

# Ethnicity or Environment? Assessing the Roots of Conflict in Darfur, Sudan, during the 1980's



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## Abstract

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The ongoing scholarly debate about the relationship between environmental change and the outbreak of violent conflict has not resulted in concrete answers yet. Therefore, this thesis applies a different approach that does not take environmental change as a separate causal factor, but instead assesses it in the wider process of the outbreak of conflict that includes other factors as well. This will be done in the light of two events in Darfur, Sudan, in the 1980's: the 1984-1985 famine and the 1987-1989 conflict. Setting the "environmental approach" against the "political approach" of these case studies, it will be argued that separately, these approaches are lacking in presenting a complete view, whereas taken together they provide a much more comprehensive understanding of conflict in Darfur. This has implications for the way conflicts are being analysed and how the relationship between environmental change and conflict is understood. Environmental change is a real-world problem that has the possibility to severely affect societies. However, it is not a one-dimensional factor with the magnitude to cause conflict on its own. Therefore, labelling violent conflicts like the one in Darfur as "climate conflicts" undermines the various other dynamics behind their processes.

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## Introduction

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‘Look to its roots though, and you discover a more complex dynamic. [...] the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change.’<sup>1</sup> This statement made by former United Nations (UN) secretary general Ban Ki Moon in an article titled ‘A Climate Culprit in Darfur’, published in *The Washington Post* in 2007, reflected on the war in Darfur between rebel groups and the national government that has been raging on since 2003.<sup>2</sup> It can be seen as an echo of a wider debate concerning a relatively new security issue, called “environmental security”. Emerging during the 1980’s, this approach started to draw connections between the environment and the outbreak of conflict. From this debate appeared terms like “climate wars” and “climate conflicts” to describe conflicts that matched this approach. Although issues concerning environmental change have become important topics in the face of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement, voices in the scholarly debate about the connection between climate change and conflict have not been as united.

In an analysis of 60 quantitative studies, Hsiang, Burke and Miguel found ‘strong causal evidence linking climatic events to human conflict’.<sup>3</sup> Buhaug and Theisen expressed little doubt that ‘the cocktail of high environmental vulnerability and future climate change constitutes a significant threat to human security in a broad sense’.<sup>4</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in a 2014 report stated that ‘Human security will be progressively threatened as the climate changes (*robust evidence, high agreement*)’.<sup>5</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, Nordas and Gleditsch found ‘very few concrete links between

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Front Page: *Children in Darfur, displaced by fighting*, photo: Michael Kamber, retrieved from: [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/photos/2006/12/darfur\\_portfolio200612](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/photos/2006/12/darfur_portfolio200612) [accessed 5 June 2018].

<sup>1</sup> Ban Ki Moon, ‘A Climate Culprit in Darfur’, *The Washington Post* (16 June 2006), available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061501857.html> [accessed 22 May 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Ban Ki Moon, ‘A Climate Culprit in Darfur’.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon Hsiang, Marshall Burke and Edward Miguel, ‘Quantifying the Influence of Climate on Human Conflict’, *Science* 341 (September 2013), pp.1-14, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Halvard Buhaug and Ole Magnus Theisen, ‘On Environmental Change and Armed Conflict’, in: ‘Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict: Challenges for Societal Stability’, eds. Jürgen Scheffran et al., special issue, *Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace* 8 (2012), pp.43-55, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge 2014), 758.

climate change and violent conflict'.<sup>6</sup> Klomp and Bulte, using cross-country data to analyse the relation between temperature and rainfall shocks and violent conflict, found 'little robust evidence linking weather shocks to the onset of conflict'.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Verhoeven warns against 'the rise of a new conventional wisdom: conflict as a result of climate change, development as the solution.'<sup>8</sup>

This body of literature has largely been dominated by scholars attempting to either prove or disprove a direct causal relationship between environmental change and conflict. Such a one-dimensional relationship has proved untenable: after nearly thirty years of debate, no concrete pathways have been shown yet. This process of trying to present a one-dimensional relationship between environmental change and conflict, which in this thesis will be called the "environmental approach", has also been visible in studies on conflict in Darfur. On the other side, opponents of this environmental approach have advocated what will be called the "political approach", which sees ethnic relations in Darfur and Darfur's position vis-à-vis Sudan's central government as the traditional factors underlying conflict in Darfur. Both approaches will be discussed more extensively in chapter 1. The ongoing debate between the two approaches highlights the necessity of a different approach to Darfurian conflict that does not look at environmental change or ethno-political relations as separate causal factors, but instead views both as part of the same, larger process. Applying this different approach will be done in the light of two Darfurian case studies: the 1984-1985 famine and the 1987-1989 conflict. These two case studies are exemplary of how environmental change combined with other factors during the 1980's to create violence that proved to be the fundament for the 2003 conflict. Therefore, this different approach will provide an answer to the following question: to what extent have environmental change and ethno-political relations been underlying factors for the outbreak of conflict in the 1980's in Darfur, Sudan?

To answer this question, this thesis will make use of a qualitative analysis to which the two aforementioned approaches are central. Methodically, this means presenting these approaches separately, after which they will be assessed as connected through the larger

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<sup>6</sup> Ragnhild Nordås and Nils Petter Gleditsch, 'Climate change and conflict', *Political Geography* 26 (2007), pp.627-638, 630.

<sup>7</sup> Jeroen Klomp and Erwin Bulte, 'Climate change, weather shocks, and violent conflict: a critical look at the evidence', *Agricultural Economics* 44 (2013), pp.63-78, 63.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Verhoeven, 'Climate Change, Conflict and Development in Sudan: Global Neo-Malthusian Narratives and Local Power Struggles', *Development and Change* 42 (2011) 3, pp.679-707, 703.

process of the development of conflict with regards to the two Darfurian case studies. Accordingly, chapter 1 will focus on the historical background of Darfur and will introduce the two approaches and their use of theoretical concepts more extensively and separately from each other. Chapter 2 and 3 will apply the aforementioned method of qualitative analysis to the 1984-1985 famine and the 1987-1989 conflict respectively. From this will emerge that a study that addresses these approaches separately is incomplete, whereas a study that assesses them as being part of the same process provides a much more inclusive explanation of the outbreak of conflict. This will not only add to an understanding of conflict in Darfur as different from a “climate conflict”, but also to an understanding of the relationship between environmental change and conflict in general.

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## Chapter 1: Historical context and the two approaches

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### ***(1.1) Land and people of Darfur***

Darfur is a western region located in present-day Sudan. However, Darfur has historically never really been an integrated part of Sudan. From its origins as a well-defined political entity in the fourteenth century till 1916, Darfur had been an independent sultanate ruled by the Fur, who can be seen as the long-time key population in the region.<sup>9</sup> This is also where Darfur derives its name from: it literally means “Land of the Fur”. With the agreement of the “condominium rule” between Egypt and Great-Britain in 1898, Darfur became a province of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. On Sudan’s independence in 1956 Darfur remained part of the Republic of the Sudan. Both under Anglo-Egyptian and independent Sudanese control, Darfur has never been of major interest to its rulers. Its economic value has always been rather insignificant, considering that a large majority of its people rely on a self-subsistent agricultural lifestyle, meaning that they survive mainly on eating what they grow. Moreover, the distance between Khartoum, Sudan’s capital, and Darfur being more than 800 kilometres has kept Darfur relatively isolated. The perceived differences between Darfurians and those Sudanese living in the more centrally located regions have therefore run very deep in past and present Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

Identities of the hundreds of social units in Darfur are very complex and interwoven. Although the terms “Arab” and “African” have been used continually throughout Darfur’s history to distinguish its population, they have very little biological or even cultural relevance. Practically all people in Darfur are Muslim and in terms of skin colour practically everybody is black. The distinction between “Arab” and “African” mostly corresponds with the specific way of life of a particular tribe: “Arabs” are mostly seen as pastoralists, being nomadic herders, whereas “Africans” mostly have an agricultural way of life. To make sense of the question who

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<sup>9</sup> Gérard Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* (New York 2007), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Robert O. Collins, ‘Disaster in Darfur: Historical Overview’, in: Samuel Totten and Eric Markusen (eds.), *Genocide in Darfur: Investigating the Atrocities in the Sudan* (New York 2006), pp.3-24, 5.

belongs to what group, Darfur can be divided into three administrative states – north, west and south – that generally also represent three ethnic zones in Darfur: Northern Darfur is home to mostly “Arab” camel nomads; in Western Darfur, making use of the fertile lands of the volcano Jebel Marra, live mostly “African” sedentary farmers, among whom the Fur; Southern Darfur is mostly inhabited by “Arab” cattle and camel nomads.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 shows a map of how Darfur is located relative to its surrounding regions and how Darfur itself can be divided into three regions.

It is therefore important to remember that for the political approach, when the terms “Arab” or “African” are used, these derive their meaning from this perception of Darfurian society split into two social groups. Although this is still too simplified a representation to do justice to all the Darfurian social units and their identities, it is a necessary means to make sense of the conflict that ensued in Darfur.



*Figure 1: Map of Darfur, relative to Khartoum and its neighbouring countries, retrieved from: <http://smc.sd/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/08/Beardsley-2-Darfur-Map-eng.jpg> [accessed 23 May 2018].*

<sup>11</sup> Collins, ‘Disaster in Darfur’, 3.

## ***(1.2) Political approach: creation of ethnic divisions***

The political approach of conflict in Darfur has generally presented this as conflicts between “Arab” and “African” groups. Although “Arabs” in Darfur culturally or biologically rarely have something in common, from the early 1980’s onwards pastoralist communities increasingly started seeing themselves as ethnically related. The following decades, being “Arab” because of a pastoralist lifestyle was largely substituted for being “Arab” because of a common ethnic consciousness. The first significant influence that sparked this ethnic consciousness came from the Sudanese government. In 1971, a military coup brought Gaafar Nimeiri to power in Sudan. The prime goal of Nimeiri’s regime was to introduce reforms in order to end all remnants from the colonial era that had left traditional institutions in Darfur intact. The reform that would prove to have major consequences for ethnic relations in Darfur was the abolition of “tribalism” and “sectarianism”.<sup>12</sup> By abolishing the Native Courts and ending chiefly rule in Darfur in the late 1970’s, Darfur’s century-old tribal order was uprooted and its social justice system that was kept intact during the colonial era was destroyed. Prior to the reforms of the Nimeiri regime, Darfur had a long-standing tradition of minor local clashes over natural resources between pastoralists and agriculturalists. The traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that had evolved over centuries had proved efficient in solving these clashes. Abolishing these traditional mediating systems and replacing them with faltering ones severely disturbed the relationships between Darfurians. Next to Khartoum’s influence, divisions between Darfurians obtained their ethnic dimensions mainly as a result of the involvement of Darfur in a cross-border power play between Chad, Libya and Sudan.

Darfur, whose eastern border is connected to Chad, had been an important hinterland for Chadian Muslim rebels since the beginning of a civil war in Chad in 1965. Darfur had never been directly involved in the Chadian civil war, but when the Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi developed a growing interest in the Chadian conflict in the late 1970’s, Darfur could not escape getting entangled in these national politics.<sup>13</sup> Darfur was of particular interest to Gaddafi not only because of its proximity to both Libya and Chad (see figure 1) but also because Gaddafi saw Darfurian society as susceptible for his pan-Arab ideology. In his wish to expand Arab society and culture, Gaddafi promoted an aggressive ideology of Arab superiority

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<sup>12</sup> Rex Seán O’Fahey, ‘Conflict in Darfur: historical and contemporary perspectives’, *University for Peace Africa Programme* (2006), pp.23-32, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Prunier, *The Ambiguous Genocide*, 43.

that would create a common ethnic consciousness between Darfur's "Arab" tribes. In an effort to gain influence in Chad, Libya tried to fight through the use of so-called Islamic Legions – a multinational Arab force.<sup>14</sup> Because of Khartoum's disinterest in Darfur these forces could easily move into Darfur and besides an Arab nationalism also brought many weapons with them. Moreover, where Nimeiri's regime had never actively opposed Libyan presence in Darfur, its fall in 1985 and the interim-government's sympathy for Gaddafi's cause further stimulated Libyan presence in Darfur.

Thus, the political approach presents Darfur as a pawn in a wide political and military game both between Darfur and Khartoum and between Khartoum and Sudan's neighbouring countries. Both the Khartoum government and Libyan presence in Darfur that brought an ideology of Arab superiority with it increasingly created divisions in Darfurian society. These ethnic divisions had not been a major disruptive factor 'until the ideology of pan-Arabism that came out of the Libya made itself felt'.<sup>15</sup> Ethnic polarization in Darfur dividing "Arabs" from "Africans" had created an inflammable society. Given the widespread availability of firearms and the absence of a working system for conflict resolution these tensions could easily explode into conflict.

### **(1.3) Environmental scarcity and conflict**

The emerging body of literature on environmental security during the 1990's caused a shift in the way conflicts have been analysed. Conflicts were no longer solely seen as affairs between states but also as affairs between humans and the environment they are part of. In this sense, the term environment is defined as 'the living organisms and the physical and chemical components of the total Earth system'.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, environmental change is a broad concept that not only encompasses climate variables but also includes change in social environments like population growth. The most significant theory that has sought to examine the relationship between environmental change and the outbreak of conflict has been the environmental scarcity theory. Thomas Homer-Dixon's book *Environment, Scarcity and*

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<sup>14</sup> Sharif Harir, "'Arab Belt" versus "African Belt": Ethno-Political Conflict in Dar Fur and the Regional Cultural Factors', in: Terje Tvedt and Raphael Badal (eds.), *Short-Cut to decay: the case of the Sudan* (Nordic Africa Institute 1994), pp.144-185, 164.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew S. Natsios, 'Moving Beyond the Sense of Alarm', in: Samuel Totten and Eric Markusen (eds.), *Genocide in Darfur: Investigating the Atrocities in the Sudan* (New York 2006), pp.25-42, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Jon Barnett, 'Environmental Security', in: Alan Collins (ed.), *Contemporary Security Studies* (Oxford 2007), pp.190-207, 194.

*Violence* published in 1999 has been the first and most influential work that advances this theory.<sup>17</sup> Resulting from this research, Homer-Dixon stated that he believes ‘that in coming decades the world will probably see a steady increase in the incidence of violent conflict that is caused, at least in part, by environmental scarcity. Developing countries are likely to be affected sooner and more severely than developed countries’.<sup>18</sup> In order to understand how environmental scarcity theory has been applied to the case of Darfur, a short explanation of this theory is required.

In environmental scarcity theory, a critical role is attributed to renewable natural resources such as cropland, forests and water supplies. In general, these renewable resources should sustain an adequate livelihood indefinitely. However, when renewable resources are being depleted or degraded faster than they are being renewed in societies where people rely heavily on them, the problem of environmental scarcity develops. Next to this decrease in its total supply, an increase in the total demand of renewable resources as a result of population growth or changing consumption behaviour can also cause environmental scarcity. Finally, an unequal distribution of the so-called “resource pie” because of large differences in wealth and power in a society – being called structural scarcity – is also a key factor in the eventual outbreak of conflict.<sup>19</sup> These three sources of scarcity interact and reinforce each other, and therefore should not be addressed independently. Generally, environmental scarcity contributes to the outbreak of conflict in the sense that it generates ‘severe social stresses within countries, helping to stimulate subnational insurgencies, ethnic clashes, and urban unrest. Such civil violence particularly affects developing societies, because they are, in general, highly dependent on environmental resources and less able to buffer themselves from the social crises that environmental scarcities cause.’<sup>20</sup>

For the environmental approach, environmental scarcity theory has been the main explanation for the outbreak of conflict in Darfur. Therefore, the notion of environmental change in this thesis follows this theoretical concept. The next section explains how the environmental approach has followed this explanation, examining in what ways the outbreak of conflict in Darfur is seen as a result of environmental scarcity in the region.

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 12.

#### **(1.4) Environmental approach: competition over resources**

The environmental approach of conflict in Darfur has mostly built on statistics on environmental and climate change. The most significant summarization of the state of understanding of environmental and climate change has been given in the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), published in 2014 by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC was formed to 'provide a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate-related policies', which covers 'the full scientific, technical and socio-economic assessment of climate change'.<sup>21</sup> One of the studies of climate change in the AR5 reflected on climate change in the Sahel region, an ecoclimatic belt that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east, also covering Sudan and Darfur. The AR5 identified the Sahel region as a hotspot for climate change whose effects are to occur earliest in this region. It showed that 'near surface temperatures have increased over the last 50 years' and that 'rainfall over the Sahel has experienced an overall reduction over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>22</sup> This trend caused a southward shift in vegetation zones in the wider Sahel region, including Sudan.

Because the IPCC only makes observations about climate change on a global scale, both environment and conflict in Darfur have not been examined in its reports. Therefore, most information about environmental change and its relationship with conflict in Darfur in this thesis has been derived from three other reports. The first and most significant report, titled *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*, was published in 2007 by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), a programme funded by the UN that 'promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.'<sup>23</sup> The second report, *Darfur: Relief in a vulnerable environment*, is a report commissioned by Tearfund, a relief and development agency, funded by the UN and the UK and US governments. The third report consists of proceedings taken from the 2004 conference Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur, which was held in Khartoum. The

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<sup>21</sup> IPCC, *IPCC Factsheet: What is the IPCC* (August 2013), available at: [http://www.ipcc.ch/news\\_and\\_events/docs/factsheets/FS\\_what\\_ipcc.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/news_and_events/docs/factsheets/FS_what_ipcc.pdf) [Accessed 3 May 2018].

<sup>22</sup> IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge 2014), 1209.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations [UN], *About UN Environment* (webpage), available at: <https://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment> [accessed 3 May 2018].

conference was held by the University for Peace (UFP), an intergovernmental organization that also serves as a university. These three reports all examine environmental change in Darfur and its relationship with the outbreak of conflict to a significant degree.

Over the last decades, Darfur has experienced several long-term environmental changes. Three types of environmental change can be distinguished that have had the most influential impact on Darfur: changing precipitation patterns, desertification and population growth. Precipitation in Darfur is extremely unequal, with major seasonal, annual and regional variation. This has a strong effect on food security in the region, especially in Northern Darfur, that is situated on the fringes of the Sahara Desert and is therefore most susceptible to droughts. Although annual variability is a defining feature of Darfur's climate, it has witnessed an irregular but evident decline in rainfall over the last century. The UNEP report identified a long-term decline in rainfall since 1946, with the ten-year moving average declining from 300 mm per annum to approximately 200 mm.<sup>24</sup> Both the Tearfund report and the UFP report found that rainfall declined in quantity, intensity and distribution, with a significant drop during the late 1960's and early 1970's.<sup>25</sup> This had a detrimental impact on Darfur's environment: 'The spread of desert-like conditions in the area of study had created a serious ecological imbalance'.<sup>26</sup> In Northern Darfur, 'the reduction in rainfall has turned millions of hectares of already marginal semi-desert grazing land into desert'.<sup>27</sup>

A changing precipitation pattern has been one of the principal causes of the second type of environmental change: desertification. Prolonged periods of drought have led to much pressure on natural resources, which caused the removal of vegetation and the depletion of soil layers. The speed with which this process of land degradation occurred has had a devastating effect since the affected lands have not been able to recover. To give an indication of the size of desertification in Darfur, the UNEP report described a 'southward shift in desert climate of approximately 100 km over 40 years'.<sup>28</sup> Next to climate-based causes such as a decline in rainfall, land degradation because of human action has also played a major role in

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environment Assessment* (Nairobi 2007), 60.

<sup>25</sup> Tearfund, *Darfur: relief in a vulnerable environment* (March 2007), 17; University for Peace [UFP], *Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur*. Khartoum, December 2014. *Conference Proceedings* (Khartoum 2006), 36.

<sup>26</sup> UFP, *Conference Proceedings*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> UNEP, *Post-Conflict Environment Assessment*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 62.

the process of desertification. In the face of declining income, the conversion of rangelands into cropland added even more pressure on already degraded land. Furthermore, the clearance of forests for fuel-wood also caused soil nutrient depletion.

In this context, population growth can be said to have been another factor to put pressure on Darfur's natural resources. All three reports show that population size has grown exponentially in Darfur and population density increasing from 3 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in 1956 to 18 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in 2003. In a society where natural resources are assets that sustain both agricultural and pastoralist communities, such an increase in population size and density put further pressure on Darfur's ecological system. An increase in population size also increased the demand for food. As a result, there has been a visible 'increase in livestock density on rangelands that are reducing in total area, accessibility and quality'.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the environmental approach of conflict in Darfur has assumed the following line of explanation: both a decrease in the total supply of renewable resources because of changing precipitation patterns and resulting desertification, and an increase in demand of these renewable resources because of growth in population size and density have been distinguishable in Darfur, increasingly putting pressure on Darfur's environment and society. As shown, the three types of change that have led to environmental scarcity are not independent, but mutually reinforce each other. Moreover, as there are many more factors that affect Darfur's environment, these are definitely not all types of environmental change that can be said to have led to environmental scarcity. However, as the next chapters will show, they are the most clear and significant factors that next to causing environmental scarcity, have also contributed to the outbreak of conflict in Darfurian society.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 85.

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## Chapter 2: Case one – The 1984-1985 famine

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As mentioned in chapter 1, during the decades preceding the 1980's, Darfur already suffered from a long-term decline in rainfall. As a result, droughts already occurred more frequently during the 1970's. Because Darfurian society had always been structuring its livelihoods according to a variable climate, these droughts never produced major problems. However, from 1980 till 1984 Darfur was struck by an unprecedented drought that resulted in a full-scale famine from 1984 till 1985 that would create severe tensions in Darfurian society. This chapter first introduces the political and environmental explanations for the famine, after which these explanations will be critically assessed together.

### ***(2.1) Political approach of the 1984-1985 famine***

The political explanation of the 1984-1985 famine mainly looks at the relationship between Darfur and Khartoum. As mentioned before, Darfur had always been very isolated from Sudan's political centre, and when the first signs of the development of a famine in Darfur reached Khartoum, the Sudanese government did nothing to prevent it.

When the situation in Darfur in 1983 after three years of drought became more and more threatening, Darfur's governor Ahmed Diraige wrote President Nimeiri a letter that became known as the "famine letter".<sup>30</sup> In this letter Diraige warned Nimeiri that unless food aid was delivered to Darfur, a serious famine in Darfur was unavoidable. Nimeiri, unwilling to send aid to Darfur, did not give a response. When by early 1984 the news from Darfur remained worrisome, the government finally responded publicly, dismissing the famine warning as exaggerated.<sup>31</sup> Whereas Darfur's minimum food deficit by 1984 was estimated to be 39,000 tons, the government stated that the deficit was only 7,000 tons.<sup>32</sup> The national government's unwillingness to provide any sort of help was not seen as a surprise in Darfur. The policies from successive governments since Sudan's independence had made this rather clear. This has been brought to light by the so-called "Black Book", published in 2000 by an anonymous group of Darfurians.

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<sup>30</sup> Prunier, *The Ambiguous Genocide*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 51.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Appearing under the title *The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan*, its authors sought to expose the favouritism of successive governments since Sudan's independence in 1956. Using schedules and tables with figures recording statistical data taken from official records, it purported to present disparities in power and wealth sharing. It found that during the rule of Nimeiri from 1969 till 1985, only 3,5% of ministerial positions were occupied by people from the western region. In 1986, this western region, of which Darfur constituted the largest part, made up 32,6% of Sudan's population.<sup>33</sup> Next to this political underrepresentation, a serious imbalance in the division of wealth between Sudanese regions was also apparent in the lack of economic development in non-northern regions. The *Black Book* stated that 'In the State of Western Darfur, primary schools remained closed for two years for lack of books and staff pay.'<sup>34</sup> Thus, the result of political underrepresentation and socio-economic underdevelopment of the Darfur region was that it remained a vulnerable region to any major disruption such as the extreme drought of the early 1980's. According to the political approach, this caused such a severe famine because the government in Khartoum remained largely in denial until it was far too late.

## **(2.2) Environmental approach of the 1984-1985 famine**

Contrastingly, the environmental approach uses environmental change in Darfur to explain the 1984-1985 famine. In Al Fashir, the capital of Darfur, mean annual rainfall had declined from 270mm in 1976 to 162mm in 1985.<sup>35</sup> Next to this, the pattern of rainfall had also changed significantly. In Darfur there have always been phases characterized by good years of rainfall and phases when bad years predominated. However, good years were becoming scarcer and the patterns of both phases changed: the good years were becoming less wet and the bad years were becoming drier. From surveys held under the rural population, Alexander de Waal concluded that 'people pointed to phenomena that had never occurred before, such as the clouds gathering, and a curtain of dust blowing, but then no rain falling. Instead of the

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<sup>33</sup> *The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan* (2000), translated by Abullahi Osman El-Tom, available at: [http://www.sudanjem.com/sudan-alt/english/books/blackbook\\_part1/book\\_part1.asp.htm](http://www.sudanjem.com/sudan-alt/english/books/blackbook_part1/book_part1.asp.htm) [accessed 9 May 2018].

<sup>34</sup> *The Black Book*.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985* (Oxford 1989), 83.

'savanna pattern' of frequent lighter showers it has moved towards the 'desert pattern' of infrequent but very heavy storms.<sup>36</sup>

Both processes of declining rainfall and changing rainfall patterns had created vulnerable ecological conditions in Darfur. From this situation arose a full-scale famine when a sudden drop in rainfall occurred at an unprecedented scale from 1980 till 1984 which caused a successive failure of harvests from 1982 till 1984. A hectic situation followed as grain prices peaked, people died from measles, diarrhoea and other diseases, and many groups wandered around looking for work.<sup>37</sup> A lack of pasture also meant that about half of the livestock in the region died, making the food situation even more precarious.<sup>38</sup> Most people moved to larger villages and towns and tried to earn an income from selling firewood and charcoal. As a result, the large amounts of deforestation of land damaged its soil permanently, making cultivation very difficult. The situation where there was barely any food available led Darfurian communities to resort to desperate measures such as cattle theft and the seizing of other communities' land. Thus, the food insecurity led to increased social stress in Darfurian society: the combined effects of environmental change and the famine that followed caused local conflicts to escalate and encompass whole communities in a wide geographical area as their survival was at stake.<sup>39</sup> Extremes of destitution were mostly visible from the end of 1984 until the rains of 1985 were relatively good again and international food relief was distributed during the second half of 1985.<sup>40</sup>

Although the 1984-1985 famine did not result in a full-scale conflict it put irreversible social stress on Darfurian society. The environmental approach as explained in this section presents the following chain of events: a serious drought that resulted out of short and long-term environmental change led to serious food insecurity, which in turn resulted in a famine that put severe pressure on Darfurian society.

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<sup>36</sup> De Waal, *Famine that kills*, 85.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander de Waal, 'Famine Mortality: A Case Study of Darfur, Sudan 1984-5', *Population Studies* 43 (1989) 1, pp.5-24, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Harir, "'Arab Belt" versus "African Belt"', 162.

<sup>40</sup> De Waal, 'Famine Mortality', 5-6.

### ***(2.3) Assessing the two approaches***

According to Alexander de Waal, by 1985 there had been almost 180,000 deaths as a result of the famine, being almost three times as high as normal death rates.<sup>41</sup> These conditions affected Darfurian society severely. The political and environmental approaches presented in the previous sections have provided different answers to the question why the drought of the early 1980's could result in such a serious famine. Whereas the environmental approach assumes this was the case because environmental conditions worsened at an unprecedented degree, the political approach attributes this to political underrepresentation and economic underdevelopment in Darfur. However, as will be argued in this section, both of these approaches themselves do not provide a satisfactory answer to this question: both could never have created such a dire situation on their own. Instead, assessing the two approaches as part of the same process results in a much more solid explanation to understanding the 1984-1985 famine.

First of all, the environmental changes in Darfur were not very likely to create such tensions in Darfurian society. Although a serious drought occurred, the livelihoods of Darfurian society had always been structured to such serious variation in climate patterns. Northern nomads could make use of certain migration routes that could lead them to better grazing lands and agriculturalists could resort to different crops that were more resistant to dryer conditions. Moreover, De Waal has argued that communities in Darfur have always showed remarkable resilience to famines: 'people's principal aim during the famine was to preserve the basis of an acceptable future way of life, which involves not only material wellbeing but also social cohesion.'<sup>42</sup> People resorted to eating wild foods such as wild grasses and fruits instead of using the available grain because they knew that in the end they could not sustain their livelihoods without its seeds. This understanding of how to sustain their livelihoods in the face of drought and famine shows that certain "defence mechanisms" were present in the system of Darfurian communities, making it unlikely that only the drought of the early 1980's could explain the severity of the famine. Moreover, the fact that only Darfur suffered from a famine while similar droughts occurred throughout Sudan during the early 1980's makes the environmental approach problematic.

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<sup>41</sup> De Waal, *Famine That Kills*, 176.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, 227.

Secondly, an approach that assumes that only a bad political and economic relation with Khartoum could cause a famine in Darfur is also insufficient. As explained in section 1.1, Darfur has never been integrated into Sudan, both politically and economically. Darfurian communities have therefore always adhered to a self-subsistent lifestyle that largely remained independent from Khartoum's influence. Therefore, the fact that Darfur was still relatively underdeveloped in relation to other Sudanese regions in the 1980's does not explain the sudden change in the availability of food. Next to this, the neglect from Khartoum only started being problematic when a famine was already looming large and is therefore no explanation for its initial outbreak. Thus, whereas the environmental approach does not give a satisfactory explanation for the severity of the famine, the political approach lacks an understanding of its initial outbreak.

Therefore, to answer the question why the drought of the 1980's resulted in such an extreme famine, linking both approaches by assessing together the facts they use in their argument provides a more logic explanation. The outbreak of the famine can be said to be the result of environmental change in Darfur: due to the extreme drought subsequent harvests failed, causing the availability of food to decline quickly. The unprecedented severity of these environmental changes caused the traditional "defence mechanisms" to either break down or fail. Moreover, since most people were self-subsistent, when they did not produce any food for themselves they had to buy it from elsewhere. From this point onwards, the neglect from Khartoum led an increasing food problem to become a full-scale famine. Next to the outright rejection of a looming famine by the Sudanese government, the economic underdevelopment of Darfur became painfully obvious. Darfur simply lacked the infrastructure and the capital to take preventive measures on its own: food could not be delivered in due time and the sky-high prices of grain in Darfur made acquiring grain from elsewhere for lower prices an impossible task.

In the end, the successive failure of harvests combined with the disinterest from Sudan's government transformed a large food problem into a full-scale famine that had a lasting impact on Darfur. The unprecedented severity of environmental changes led Darfurian society to look to Khartoum for help for the first time. It was at this point that Khartoum's disinterest proved to be disastrous for Darfur. The case of the 1984-1985 famine shows that both the environmental and political approach individually only shed light on a specific part of the process; assessing both of them together as part of the same process gives a much more

comprehensive understanding of its complex mechanisms. The drought and famine of the early 1980's created severe tensions in Darfurian society between different communities and tribes. The desperate measures people took to stay alive upset the already thin balance between communities. These tensions would continue during the years after the famine, to explode for the first time during the 1987-1989 conflict, which serves as the second case study that will be addressed in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 3: Case two – The 1987-1989 conflict

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The tensions between Darfurian communities that were visible during the 1984-1985 famine increased during its aftermath to reach their peak two years later. This was demonstrated by the outbreak of the 1987-1989 conflict between different “Arab” tribes and the Fur, the largest “African” tribe. This conflict would prove to be the first conflict in Darfur that involved all of its society. After introducing the two approaches’ explanations for the 1987-1989 conflict, this chapter will follow the line of argumentation of chapter 2 by eventually assessing the two approaches together.

### ***(3.1) Political approach of the 1987-1989 conflict***

According to the political approach, the 1987-1989 conflict must be seen in the context of an ethnically divided Darfurian society, as explained in section 1.2. The conflict started not particularly different from traditional clashes between pastoralist “Arabs” and some agricultural “African” Fur tribes over access to grazing lands and water sources. However, it quickly degenerated into an ethnically driven war as ‘propaganda, particularly in the Khartoum media, intensified and stoked the fighting until it drew all the sectors on the Fur on one side and all the Arab tribes on the other’.<sup>43</sup> It was against this background in 1987 that the so-called Arab Gathering first announced itself in a letter to the Sudanese government. Consisting of an alliance between 27 Darfurian “Arab” tribes with a coordinated political and military approach, the Arab Gathering presented “Arabs” in Darfur as ‘the standard bearers of religion, culture and civilization’, demanding a greater deal of representation in regional politics and improvement of their economic situation.<sup>44</sup> From this supremacist way of thinking, which was backed by the Khartoum government and media, the conflict spiralled into an ethnic conflict of large proportions. Both “Arabs” and “Africans” began to form their own militias that would attack each other’s villages, killing its inhabitants and destroying agricultural and pastoral lands which severely damaged the livelihoods of both “Arab” and “African” tribes. This conflict lasted for two years during which the Khartoum government did nothing to intervene but

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<sup>43</sup> International Crisis Group [ICG], *Darfur Rising: Sudan’s New Crisis* (Nairobi/Brussels 2004), 6.

<sup>44</sup> ICG, *Darfur Rising*, 10.

instead seemed to favour the “Arabs”. As Khartoum itself would not be affected politically or economically, it supplied “Arab” groups with firearms for their defence.<sup>45</sup>

In 1989, after two years of violent conflict, peace negotiations began as an initiative of Tijani Sese, the newly appointed president of Darfur’s regional authority. The rhetoric of both “Arab” and “African” parties during these negotiations reveals much of their understanding of the conflict and the ethnic divisions around which it was built. During a peace conference on 29 May 1989 in Al Fashir, both parties presented statements to give their view on the conflict. The Fur delegation gave the following statement:

The dirty war that has been imposed upon us [...] assumed a genocidal course aiming [...] no less than the complete annihilation of the Fur people and all things Fur. [...] The message is quite clear: empty the land and do not allow any Fur survivors to come back and re-establish their villages. [...] The basic fuel of this war is racism. This conflict is about their attempt at dividing people from Dar Fur region into “Arabs” against “Blacks” [“Africans”], with superiority attributed to the former. The racial nature of the conflict is clearly revealed by the organizational vessel adopted by them, the “Arab Congregation” [Arab Gathering].<sup>46</sup>

From this statement it is clear that the Fur presented themselves as victims of a war that was fuelled by racism. Showing a clear understanding of the division between “Arab” and “African”, the war was no longer about natural resources but about ethnic hatred. The “Arab” delegation gave a similar statement, although obviously presenting the “Africans” as the offenders:

The situation was destabilized [...] when the Fur raised a slogan which claimed that Dar Fur is for the Fur “Dar Fur for Fur”. [...] The Arabs were depicted as foreigners who should be evicted from this area of Dar Fur. [...] Ours is a legitimate self-defence and we shall continue defending our right of access to water and pasture. However, let us not be in doubt about who began this war: it is the Fur who in their quest to extend the so-called “African belt” wanted to remove all the Arabs from this soil.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Harir, “Arab Belt” versus “African Belt”, 149.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, 147.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

This quote shows that the “Arab” delegation had a similar vision by blaming the other while presenting their own position as self-defensive. Thus, both “Arabs” and “Africans” attributed the conflict to the racist ideology of the other that aimed at destroying the inferior ethnic group. The Fur argued that the “Arab’s” attempt at conquering Fur territory aimed at the extension of an “Arab cultural belt” at the expense of “African” natives. This was framed as an “Arab” conspiracy executed by local “Arab” tribes together with the Khartoum government on the basis of the ideology of pan-Arabism as espoused by Libya.<sup>48</sup> The “Arabs”, on the other hand, saw the conflict as a legitimate self-defence against an “African” attempt to create an “African belt” at the expense of “Arab” access to pasture and water. In sum, the political approach assumes that the 1987-1989 Fur-Arab conflict revolved around a rhetoric of “Arab belt” versus “African belt”, which was a clear expression of an ethnic split that had been growing since the early 1980’s.

### ***(3.2) Environmental approach of the 1987-1989 conflict***

In analysing conflict in Darfur with regards to environmental change, some scholars have described the 1987-1989 conflict as the first Darfurian “climate war” or “climate conflict”.<sup>49</sup> As described in section 1.4, Darfur’s climate is annually variable, to which Darfurian livelihoods have been adapting in many ways. Most significantly, pastoral communities throughout Darfur that are most susceptible to changes in rainfall or temperature have always made use of seasonal migratory routes, stretching as far as 450 kilometres. However, the *modus vivendi* began to break down as the long-term effects of environmental change began to be noticeable.

Although the 1970’s had already been years of recurring drought, during the early 1980’s rainfall diminished even further. This long-term trend led to a process of desertification in Northern Darfur, where it became increasingly difficult for its inhabitants, predominantly pastoralist herders, to sustain their livelihoods. As a result, camel herding nomads were forced in large numbers to change their migratory routes further southwards, ‘encroaching more and more upon the remaining pasturelands belonging to the sedentary peasants’.<sup>50</sup> This massive

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, 149.

<sup>49</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars: Why People Will Be Killed in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge 2012); Jeffrey Mazo, ‘Chapter Three: Darfur: The First Modern Climate Change Conflict’, *The Adelphi Papers* 49 (2009) 409, pp.73-86.

<sup>50</sup> Prunier, *The Ambiguous Genocide*, 50.

movement of pastoralist groups and their livestock into the agricultural lands of Western Darfur created severe tensions. While there had always been a considerable number of migrants throughout Darfur, the migration of whole tribal groups created problems, mainly in terms of available land.<sup>51</sup> Forced migration by groups because of declining availability of natural resources is also apparent in environmental scarcity theory. Called “ecological marginalization”, this occurs when resource-poor people are driven into ecologically marginal areas which causes further resource depletion because of higher population densities.<sup>52</sup> In turn, this causes “social segmentation”, a process during which ‘strengthened identities intensify competition among groups, reducing social trust and useful intergroup interaction.’<sup>53</sup> These two processes of ecological marginalization and social segmentation were clearly visible in Darfurian society preceding the 1987-1989 conflict.

The outbreak of conflict resulting out of environmental degradation has also been identified by the UNEP, UFC and Tearfund reports. Although not directly commenting on the 1987-1989 conflict, their findings correspond with what has been seen as environmental causes for its outbreak. The UNEP report stated that:

Environmental degradation, as well as regional climate instability and change, are major underlying causes of food insecurity and conflict in Darfur. [...] The region is beset with a problematic combination of population growth, over-exploitation of resources and an apparent major long-term reduction in rainfall. As a result, much of northern and central Darfur is degraded to the extent that it cannot sustainably support its rural population.<sup>54</sup>

Accordingly, Darfur’s problematic environmental situation during the 1980’s led to conflict because of several coping strategies adopted by pastoralist groups that were forced to migrate. First, pastoralists were ‘competing directly with other grazers for preferred areas of higher productivity’; second, pastoralists were ‘moving and grazing livestock on cropland without consent; and third, pastoralists were ‘forcing other pastoralists and agriculturalists off previously shared land’.<sup>55</sup> In line with this, the Tearfund report found that ‘the backdrop to

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<sup>51</sup> Harir, “Arab Belt” versus “African Belt”, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 178.

<sup>54</sup> UNEP, *Post-Conflict Environment Assessment*, 329.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 86.

the current conflict is one of protracted environmental degradation, intermittent conflict and transition in terms of livelihoods and migration'.<sup>56</sup> The UFP report also concluded the following:

The depletion of productive lands in the greater region of Darfur and particularly in northern Darfur as a result of a relentless desertification process over the past several decades, compelled a forced ecological migration and mass population movement southward in search of better conditions for pasture and farming. The ability of local people to adapt to the new realities and the subsequent questions of land use and resource sharing continued to threaten peaceful coexistence in the area and the social cohesion of the entire community. The situation was destined to incite local tensions and provoke violent resource-based conflicts.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, environmental change in Darfur can be set at the beginning of a chain of events that upset the balance of livelihoods in Darfur preceding 1987. Desertification, the most significant change, led to a decrease in total supply of renewable resources, especially in Northern Darfur. As a result, large southwards migratory movements of pastoralists from Northern Sudan occurred, adding to the population pressure on renewable resources in Western Darfur. Accordingly, next to a decrease in total supply, an increase in the demand of natural resources because of this growing population further increased Darfur's environmental scarcity. Therefore, conflict ensued mainly because of growing competition over natural resources that were becoming increasingly scarce. In practice these were almost all conflicts over access to water sources, grazing and farming rights, and the allocation of land between pastoralist and agricultural groups.

This section has laid out environmental change as an explanatory factor to the outbreak of violent conflict in Darfur in 1987. Environmental changes at an unprecedented degree during the 1980's, such as declining rainfall and desertification, caused migratory movements that created a base for tensions as pastoralists and agriculturalists started fighting over natural resources that were becoming increasingly scarce. Tensions between these groups would regularly produce conflicts, exploding for the first time during the 1987-1989 conflict.

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<sup>56</sup> Tearfund, *Relief in a vulnerable environment*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> UFP, *Conference Proceedings*, 12.

### ***(3.3) Assessing the two approaches***

Although both approaches have been presented separately from each other, they do in fact acknowledge each other. Most literature from the political approach does acknowledge that there have been ecological problems in Darfur, and most environmental interpretations also acknowledge that there are also factors that 'have little or no link to the environment or natural resources'.<sup>58</sup> However, despite both approaches acknowledging each other, in their analysis of conflict in Darfur they largely exclude each other. Although this might have led to a tighter focus on a particular dimension of the conflict, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding both approaches have to be applied simultaneously. It will be argued in this section that apart from each other, they only provide very limited views of the 1987-1989 conflict.

First of all, the environmental approach gives no satisfactory explanation for why a conflict between communities in Darfur broke out on such a massive scale. As explained before, seasonal migration of pastoralist groups in Darfur had been common as sharing natural resources was in the interest of both pastoralist and agricultural groups. As agricultural waste would be used as fodder for the pastoralists' livestock, the manure of this livestock would in turn be used to fertilize agricultural land. Although the amount of people migrating to Western Darfur increased notably as a result of desertification, this was not a reason for pastoralists and agriculturalists to organise themselves in groups and start fighting each other. This would have been even more unlikely in the presence of traditional systems of mediation that had always efficiently solved conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Therefore, solely an increase of migrating groups that put pressure on natural resources that were becoming increasingly scarce could indeed cause tensions between Darfurian communities. However, this does not explain how these tensions could explode into a conflict in which Darfurian society itself would be split into two rival groups.

The sources from which the environmental approach emerges can be seen as examples of one of the main shortcomings of this approach. Most sources that present environmental change as the main cause for the outbreak of conflict in Darfur are all policy-directed reports that are funded by Western governments or the UN. The recommendations from the UNEP, Tearfund and the UFP reports show that these reports are written with the notion of

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<sup>58</sup> UNEP, *Post-Conflict Environment Assessment*, 77.

development as its principal framework. All three reports recommend the investment in environmental development programmes, ecologically sustainable rural development, increasing resource management and the development of an environmental education system. For the largest part, these development programmes are to be coordinated by UN-funded humanitarian organisations. This focus on development, which provides the core of the environmental approach, is in line with Gregory Bankoff's argument that terms like development and vulnerability are part of a Western discourse.<sup>59</sup> Bankoff argues that 'how to achieve development and so overcome underdevelopment becomes the fundamental problem facing most societies, and one where the 'cure' is envisaged in terms of modernisation through the agency of Western investment and aid'.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the environmental approach can be said to present a prepossessed view that mainly serves this Western discourse. Therefore, the insurmountable bias that is inherent to the environmental approach makes this approach problematic in the sense that it gives a comprehensive understanding of Darfur's conflict.

The political approach is also problematic in presenting a complete view of the conflict. First of all, Darfurian society cannot be simply divided into two communities of "Arabs" and "Africans". Although it has been argued in section 1.1 that this distinction is necessary, it should only be used as a methodological tool to make sense of the complex social relations in Darfurian society. The political approach, however, uses the distinction between "Arab" and "African" mainly as a representation of real social boundaries in Darfur. Therefore, the main limitation of the political approach is that it presents the 1987-1989 conflict as a conflict between "Arabs" on the one hand and "Africans" on the other. Seeing society in Darfur as inherently split between "Arabs" and "Africans" goes beyond the argument that communities in Darfur increasingly saw themselves as being part of one ethnic group. Secondly, although Darfurians increasingly gained a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, this does not provide any answers to why the conflict broke out in the first place. Although tensions between "Arab" and "African" communities were increasingly growing during the 1980's, the sole existence of the tensions cannot explain why "Arab" and "African" communities started fighting each

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<sup>59</sup> Gregory Bankoff, 'Rendering the World Unsafe: 'Vulnerability' as Western Discourse', *Disasters* 25 (2001) 1, pp.19-35.

<sup>60</sup> Bankoff, 'Rendering the World Unsafe', 24.

other. Tensions between communities and the sense of belonging to an ethnic group were not serious enough to start a full-scale conflict.

As has been shown in the case of the 1984-1985 famine, both approaches present only a limited view of a complex process. This is also distinguishable for the 1987-1989 conflict: whereas the environmental approach better serves as an explanation of the initial outbreak of conflict, the political approach gives a better understanding of why this conflict eventually involved every aspect of Darfurian society. Therefore, combining the two approaches results in the following explanation: desertification of land in Northern Darfur led to the southward migration of pastoralist groups in unprecedented numbers. Although resulting conflict over natural resources had occurred continually throughout Darfur's history, in the absence of the traditional mediating systems – that were abolished during the late 1970's by the Nimeiri regime – conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists spiralled out of hand. As these conflicts were increasing in size, violence and length, communities in Darfur started to take sides according to the ethnic divisions that had been growing during the 1980's. In the wake of the tensions from the 1984-1985 famine, conflicts over natural resources that remained unresolved 'acted like acid on open social and economic wounds which were being re-interpreted in increasingly ethnic and "racial" terms'.<sup>61</sup> Thus, widespread migration resulting out of environmental change could only produce such a full-scale conflict because policies from Khartoum had caused the abolition of traditional mediating systems and the growth of an ethnic consciousness in the minds of Darfurians. Therefore, the 1987-1989 conflict was neither *just* a "climate conflict" nor *just* an "ethnic conflict".

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<sup>61</sup> Prunier, *The Ambiguous Genocide*, 57.

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## Conclusion

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This thesis has sought to explain the underlying factors for the outbreak of the 1984-1985 famine and the 1987-1989 conflict in Darfur. Whereas in most studies on this topic, the main emphasis has been put on approaching these factors separately, this thesis has applied a different method in assessing the connectedness of these factors. In this assessment, two approaches have been chosen that generally have been used as separate explanations for the outbreak of conflict in Darfur: the environmental approach and the political approach. The environmental approach assumes that the outbreak of conflict is largely a result of environmental change. The declining availability of scarce natural resources resulting from declining rainfall and desertification, and the increasing demand for these resources because of growing population size and density put a lot of pressure on Darfur's ecological and social environment. In this view, the resulting tension between pastoralists and agriculturalists provided most of the background for the ensuing conflict. On the other end, the political approach assumes that conflict in Darfur has resulted from ethnic tensions between Darfurian communities caused by its ethno-political relations. Darfur's marginal political and economic situation relative to the centre of Sudan in combination with a pan-Arab ideology from Libya created ethnic divisions between "Arabs and "Africans" in Darfur. In this view, these ethnic tensions provided the backbone for the ensuing conflict.

With regard to the two cases studies, it has been argued that both approaches only present limited views of complex intertwined processes. Although both provide a useful explanation of the situation, considering them separately from each other does not lead to a comprehensive understanding of conflict in Darfur. Therefore, assessing them as part of the same multifaceted process has proved to offer a much more satisfactory explanation. In the case of the 1984-1985 famine, the environmental approach could be used as an explanation for the initial food insecurity whereas the political approach serves as an explanation for why this could result in such a full-scale famine. In the case of the 1987-1989 conflict, the environmental approach only explains the origins of tensions in Darfur whereas the eventual full-scale size of the conflict along ethnic lines can only be explained by the political approach. This shows that labelling conflict in Darfur as either a "climate conflict" or an "ethnic conflict" does no right to the various processes that underlie the situation in Darfur. Only an

assessment of the interconnectedness of various explanations in the face of a larger process is able to provide a comprehensive understanding. This not only adds to an understanding of conflict in Darfur, but also to an understanding of the relationship between environmental change and conflict in general. Although there are certain connections between the two, environmental change is very unlikely to have the magnitude to cause conflict on its own. This thesis does not underestimate the effect of environmental change on societies. However, insisting on separating environmental processes from socio-political developments adds little to understanding the complex mechanisms that are present in societies. Thus, both environmental change and socio-political processes form a part of the same reality.

The scope of this thesis has made it necessary to limit the choice of factors to be assessed. There are undoubtedly many more factors that have also contributed to the developments in Darfur presented in this thesis. However, the goal of this thesis has not been to provide a full overview of all these factors, but to show that these factors are interconnected. This instantly points to a problem in studying these conflicts. A study that provides an analysis that includes every detail and every factor of the complexity inherent to conflicts will maybe be too large to be carried out. Choices in what to analyse will always have to be made. Secondly, the background of the literature and sources used in this paper must also be considered. Because there are little to no sources from Darfur or Sudan, using mostly Western literature and sources unavoidably presents an outsider's perspective.

Therefore, for further research it would be very interesting to expand the approach of this thesis and include other factors in the analysis of conflict in Darfur. These could include the ongoing civil war between North and South Sudan that started in 1954 and the possible influence from international governments like the United States and China, that have had commercial and oil interests in Sudan.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, examining the long-term developments between the 1980's and the outbreak of the 2003 conflict in Darfur would add more historical depth to the findings of this thesis. Thus far, the 2003 conflict has mostly been presented separately from the developments of the 1980's. Finally, bottom-up research in Darfur will very likely provide interesting perspectives that might question the assumptions most people have about conflict in Darfur. What is clear, however, is that the assumption of conflict in Darfur as either a "climate conflict" or "ethnic conflict" masks the complex reality.

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<sup>62</sup> Scott Straus, 'Darfur and the Genocide Debate', *International Affairs* 84 (2005), pp.123-133, 131.

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