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Sudan and Somalia: Human-Environment Dynamic in the Horn of Africa, 1970-2000

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Abstract:

The Horn of Africa has experienced, since decolonization, increased occurrences of various types of conflicts linked to bad governance, ethnic tensions, and environmental degradation, aggravated by the legacies of colonialism. Since the 1970s more specifically, Sudan and Somalia, two of the most unstable countries of the Horn, have witnessed major civil wars and instances of lower-level inter-communal conflicts between pastoralist groups who constitute a large portion of the population in both states. Inter-communal conflicts are largely fought between pastoralists and influenced by resource scarcity in semi-arid and arid regions. This paper analyzes the multiple and entangled sources of inter-communal conflicts in Sudan and Somalia from 1970 to 2000 to assess the relationship between environmental, political and social dynamics in a region of the world increasingly affected by environmental degradation and global warming, and evolving in a tensed political setting.

Keywords:
Horn of Africa, environmental degradation, inter-communal conflicts, pastoralists, resources

The Horn of Africa is an extremely unstable region, both environmentally and politically. Since 1991, with the collapse of the state after the military regime of Mohammed Siad Barre was overthrown by rebel factions, Somalia has witnessed ferocious warfare on top of severe environmental problems. It was only in 2012 that an internationally approved democratic government was reinstalled, and the country still faces a serious threat from Islamist organization Al-Shabab aligned with Al-Qaeda. The last massive attack attributed to them is the deadliest incident recorded since the 1990s civil war; a truck bombing in Mogadishu market on the 14th of October 2017 that killed more than 400 civilians[1].

In Sudan, tensions between the Christian South and the Muslim North have considerably decreased since the independence of South Sudan in 2011. However, the current president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir who has ruled for more than 25 years, is under an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court. He is accused of crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes, mostly committed in Darfur where many Sudanese still live in refugee camps in unbearable conditions, after having been displaced while fleeing the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the army based in Khartoum, Sudan's capital city. [2]

In terms of its environment, the two countries have long suffered from disasters specific to the arid climate of the Horn of Africa, an ecogeographical zone that expands from the West border of Sudan to the eastern tip of Somalia in the Indian Ocean. John Markakis defines an ecogeographical zone as a region characterized by unified environmental patterns because of the existence of 'ecological zones within the region that span the

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[1] Hussein Mohamed, Eric Schmidt and Mohamed Ibrahim, "Mogadishu Truck Bombings Are Deadliest Attack in Decades". *New York Times,* October 15, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/15/world/africa/somalia-bombing-mogadishu.html.
[2] BBC News, "Sudan country profile*" BBC News,* July 24, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094995.

territories of the several states' that constitute it.[3] Indeed, although the Horn lies in the equatorial tropical zone of Africa, most of the countries that are part of it suffer from serious water deficiency, which is in itself a climatic anomaly. The water stress is intense in most part of the region because of a paradox not encountered in other 'similar latitudinal and geographic locations,' asserts Markakis.[4] The Horn's soils and climate create conditions for a high water requirement that it cannot obtain because of a very low average of rainfall combined with an increase in the evaporation rate that proves insufficient to replenish the loss of moisture. Consequently, droughts have been frequent in the last decades, and the Greater Horn is likely to remain one of the hottest regions in the world as the impact of global warming becomes more acute. [5] Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia have coped with a major
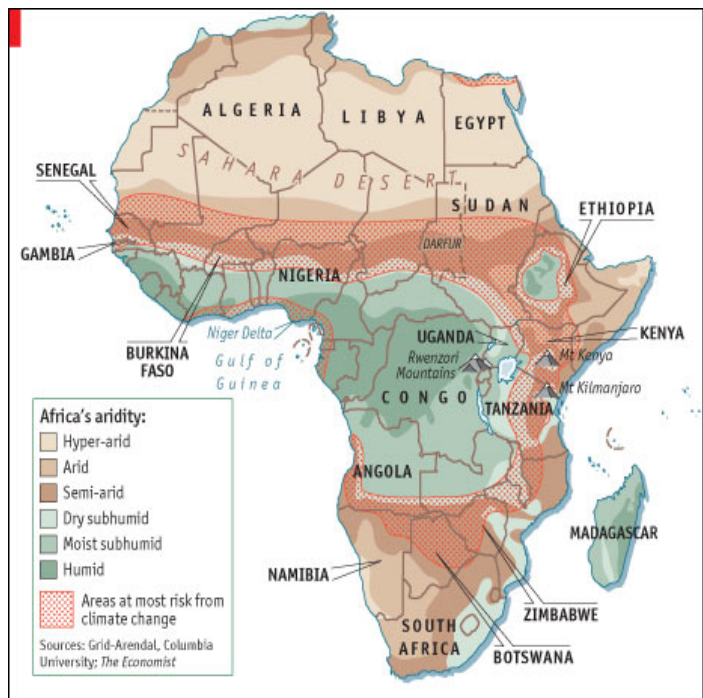
drought in the beginning of the 1990s, and localized incidents still occur across the Horn as a direct result of its climatic specificities. Most of the region is arid or semi-arid, with some variations within and between the states that are part of it. South Sudan possesses a far greater potential for irrigation and average rainfall than Sudan and Somalia because of the Nile rivers that cross its territory, compared to the very limited potential of Somalia,

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[3] John Markakis, *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (London: SAGE Publications, PRIO, 1998), 5.
[4] Ibid., 27.
[5] Kidane Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 1.

concentrated in two rivers in the Southwest – the Juba and the Shabeelle – of which only one flows all year through.[6] This particularity also affects the consistency of precipitations, which are very sparse across Sudan, but reach peaks in the South with 1800 mm per year compared to less than 100 mm in the arid far North[7]. In Somalia, precipitations are low throughout the country, increasing from North to South inconsistently because of the encounter between monsoon winds, oceanic currents and the impacts of global warming. Overall, however, 'the greater part of the Horn lowland', mostly situated in Somalia and Sudan, the highlands being concentrated in Ethiopia, 'receives a mean annual rainfall of less than 500 mm'. [8] This feature inevitably creates the conditions for droughts, famines and an increasing competition over scarce resources such as arable land, pastures and water sources among the pastoralist communities that largely compose the populations of the Horn.

The choice of Sudan and Somalia in the analysis of the complex dynamic between governed and government in relation to environment and global warming is not random. These two countries will serve the illustration of a pattern in the

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[6] Nina J. Fitzgerald, *Somalia, Issues, History and Bibliography,* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2002), 15.

[7] Markakis, *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* 27.

[8] Ibidem.

Horn of Africa, a region characterized by being simultaneously one of the most politically unstable and one increasingly impacted by climatic changes and environmental degradation. Sudan and Somalia have both suffered deadly civil wars in the latter half of the 20th century. This instability is in part a product of the decolonization process that started in the 1950s and left most of African countries with arbitrarily defined territorial boundaries that parcelled out national ethnicities and dispersed them across different countries. This has been compounded by the institutional fragmentation that resulted from the introduction of a capitalist economic system and the institutional reforms that followed during the colonial era. Today, as traditional institutions like chieftaincy in South Sudan or the Sultan system in Somaliland persist alongside the state, and as pastoralism is more and more marginalized as a mode of production in a globalized capitalist economy, many countries of the Horn suffer the consequences of this institutional dichotomy.[9] Political incoherence between the different entities of power and hierarchical structures affects all the sectors of society including the economy, the social cohesion between the different ethnicities or clan units, agricultural policies, religions, resource management and the democratic institutions of governance, to name only a few.[10] Furthermore, the overall environmental situation of the Horn has determined the predominance of pastoralism as an economic system and lifestyle, practised by over half of the population in Somalia and South Sudan, and by a sizable portion of the rural communities in Sudan.[11] Pastoralist lifestyle revolves around agriculture, grazing, trade, and cattle rustling and, as a production system,

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[9] Kidane Mengisteab and Gerard Hagg. *Traditional Institutions in Contemporary African Governance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routldge, 2017), 208, https://www-taylorfrancis-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/books/e/9781351854658.
[10] Mengisteab and Hagg, *Traditional Institutions,* 1.
[11] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 8.

is particularly adapted to arid or semi-arid environments, designed 'to withstand adversity of all kinds, including droughts'.[12] However, in the last decades, plural signs of severe environmental degradation such as deforestations, desertification, loss of vegetation and biodiversity and increased soil erosion have been witnessed and have impacted pastureland as well as agricultural crops, hence both pastoralist and agrarian lifestyle and production.[13] Both in Sudan and Somalia, inter-communal conflicts fought over pastureland, water and cattle remain frequent in drier areas, as they seem directly affected by environmental degradation, and have proven particularly deadly when they coincide with civil wars and inter-state conflicts as has been the case in these two countries. Ethnicity, as well as regionalisms and the economic and political marginalization of pastoralists are also relevant to the study of these types of conflicts.[14]

Finally, the whole African Horn is characterized by chronic food insecurity that has mobilized international relief agencies in recent decades and that derives directly from the relationship between ongoing conflicts and environmental degradation. Sudan and Somalia, but also to a great extent Ethiopia, have endured tragic famines, most of which have taken place in periods of severe drought compounded by civil war and inter-communal conflicts. The most obvious examples are the famines of 1992 and 1993 in the three countries which followed the collapse of the government in Somalia and the outbreak of the Dinka-Nuer war in Southern Sudan in 1991. Hence, Sudan and Somalia share patterns of interaction between political and social conflicts and environmental degradation, as well as between

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[12] Markakis, *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* 27.
[13] Mengisteab, *The Horn o Africa,* 16.
[14] Yoshito Kurita, "The Social Basis of Regional Movements in Sudan 1960s-1980s" in *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa* ed. by John Markakis and Katsuyoshi Fukui (Athens : Ohio University Press, 1994), 4, 9, 202.

humans and their environment that are conditioned by a variety of factors, as mentioned above. The goal of this research is to first outline the patterns of interaction between the political end environmental dimensions of the cases of inter-communal conflicts that will be analysed; second, to explain how global warming and political mismanagement combined together impact the various types of war that are common in the Horn; third, to briefly review the involvement of third parties in the environmental and political crisis and assess its consequences, more specifically on food insecurity in the region; and finally, to answer if we can identify the causes of long-lasting crises in the Horn either in the interplay between degrading environmental conditions and global warming, or in the tradition of bad governance, or in the dynamic between all of those elements. Targeting a single factor at the origins of the contemporary reality of Sudan and Somalia will prove in the end complex; it will prove more accurate to explain the dynamics between regional environmental conditions, global warming and local and external politics in organizing them in a quasi-hierarchical schema in which some factors encompass the others, but in which none has supremacy in its consequences. One thing is certain; none of these components of analysis plays on its own, and all partially condition each other.

Kidane Mengisteab defines inter-communal conflicts as 'conflicts which are fought among ethnic, clan and occupational groups [usually pastoralists and sedentary farmers of various ethnic ties with different organizational structures]. These conflicts are generally over resources such as land, water and livestock (cattle rustling) and they are provoked by resource scarcity, resulting from a rapidly deteriorating environment and fast growing populations.'[15] I find inter-communal conflicts to be the most obvious example of

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[15] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 24.

consequences that arise from the point of intersection between political and environmental conditions in a country. Different ethnic groups that share a pastoralist lifestyle entirely organized around the availability of resources, rainfall and agriculture are, for instance, directly impacted by environmental degradation. These problems are then in turn facilitated by the often incompetent actions of governmental institutions that are found unable to manage the needs and requirements of the different social units interacting among the population. These conflicts therefore take place because the environment and the political system both act to threaten the viability of pastoralism itself and, by the same token, the survival of these ethnic groups. When, on top of this dynamic, human and cattle populations have grown at an accelerated rate, resulting in overgrazing and shortages of pastureland already made barren by more frequent droughts, competition over resources has also increased.[16]

Indeed, resource scarcity is not only determined by the harsh climatic conditions of semi-arid and arid environments, such as the shortage of rainfall, but also by the number of persons that eventually depend on the resources to live and survive. In certain instances, unfortunately common across the Horn of Africa, national governments have worsened already dramatic situations in appropriating communal land to exploit or sell to international extractive companies, most of the time without 'prior and informed consent of local landholders [being] required before land is allocated to an investor'.[17] Finally, some of these conflicts also possess religious and nationalist roots that provide the context for

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[16] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 160.
[17] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 168.

violence.[18] The Nuer-Dinka war in Southern Sudan and the conflict between the Ishaq and Ogaden "clans" in Somalia illustrate how these factors meet to create a dynamic between people and their natural and political environments.[19]

The Nuer-Dinka War in Southern Sudan: To 'Kill for a Cow'

Scott Peterson, in *Me Against My Brother,* explains that the rivalry between the Nuer and Dinka warriors in South Sudan before its independence goes back to ancient fables. These announced the prophetic union of the Nuers under a messiah that would bring down the Dinka and give the precious cattle back to its initial possessors. In 1991, when the rivalry reached its peak with the Bor Massacre, Dinkas and Nuers were respectively led by warlords (clan head chiefs) and political leaders John Garang and Riek Machar who, while fighting one another, led the Christian populations to wage war on the Muslim regime of the North, amidst the civil war. This fact, however, did not stop Machar allying with the national army in Khartoum to defeat his Southern enemy.[20] In a time of various rivalries and competition over power, for some

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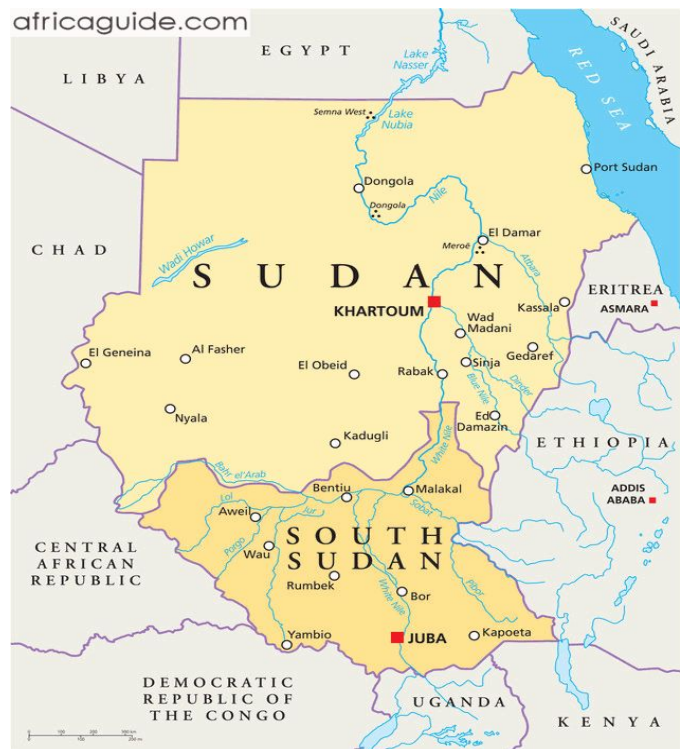
[18] See Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* Fukui and Markakis, *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn,* and Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[19] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* chapter [...]
[20] Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother,* 223.

factions, the hopes of survival rested in the choice of the right allies, even if it meant a betrayal of nationalist and religious ideals.

The most violent and deadly incident of this war took place in the city of Bor in 1991, when a major drought began to spread across the Horn. Several thousands of Nuer warriors raided Dinka land to take back the 'enemy's revered cattle,' a symbol of wealth, and, mostly, a source of life in the semi-arid plains of South Sudan deserted by the drought.[21] Scott Peterson describes in his book the violence with which the Nuer warriors ravaged the Dinka populations, their lands and their cattle herds:

> 'The raiders killed so many [Dinkas] that the death count was stopped after reaching 2,000. People were speared and shot, bound with ragged belts and knotted cord, strangled, and burned. Three boys were tied to a tree and clubbed to death. Men were castrated and disemboweled. The region was depopulated as 100,000 Dinka fled south into the swamps to survive or die on a diet of leaves and water lilies. Food stores left behind were put to the torch, and tens of thousands of head of precious cattle were spirited away by the marauders.'[22]

Extreme brutality and the total dispossession of the enemy clan were justified by, on the one hand, the religious prophecies that clamoured the supremacy of the Nuer, and on the other hand, by the crucial need for cattle both as a commodity on which the pastoralists depended, and as food resources. Peterson cites the British ethnologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard who studied the Nuers in explaining the centrality of cattle both in their culture and their

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[21] Ibid., 218.
[22] Ibid.

lifestyle: 'Cattle are their dearest possession, and they gladly risk their lives to defend their herds or to pillage those of their neighbors. [...] Nuer say that it is cattle that destroy people, for 'more people have died for the sake of a cow than for any other cause.'[23]

This last statement seems of great importance in the study of the causes of the multiple conflicts in the Horn of Africa. In essence, populations fight over resources with even more intensity and to a higher frequency when they reach a peak in scarcity produced by the convergence of political and climatic irregularities. In the case of this Sudanese inter-communal conflict, the object, hence the cause of war is resources, whereas environmental crisis and an unstable political structures act as aggravating factors. Where food is scarce and survival is concentrated on one specific resource, researches have demonstrated that causes of environmental degradation such as soil deterioration and droughts can be linked to violent armed conflicts.[24] Ole Magnus Theisen, in his research in eco-scarcity theory, states that the correlation between resource scarcity induced by environmental degradation and violence is especially – and predominantly – relevant in the case of 'lower-level conflicts' such as inter-communal wars.[25] This corroborates the claims of Kidane Mengisteab on the causes of inter-communal conflicts in the Horn of Africa.

What is particular, though, in the case of the Nuer-Dinka war is that this geographical area of Sudan was, and still is, rich in water resources as compared to the North, or Somalia, for example. The region is irrigated by two rivers of the White Nile with permanent water flow that gave birth to multiple natural basins and rivers on which the borders the city of Bor are situated. Water is currently an important source of envy in South Sudan on the part

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[23] Ibid., 222.
[24] Ole Magnus Theisen, "Blood and Soil? Resource Scarcity and Internal Armed Conflict Revisited", *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6, (2008), 802.
[25] Ibid.

of its northern neighbor, Egypt, which is one of the most arid countries in the world.[26] The 1991 drought potentially affected the quality and the consistency of the Nile rivers water flow, but no studies point to clear consequences on the intercommunal conflict itself, which was at least partially waged over cattle rustling and pastureland. Moreover, the famine of 1993 aggravated by the warfare – which affected the populations situated in the burnt areas between Nuer and Dinka territories – was not rooted in water or food scarcity per say (although burning agricultural and pasturelands did not help) but from the appropriation of foodstuffs both cultivated and brought in by relief agencies by the Dinka and Nuer leading factions.[27] They also considered this strategy as a way to gain control over the government in Khartoum in the context of the civil war.[28] I will return to this recurring pattern in the context of national conflicts when discussing the issue of food security in the Horn.

In summary, the case of inter-communal conflict analyzed here is defined by four main characteristics: the circumstances of environmental crisis; entanglement with a civil war; food insecurity; and, last but not least, a clear focus on two resources, cattle and land. The roots of the Dinka-Nuer War were clearly in a competition over resources, to which the drought seemed to have contributed in a definitive, but not primary fashion. A comparison with the Isaaq-Ogaden ethnic conflict in Somalia will enable some parallels and comparisons.

Isaaq and Ogaden "Clans" War in the Desert: A Cross-Border Communal Conflict Over Land

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[26] Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan, & Darfur: Everyone Needs to Know,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.
[27] Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother,* 230.
[28] Ibidem.

The Ogaden desert is situated in East Ethiopia; it is the region that penetrates the western border of Somalia, and it is no surprise that we find a great concentration of Somalis there since this ethnic group was spread across the Horn as a result of the arbitrary territorial divisions decided among European colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884. As part of an expansionist, quasi-imperialist project for a Greater Somalia, Mohammed Siad Barre, the Somali dictator who triggered the civil war in 1987, sought to conquer all the regions of the Horn (with a specific interest in Ethiopia) where Somalis lived. This served as the justification behind the 1977 war he launched against Ethiopia over the territories of Ogaden. Irredentism and claims to land set the political context in which relationships between Ethiopia and Somalia would evolve for the next years. This created the conditions for the tense relations between the different ethnic groups inhabiting the Ogaden, although the 1977 war ended with a clear defeat for Siad Barre's army, which could have appeased the situation.[29] Overall, this civil strife alone provoked the displacement of more than 650, 000 Somalis who escaped repression by fleeing to Somalia in 1978.[30] In the years between 1978 and 1991, as a result of ethnic tensions but also in reaction to the dictatorial and "anti-tribal" rule of Siad Barre, many rebel groups formed in Ethiopia and Somalia, such as the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM).[31]

The WSLF was a Somali nationalist organization allied with the Siad Barre regime for the annexation of the Ogaden region supported by the Ogaden Somalis, while the SNM allied with Ethiopia and the Isaaq Somalis against their own government who waged war to "tribalism." At first view, then, this conflict had deep and more visible political roots than

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[29] Fitzgerald, *Somalia, Issues, History and Bibliography,* 61.
[30] Ibid., 51.
[31] Ibid., 29, 36.

the South Sudanese ethnic war, found in the tensions between two communal groups allied with opposed rebel factions to claim rights to land on nationalist grounds and against their own governments. Many other rebel organizations with communal affiliations in Somalia formed in opposition to the Siad Barre's regime around the 1980s, as the country's social structure was founded on Somali lineage. The Isaaq 'clan-family', for example, was part of the Samaal branch of Somalis that amounted to 'roughly 75 percent of the population' and that distinguished itself from the other major branch by its nomadic-pastoralist production system and lifestyle in comparison to an agricultural one.[32] It is because of the centrality of pastoralism in Somalia and Ethiopia that, at second view, the focus cannot be exclusively on inter-states and domestic political dynamics in this case of inter-communal conflict.

Indeed, in *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers,* John Markakis claims that even in this particular instance of cross-border communal conflict superseded by a civil war, the imperatives of pastoralism, that is, competition over resources such as land, water and cattle in an arid zone – in this case, the Ogaden desert – meant that environmental factors prevailed over those of nationalism[33]: '[pastoralist] political alienation is the rule in the Horn, and nationalism apparently is no cure for it. With the disintegration of the post-colonial unitary, centralized, authoritarian state, the Somali clans were struggling for a share of power in a Somali state of the future.'[34] The Ogaden was then not only fought over as national territory, but as pastureland for pastoralist groups whose survival rested on healthy living conditions for cattle herds, meaning sufficient food and water. In comparison to the Sudanese example, even if the Nuers' primary goal in waging war to the Dinkas was

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[32] Ibid., 44.
[33] John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers,* (New York: James Currey Publications, 2011), 214.
[34] Markakis, *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* 135.

to steal their precious cattle, land as a resource acquired a specific symbolism and importance in the competition. For pastoralists, grassland and water are sources of life; unfertile, dry, or occupied land means no pasturelands, no access to clean water and virtually no prospect of sedentary farming. In absolute terms, no adequate lands means reduced chances of survival for pastoralists. Again, this case looks like a classical example of inter-communal conflict fought over scarce resources in a difficult natural and political environment.

Only, the Ogaden desert is not a fertile land. Quite the opposite, as Gebru Tareke mentions: 'only thorn vegetation thrives and underground water is the main source of life: [except] for the fertile belts along river basins where limited sedentary life exists, it is a barren and bleak landscape of flat-topped hills and arid plains.'[35] At first analysis, this does not account for the environment's amenable setting for cattle rustling. However, as previously noted, pastoralism is an economic mode of subsistence that specifically integrated itself to harsh climatic and environmental conditions, and this is the central reason for its widespread practice in the arid and semi-arid areas of the Horn of Africa. John Markakis highlights that in Somalia, responding to a growing market demand, agro-pastoralists began to overstock in the late 20th century, precipitating the exhaustion of large portions of fertile lands and the degradation of their livestock.[36] Then, in claiming back what it named 'Western Somalia' on the basis of ethnic and cultural connections, did the Somali government instead covet the Ogaden as indispensable pastureland to compensate

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[35] Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited." *The International Journal of African Studies,* 33, no. 3 (2000): 636-637.
[36] Markakis, *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* 93.

for its 'vast non-cultivable territories'?[37] Tareke asserts that in 1977, economic interests effectively underlined cultural ones, but the former were less directed toward the Ogaden than land further west, the rich agricultural region of the Hararghe, where Ethiopia's 'finest cattle [were] raised.'[38] The question is, therefore, what truly motivated a second war over the arid plains of Ogaden where different sub-groups of Somalis strived for recognition and rights to national land?

One important fact distinguishes the Sudanese and Somali cases of inter-communal conflicts; the Isaaq-Ogaden strife also served as a battleground for a cross-border war between Ethiopia and Somalia. Certainly, Somali irredentism acted as a substantial motivation, and the need for resources for the two pastoral nomadic groups cannot be overlooked. But whereas the Nuer-Dinka war was overwhelmingly waged over the sacred cattle as a source of political power, economic wealth and food, the Isaaq and the Ogaden clans had strong political connections and motivations that took over the competition for resources. Here are then two cases of inter-communal wars that definitely share relevant similarities, but that were also conditioned by different set of factors. Although it has to be kept in mind that intra-state and inter-state communal conflicts are inevitably different, the one major take-away that has to be drawn out of this comparative analysis is that even if pastoralism is a mode of production at the mercy of its natural environment and its variations, ethnic conflict between pastoralist communities is not solely determined by environmental causes; its frequency increases with an accelerated rate of degradation, but political dynamics play a crucial role in their emergence and their consistency. According to

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[37] Martin Doornbos, "Pasture and Polis: The Roots of Political Marginalization of Somali Pastoralism" in *Conflict and the Decline of Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa*, edited by John Markakis (London: ISS Press, 1995), 100.
[38] Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War", 638.

Ole Magnus Theisen, 'poverty and dependence on agriculture' in dry areas as well as 'resource capture' by elites or external actors contribute to the creation of lasting grievances against governments.[39] This pattern is worsened in cases of mismanagement: 'together with a lack of government interest and investment in rural areas, the causal mechanism behind both resource degradation and civil war is bad governance' asserts Theisen.[40] Factors such as the marginalization of ethnic groups or pastoralists isolated from the global economy by institutional fragmentation, resource deprivation, and policy incoherence, can be attributed to bad governance and simultaneously worsened by environmental degradation.[41]

Now, I turn toward environmental degradation itself in the Horn of Africa by first assessing the global impacts of climate change in this region in order to ultimately debate the consequences of environmental crisis on conflicts' emergence.

Global Warming and Environmental Degradation: Patterns in the Horn

Kidane Mengisteab's study of the political and environmental dynamics in the Horn of Africa brilliantly assesses the contribution and the interplay of climatic change, environmental degradation, regional human activity and political management in the production of frequent and varied conflicts that the countries of this region have endured since decolonization.[42] The focus of her analysis is on the patterns of intersection and interaction of these different factors in conflicts occurrence. She reviews the political and social legacies of colonialism that still affect the social cohesion between the different ethnic

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[39] Theisen, "Blood and Soil?" 802.
[40] Ibid., 803.
[41] Fukui and Markakis, *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn,* 9.
[42] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 18.

groups today, national economic policies, inter-state relations, and agricultural policies in general, as well as the conditions set by a rapid environmental degradation caused by both global warming and intense human activity in a region where population grows at a fast pace. While definitely more complex and detailed throughout her book, her argument is summed up fairly efficiently here:

> 'environmental degradation becomes as destructive as it has been in the Greater Horn when the existing political and institutional arrangements are incapable of controlling its occurrence or in managing its impacts. Environmental degradation factors such as inappropriate land tenure systems, poor conservation measures and rapid demographic growth are largely problems of management, although the global factors of degradation, such as global warming, set the context within which the countries of the region have to operate.'[43]

She identifies environmental degradation and poor political management as both conflict-generating factors on their own, but even more so when combined together – which is the rule in the Horn. This is especially true in cases of water and land-based inter-communal conflicts such as the ones previously presented. Her work is particularly relevant to my argument because she focuses her scope of study on pastoralists, hence mostly on disputes between pastoralist communities, and less on civil and inter-state wars, although she also assesses the latter's causes and consequences. The reason behind this focus is that environmental changes disproportionately affect pastoralists. Indeed, as Mengisteab

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[43] Ibid., 7.

mentions, 'the scarcity that environmental degradation creates, depending on its intensity, would be sufficient to cause communal conflicts, especially among pastoralists and sedentary farmers.'[44] Furthermore, the scholar asserts that these ethnic-based communities are often already marginalized within their own society due to changes in the economic system that do not enable them to adapt to new modes of production, combined with the fact that they have traditionally been alienated under colonial regimes. Suffering from the legacies of colonialism and the weight of environmental crisis, pastoralists easily turn towards organizing into rebel groups against governments and other "clans" to compete over resources, and it is from this conjuncture that arise not only local communal conflicts, but also civil wars.

Mengisteab presents global warming as the broad context within which regions or countries of the world find themselves when already trying to manage their own climatic and environmental settings with political management and social dynamics between the different ethnicities that share a common territory. The tangible effects of global warming on conflict-emergence in the Horn of Africa are debated, but as a general trend across the region, Mengisteab mentions an overall decline in rainfall over the last fifty years and an increase of the evaporation rate directly caused, alongside other factors, by rising temperatures. These two climatic patterns inevitably affect the occurrences of cyclical droughts spanning normally very arid lands.[45] Besides droughts, 'deforestation, loss of vegetation and biodiversity, increased soil erosion, […] and desertification' resulting from climate change and intense human exploitation of lands now constitute a norm in the

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[44] Ibid., 152.
[45] Ibid.,158.

Horn.[46] These are the most concrete manifestations of global warming found by Mengisteab. However, the concrete connection between environmental crises and the rise of conflicts within and between the states of the Horn has been disputed. The author presents three views on this debate. Generally, establishing a link of causality between environmental degradation and communal conflicts is easier since those are resource-scarcity related and based in pastoralist communities. A causal relationship between global warming and civil wars, for instance, is much more difficult to assess. Burke et al. (2009) claim that a 1°C increase in temperature in Africa is associated with an increase of 4.5 percent in conflict eruption during the same year.[47] Bughaug (2010), conversely, assert that based on studies on 'short-term effects of climate variability', empirical evidence points to a 'disconnect' between global warming and civil wars' outbreak, frequency and severity.[48] Finally, Spillmann (1995) and Claussen (2007) offer a middle-ground approach in presenting climate change as acting in combination with other factors such as poverty, economic decline, demographic problems, political instability and ethnic tensions – some of these being exacerbated by resource scarcity deriving from environmental degradation – to create contexts likely to produce conflict.[49] For practical as much as empirical reasons (Spillmann's research was conducted in 1995, a year that fits within the time period I focus on), I prioritize the third approach. This hypothesis on the relationship between environmental degradation and conflict incidence in the Horn of Africa does not overlook the complex political dynamics, ethnic tensions and tradition of poor institutional management at play in the region in its attempt to explain the frequency and the endurance

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[46] Ibid.,153.
[47] Ibid.,151.
[48] Ibidem.
[49] Ibid.,152.

of violent disputes in this part of the world. Rather, it underlines a possible interdependency pattern between nature and human-based factors.

External Involvement on the African Continent: Relief Agencies, «Warlords» and Food Insecurity

The Horn of Africa, no different from the rest of the continent, was not insulated from colonialism and contemporary forms of imperialism. From 1885 to 1960, Somalia was divided into a southern Italian protectorate and a northern British protectorate, and Sudan was under Anglo-Egyptian domination from 1898 to 1956[50] (although Egypt has never completely ceased to exercise some kind of control and influence on its southern neighbor with which it shares the resourceful Nile river). All countries were carved up, the different slices of territory distributed among their colonizers, and then remained under imperial rule for over sixty years in most cases. This 19th century enterprise left many scares as already mentioned, notably the creation of stateless nations isolated from their ethnicity of origin. Moreover, in centralizing power and restructuring societies, this period fostered the birth of wars of resistance and liberation, inherently bound to the formation of rebel groups within the population. Equally important in its long-term consequences has been the fragmentation of African economies when empires forcefully implanted a capitalist system into subsistence agricultural economies, monopolizing and exhaustively exploiting the natural resources for mineral extraction or commercial farming. This then resulted in the marginalization of the groups that kept their historical mobile mode of production and

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[50] Ibid., 50.

lifestyle, the nomad pastoralists.[51] At the institutional and administrative levels, capitalist economies required transformations that drastically conflicted with the traditional political structures, transformations that left their imprint on the governmental institutions of today: '[one] of the major legacies of the colonial experience in the countries of the Greater Horn, as in the rest of Africa it, thus, a dichotomous system of institutions of governance. Long after colonialism, the segment of the population in the traditional subsistence sector still adheres to the traditional system's customary property rights laws, its resource allocation mechanisms, and its conflict resolution and dispute adjudication practices.'[52] This, combined with ethnic tensions, agricultural and land tenure policies maladaptive to the environmental conditions, the population growth and continual expropriation of national resources by powerful international corporations, amount to extremely poor political management by governments either crippled by corruption or sincerely unable to realize the huge transformations that virtually all sectors of society require.[53]

The legacies of colonialism in political structures are one thing: contemporary imperialism through international humanitarian and financial aid is another.[54] The objective here is not to demonize the enterprises of humanitarianism by predominantly Western countries in the African continent since some populations who became victims of the severe droughts of the 1990s and deadly conflicts, such as the people of Darfur and most Somalis, would have barely survived without imports of food. The point is to briefly

[51] Doornbos, "Pasture and Polis", 116-117.
[52] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 55.
[53] Peter Woodward, *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003), 174 ; Alex De Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 2015), 77.
[54] Woodward, *Politics and International Relations,* 172, 191.

highlight the main contributions, being positive or negative, of external actors that are inevitably part of the equation in both inter-communal conflicts and civil wars.

Some interventions have been more openly displayed in front of the international community, such as the involvement of the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Cuba during the Cold War in Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia, or disproportionately in Somalia with the start of the War on Terror in 2001.[55] But some countries have also contributed in a much more subtle way, with either genuine or self-interested intentions, by the intermediate of relief agencies, to exacerbate violence or at least to furthermore complicate already difficult political situations intertwined with an environmental crisis.[56]

'Nowhere else in Africa has food so directly contributed to the continuation of war. In Sudan, it has become the most powerful weapon, and so afflicting hunger has been the key military strategy for both sides.'[57] Scott Peterson assesses the use of food shortages as a strategy used both by governments and rebel groups in the Horn of Africa, who profit from famine in order to weaken civilians on the enemy side. This is partly achieved by appropriating as great as possible a share of the supplies brought in by international relief agencies, which find themselves participating most of the time indirectly in this dynamic. Both in Sudan and Somalia in the early 90s, estimates range to almost 80% of the portion of food stocks necessary for survival stolen by soldiers of rebel groups once aid agents left the conflict areas. This is often out of fear of being also the targets of violence, as happened in 1991 during the Nuer-Dinka war in some regions of South Sudan. 10 to 20% of the same stocks that belonged to 'non-sympathizing families' were subsequently taxed by militias,

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[55] Ibid., 120-124.
[56] See Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* chapter 6; Peterson, *Me Against My Brother,* 16.
[57] Peterson, *Me Against My Brother,* 230.

when it was estimated in 1992 that up to 3000 persons per day were dying from starvation.[58] Decentralized political structures where the government lacks the monopoly of authority and use of force allow for every actor to more or less freely implement any strategies deemed necessary to get a share of control and power, and those strategies inevitably end up in furthermore suffering among the pastoralists and farmers, the families of rebel groups involved in conflict, but also aid workers and journalists. Here, the political dynamics at play together create a situation in which belligerents can profit both from the hunger caused by drought and conflict, and the involvement of third parties.

I.M. Lewis also mentions the role that played in a more or less indirect fashion the financial aid from oversea in the arm trade that supplied both sides of conflicts in many countries of the Horn. Through 'aid misappropriations'[59] but also through covert alliances between Occidental powers and African states, rebel groups and governments could access lethal weapons with enough ease to perpetuate conflicts endlessly. According to Mengisteab, the magnitude and frequency of inter-communal conflicts not only intensifies with accelerating environmental degradation but also with the 'availability of small arms' that reach even the most remote sectors of the population through international aid. [60] On top of this, important residual arm stocks had been available for one or two decades following decolonization and were claimed by either national authorities or warlords, further proof that imperial powers never totally leave their colonies. The worst scenario probably happened in Somalia during the 1991 civil war when U.S. peacekeeping troops engaged in fighting against the rebel militias after repeated attacks in the South near

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[58] Ibid., 231; Mark Bradbury, "Normalising the Crisis in Africa", *Journal Disasters,* 22, no. 4, (1998): 331.
[59] I. M. Lewis "Misunderstanding the Somali Crisis", *Anthropology Today,* 9, no. 4, (1993): 1.
[60] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 29.

Mogadishu[61]; incapable of dealing with the multiple clan rivalries exacerbated by a corrupted and dictatorial government, U.S. troops turned the peacekeeping mission into another conflict, killing the Somalis that were initially meant to be saved.

Finally, Mengisteab also mentions that in the specific instance of resource-based communal wars, national governments can worsen land and water shortages by appropriating communal land for agricultural exploitation.[62] However, in these cases, governments have appropriated fertile lands where pastoralists raised their cattle not for internal markets, but to sell it or give it to multinational corporations.[63] Theisen raises the issue of resource capture that occurs 'when powerful elites use their power in order to grab resources they anticipate will become scarce in the near future'.[64] Instances where economic and political elites manipulate state policies for their own benefit weaken institutional responses for marginalized and disadvantages groups, like pastoralists, agrarian farmers and herders in these cases, and consequently increase risks of violence.[65] Sudan possesses a great potential for mineral exploitation with important resources of gold, diamond and copper for which several countries from the Western hemisphere have manifested an interest.[66] Mineral exploitation is certainly the main source of land concessions, whereas the oil industries have contributed heavily to water and soil contamination, most obviously in the case of South Sudan, a region that possesses important oil resources.[67] In context of water and food scarcity, the dispossession of land by

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[61] Peterson, *Me Against My Brother,* 16.
[62] Ibidem.
[63] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 170.
[64] Theisen, "Blood and Soil?" 803.
[65] Ibidem.
[66] Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan, & Darfur,* 4.
[67] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 170.

national authorities can cause almost on its own the outbreak of new resource-based conflicts.

Conclusions

It would be impossible to discuss and assess the relationships between all the conflict-generating factors in the Horn of Africa. For instance, I have not analyzed the impacts of population growth both on environmental degradation and competition over scarce resources. Since the 1960s, the Horn has experienced a demographic explosion with the population literally doubling in fifty years.[68] As a direct consequence, more lands have been exploited and deforested to feed livestock and cultivate agricultural products, and incidences of food and water shortages have increased, aggravated by the incompetency of governments in managing those resources.[69]

Endemic diseases are widespread across the whole African continent, and the countries of the Horn are no exception. Tuberculosis, malaria and all kinds of infectious and parasitic diseases have persisted in Somalia with a high rate of contamination that increased with the collapse of the state and all its institutions in 1991.[70] As Nina Fitzgerald has stated: 'In the years since the [post-Siad Barre] revolutionary regime had come to power, drought, flood, warfare (and the refugee problem resulting from the latter) had, if anything, left diets more inadequate than before.'[71] Pandemics often kill many more people and at a much faster pace than the bloodiest armed conflicts and are directly correlated to environmental crisis. Although these factors are all of great significance, my focus has

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[68] Ibid., 159.
[69] Ibid., 150.
[70] Fitzgerald, *Somalia, Issues, History and Bibliography,* 50.
[71] Ibid.

remained fairly narrow in the face of a phenomenon with an infinite number of roots, directions and entanglements.

My objective in this article has been to examine and debate the appropriate place scholarship should and/or can allocate to environmental and political factors in the emergence of violent conflicts in a region of the world that suffers considerably from global warming and unstable political structures. The examples of inter-communal conflicts, resource scarcity-induced disputes between ethnic groups within the same or between different states, in Sudan and Somalia have demonstrated, if anything, that environmental and political elements find themselves in an interdependent dynamic and, most of the time, reinforce each other in their impacts on the sources of conflicts. In Southern Sudan, pastoralists fought over cattle and land both for survival and power. In Somalia, the Ogaden desert had a national value in the irredentist claims of the Somalis, but was also fought over as pastureland for cattle and as secure access to the fertile and rich arable lands of the Hararghe in Ethiopia for the Somali government. In both countries, a civil war and a severe drought set the premises for conflict emergence, and these two factors can definitely not be excluded from the analysis. The relationship here is not one of interdependence per say, since environmental degradation and political factors such as ethnic tensions, poor political management or a dictatorial government could act on their own to trigger some types of conflicts in part or in entirety. Instead, it is one in which one factor cannot be reasonably separated from another in a given context. In both Sudan and Somalia, the devastating consequences of drought were exacerbated by the civil and inter-communal wars, as the famine that the Sudanese and the Somali suffered was fuelled by drought, but also by the mismanagement of the food supplies by all actors, being the national governments, the

leading factions of different pastoralist groups, or the relief agencies from abroad. Amartya Sen in *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* adds other variables in the equation of food insecurity. As the drought deteriorated pastureland and fertile land, it directly affected the survival of livestock. But is also deprived pastoralists of another source of food and profit on the internal market, namely grains in the case of Ethiopian pastoralists and other products of agriculture in neighboring countries.[72] More than the appropriation of food supplies by other actors or the degradation of land resources by the drought, it is probably the displacement of pastoralists from their grazing land as a result of the growth of commercial farming that led to their isolation and the regional famine to affect them disproportionately.[73] Hence, the competition for political control and power between the different sub-groups of society is directly affected by environmental crisis that induce further scarcity of resources in arid climates already at risks. Certainly, as Kidane Mengisteab has argued, global warming and environmental degradation can be seen as setting the broad context in which politics dynamics unfold to create conflicts but environmental factors cannot obscure political ones.[74]

Finally, I. M. Lewis offers a more radical interpretation of the 1991 humanitarian crisis in Somalia that sheds light on a real pattern that must be taken into account, namely the Eurocentric lenses that some – if not most – analysts wear when assessing the roots of conflicts in parts of the world other than the Occident, lenses that the field of Indian Ocean world history can help to question. According to Lewis, focusing exclusively on the

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[72] Amartya Sen. Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003), 105, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0198284632.001.0001/acprof-9780198284635.
[73] Ibid., 112.
[74] Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa,* 7.

environmental causes of a conflict, as happened during the Somali crisis as a result of its cover by oversea reporters, underlies three very problematic and recurring patterns of interpretation of political phenomena in old colonies by former empires.[75] First, presenting the 1991 drought and the severe famine that derived from it as a predominant reason for the state's collapse only demonstrated a profound misunderstanding of both the existing political units within the country and the dynamics between them, that were indeed quite different from simple state – individual interactions. As we have seen, ethnic groups, rebel factions headed by warlords, pastoral nomads and international agencies were fairly important actors in the Sudan's and Somalia's political conflicts, and these are groups that we rarely find as is in Western or Occidental societies. Second, in featuring starving Somalis pictured as 'victims and objects of inexorable natural forces over which they had no control', reports on the crisis in a way stripped all victimized civilians of their agency and responsibility in a war with multiple faces, sources and directions.[76] This portrayal overly simplified an incredibly complex situation by reducing its causes to natural, extra-human factors, where in fact, a lot of human elements influenced and conditioned the environmental crisis. Consequently, and lastly, the nature of the political dynamics at play and the extent of the warlords or the national government's power and knowledge of the situation was overlooked or completely misunderstood. Lewis mentions that the high commandants of the rebel factions at war with one another and the Somali government skillfully manipulated more than food supplies, as media information was used to their advantage to play with relief agencies and U.S. troops, which eventually led to unfortunate

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[75] Lewis, "Misunderstanding the Somali Crisis", 1.
[76] Ibid.

situations in 1992.[77] What reporters misunderstood, in the end, is that the violent war that all sections of society eternally waged against each other was not only a matter of survival in an uncompromising environment; it was also a political quest for power on a continent profoundly marked, at some points broken by History, a History written through those same Eurocentric lenses that must be removed from our eyes if we intend to ultimately understand, but also conciliate human and natural forces in the present and the future.

[77] Ibid., 2.

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