diverse set of actors and may both escalate violence and facilitate conflict mitigation. Hence, such markets are neither inherently 'good' or 'bad'. Trade revenues might consolidate the power of local elites and strongmen and thereby result in stability as competitors are marginalised, but conflict over control of markets and trade routes might also intensify violence between armed groups under the command of these strongmen. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to promote trade as peace-building in cases when border markets operate clandestinely and one of the main conflict actors actively disrupt their operation, as in the case with the Government of Sudan's suppression of the *sumbuku*s of the Nuba Mountains. Thus, trade and markets certainly have important benefits and might indeed dampen local conflict, but there is little indicating that there is an 'inviolate hand' ensuring that trade activities automatically bring permanent peace and stability.

Active measures are needed to strengthen peace-building aspects of borderland markets and curbing negative impact of trade activities. Actions and policies of local elites – chiefs, women and youth leader, government officials, armed strongmen – are key in this regard, but – as with UNISFA efforts to protect the Amieth market – external parties such as foreign NGOs and multilateral organisations might also contribute. Crucial factors would be to guarantee security in and around the market and facilitate the establishment of shared institutions for handling disputes. Another measure is to give potential spoilers access to the market. However, there is a possibility that such interventions, especially the provision of overall security, might cause unintended political ripples generating and prolonging violent conflicts; it is an open question what will happen with the re-settled Ngok north of Abyei town if UNISFA withdraws. It appears that the security provided by UNISFA is a key factor, as also emphasised in the article. A more detailed study of UNISFA and the implications and lessons learned from its role in the Amieth market could also be an interesting contribution to the discussion of the future of peacekeeping operations in weak states.

There are several other questions concerning the Amieth that the current empirical material cannot answer fully, but which would be worthwhile pursuing in future investigations. The Amieth case illustrates the necessity of a deeper contextual understanding when crafting external interventions to promote the private sector (trade in this case) as a tool for peace-building. Indeed, the politics of Abyei is an intriguing study right from the history of how it was made part of northern Sudan, how the contestation over the area almost scuppered both the negotiations and implementation of the 2005 CPA, to the establishment of UNISFA and the holding of a unilateral referendum in 2013. The actual distribution of power in Abyei since 2011 is however difficult to discern because of the state of limbo caused by the unresolved status of the area and it seems to be embedded in a web of ever-changing and pragmatic arrangements between politicians/government officials, chiefs, military/security/militia leaders and the UNISFA. Some of these leaders are also probably engaged in the trade in Amieth, but further studies are needed to investigate the nitty-gritty operation of these governance relationships.

Moreover, the issue of power disparity between the Sudanese traders and the residents of Abyei/Amieth warrants further scrutiny. It is no coincidence that *Jellaba* (peddler/small-time trader) is a derogatory term for northern Sudanese used by people in the South. And, as mentioned, traders from the north was involved in slave trade and has profited during wars and often with protection and in collusion with the government and the army, something which have given them a further negative status in South Sudan. Whether this antagonism played a role in the establishment of the market is difficult to say. As discussed above, the process of locating the market, including the temporary use of the village Noong, was a compromise between the Ngok leaders wish to locate the market far north and the Misseriya desire to use Abyei town. This is however as far as the available material can be stretched and it does not warrant speculations about the motives behind these different preferences and what the choice of Amieth says about the distribution of power. By the same token, resentment towards both Misseriya trades and merchants from further north could be detected among the Ngok residents interviewed (see especially the section on allocation of plots in the market), but this is not enough to draw any clear conclusions as to how power was distributed in the Amieth market.

When zooming out and considering the more general discussion of trade, security and peace-building, the examples from the Sudan-South Sudan borderlands indicate that the interplay between local peace processes, trading practices and attempts at negotiating market access deserves attention from scholars. More specifically, by exploring the impact of insecurity and hybrid governance on trade and the role of the private sector, the article questions the 'Business for Peace' literature, which takes the norms and standards of a well-regulated and peaceful governance context as the point of departure when assessing the role of business actors. In the peripheries of weak states linkages between business and peace is demonstrably something different altogether. This research into borderland markets has identified a diverse set of actors involved in trade and other kinds of economic activities. It is when the nuances and complexities of such a hybrid governance context are considered that the true peace-building potential of commerce in weak states is revealed.

Notes

1. Miklian et al., 'From Boardrooms to Battlefields'. See also the introduction to this special issue by Miklian and Schouten.
2. Berdal and Mousavizdeh, 'Investing for Peace', 39.
3. See acknowledgements for further details.
4. Meagher, 'Strength of Weak States?'
5. However, to provide a full overview of this deep and fascinating history is outside the scope of this article, but can be pieced together through the references in this and the following notes: Pendle and Madut Anei, 'Wartime Trade'; Komey, 'Peasant-Sedentary'; Rickard, 'We Are the People'; Vaughan et al., *The Borderlands*; Johnson, 'Destruction and Reconstruction'; Cunnison, *Baggara Arabs*.
6. Keen, *Benefits of Famine*.
7. Poggo, 'First Civil War'; Johnson, 'Root Causes'; Rolandsen and Daly, *History of South Sudan*; Rolandsen and Kindersely, 'Nasty War'.
8. Keen, *Benefits of Famine*.
9. Pendle and Madut Anei, 'Wartime Trade'; Rickard, 'We Are the People'.
10. Fraser et al., 'Trading for Peace'.
11. Rickard, 'We Are the People'.

12. Radio Tamazuj, 'Ex-Army Chief Paul Malong'.
13. Komey, 'Pastoral-Sedentary Market'.
14. Elhassab et al., 'Cross-Border Trade'.
15. Ibid., 15–16.
16. Utas, 'Introduction'; Reyntjens, 'Regulation, Taxation and Violence'.
17. E.g. Maini, 'Munabao–Khokhrapar Land Route'; Hatay et al., 'Intra-Island Trade'.
18. Migdal, *Strong Societies*.
19. Ibid.; Migdal, *Boundaries and Belonging*; Utas, 'Introduction'.
20. Migdal, *Boundaries and Belonging*, 75–79.
21. Reno, *Warlord Politics*; Bayart, *The State in Africa*; Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*.
22. Meagher, 'Strength of Weak States?'; Meagher, 'Smuggling Ideologies'; Bagayoko et al., 'Hybrid Security Governance'.
23. Rolandsen, 'Too Much Water'.
24. Debos, *Living by the Gun*; Keen, *Benefits of Famine*; Larmer et al., 'Neither War nor Peace'.
25. Ahmed, 'Changing Dynamics'.
26. Johnson, 'Why Abyei Matters'; Kuol, 'Political Violence'; International Eminent Persons Group, 'Slavery, Abduction'.
27. Focus group, *Misseriya Chiefs*, Residence in Abyei, South Sudan, 9 October 2017.
28. Interview, Member of Peace Committee and of the Ministries, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 12 August 2017.
29. Cf. Ibid.; Focus Group, Ngok Member of Peace Committee, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 17 August 2017; Focus group, *Misseriya Chiefs*, Residence in Abyei, South Sudan, 9 October 2017; Interview, Concordis Officer, Concordis Office (Abyei), South Sudan, 31 May 2017.
30. IOM South Sudan, 'Abyei'.
31. *Sudan Tribune*, 'Khartoum, Juba Agree'; Radio Tamazuj, 'Juba and Khartoum'.
32. Focus Group, Member of Abyei Youth Union, Abyei Youth Union, South Sudan, 30 May 2017.
33. Pendle and Madut Anei, 'Wartime Trade'.
34. Interview, Visiting trader and a Restaurant Owner (Misseriya), Amieth Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017.
35. Interview, Concordis Assistant, Concordis Office (Abyei), South Sudan, 31 May 2017.
36. Interview, Amieth Agouk County Commissioner, Amieth Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017.
37. Interview, Trader, Molmol Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017.
38. Focus Group, Ngok Member of Peace Committee, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 17 August 2017.
39. 'Arabs' are often used as a derogatory term including most people living in today's Sudan.
40. Interview, Trader, Molmol Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017.
41. Ibid.
42. Focus Group, Member of Abyei Youth Union, Abyei Youth Union, South Sudan, 30 May 2017.
43. UNISFA News, 'Amiet Common Market Reopens'.
44. Interview, Peace and Reconciliation Advisor, Abyei, South Sudan, 24 May 2017; Focus Group, Member of Abyei Youth Union, Abyei Youth Union, South Sudan, 30 May 2017; Interview, Member of Peace Committee and of the Ministries, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 12 August 2017; Interview, Member of the Administration and Finance Ministry in Abyei, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 22 August 2017; Interview, Amieth Agouk County Commissioner, Amieth Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017.
45. Focus group, Abyei Youth, Residence in Abyei, South Sudan, 8 October 2017.
46. Interview, Member of the Administration and Finance Ministry in Abyei, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 22 August 2017.
47. Focus Group, Member of Abyei Youth Union, Abyei Youth Union, South Sudan, 30 May 2017.
48. Focus Group, Ngok Member of Peace Committee, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 17 August 2017.
49. Focus Group, Member of Abyei Youth Union, Abyei Youth Union, South Sudan, 30 May 2017.

50. Interview, Peace and Reconciliation Advisor, Abyei, South Sudan, 24 May 2017; Interview, Concordis Assistant, Concordis Office (Abyei), South Sudan, 31 May 2017.
51. Interview, Spokesperson for UNISFA, UNISFA Office Abyei, South Sudan, 15 October 2017.
52. Interview, Member of Peace Committee and of the Ministries, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 12 August 2017; Focus group, Abyei Chamber of Commerce, Molmol Primary School, South Sudan, 11 October 2017.
53. Interview, Concordis Officer, Concordis Office (Abyei), South Sudan, 31 May 2017; Interview, Member of Peace Committee and of the Ministries, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 12 August 2017; Focus Group, Ngok Member of Peace Committee, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 17 August 2017; Interview, Visiting trader and a Restaurant Owner (Misseriya), Amieth Market, South Sudan, 27 May 2017; Focus group, Abyei Chamber of Commerce, Molmol Primary School, South Sudan, 11 October 2017.
54. Focus Group, Ngok Member of Peace Committee, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 17 August 2017; Focus group, Abyei Chamber of Commerce, Molmol Primary School, South Sudan, 11 October 2017.
55. Interview, Spokesperson for UNISFA, UNISFA Office Abyei, South Sudan, 15 October 2017.
56. Interview, Member of Peace Committee and of the Ministries. Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 12 August 2017.
57. Interview, Member of Local Government, Abyei Coordination Office (Juba), South Sudan, 20 August 2017.

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