



DEBATE

How capitalism is destroying the Horn of Africa: sheep and the crises in Somalia and Sudan

Mark Duffield* and Nicholas Stockton

See Note on contributors

SUMMARY

Given the current turmoil in the Sahel and Sudan, this debate piece addresses an important absence in the commentary. While self-serving explanations relating to climate change, avaricious generals and entrenched ethnic tensions abound, there is little on the deepening crisis within the agro-pastoral economy that directly affects millions of toiling people across the entire region. With reference to the spectacular, but largely ignored, growth in livestock exports from the ostensibly impoverished Horn to the urbanising Gulf states, we argue that over several decades, neoliberalism has transformed the erstwhile reciprocity between ‘farmers’ and ‘herders’ into a relation of permanent war. Favouring armed actors, the historic affinity between merchant capital and raw violence as an economic relation has produced a violent and expansive extractive economy. This internationally facilitated mode of appropriation, with its associated acts of land clearance, dispossession and displacement, is the root cause of the current crisis.

KEYWORDS

Livestock trade; war; agro-pastoralism; neoliberalism; urbanisation; primitive accumulation; de-development; clearances; dispossession

Contemplating the calamitous state of affairs in the Horn of Africa, and unpersuaded by the solipsistic explanations offered by the international aid system, academia and mainstream journalism, in 2021 we chanced upon some extraordinary trade data in FAOSTAT, the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO’s) public database. This revealed that at the height of the 1990s social civil wars in Somalia and then, during the 2000s in Sudan, exports of livestock from these two countries to the Gulf states grew exponentially,

*Corresponding author email: m.duffield@bristol.ac.uk

Co-author email: nstockton@me.com

This article was originally published under doi number [10.1080/03056244.2023.2264679](https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2023.2264679). Now republished under ROAPE’s new doi, supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://roape.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/StocktonDuffieldData-Set.xlsx>

Accepted: 24 August 2023; originally published online: 1 November 2023; published online in this version: 14 May 2024

©2024 ROAPE Publications Ltd. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License (CC-BY 4.0), a copy of which is available at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

<https://roape.net> doi: [10.62191/ROAPE-2024-0001](https://doi.org/10.62191/ROAPE-2024-0001)

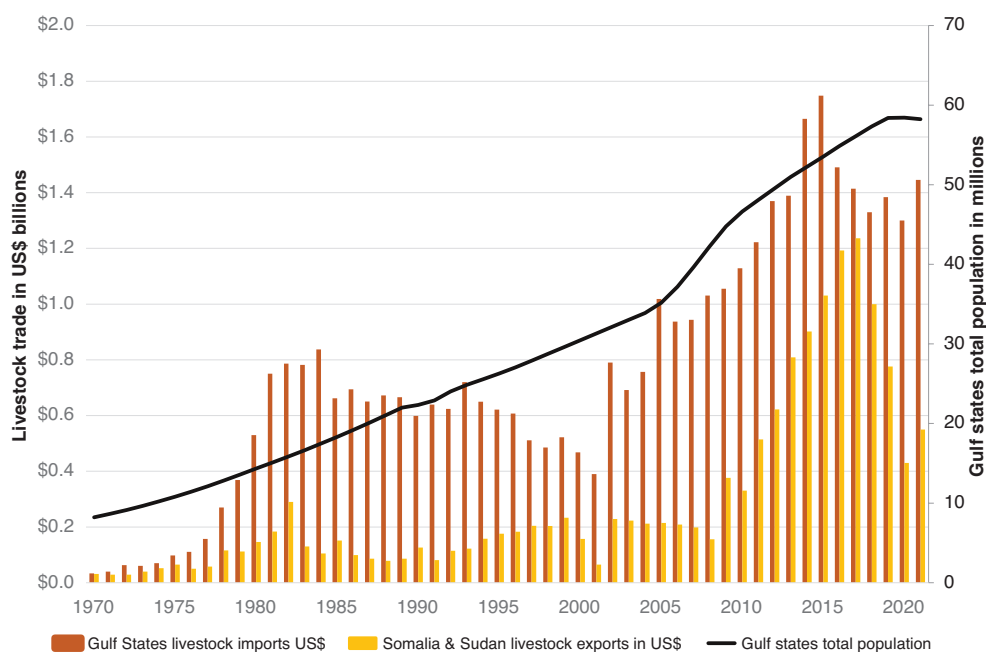


Figure 1. Horn livestock exports, Gulf livestock imports and Gulf total population.
Source: FAOSTAT and World Bank.

displacing Australia and Europe as their main livestock suppliers. For example, Sudan and Somalia together exported 9.5 million live animals to the Gulf states in 2017, accounting for 80% of the value of all Gulf states' livestock imports in that year alone (see **Figure 1**) and almost double the number of the combined global exports of ruminants from France, Canada and Australia, usually regarded as the 'world's top three exporters'.¹

These spectacular figures were realised at a time when each was in the midst of multi-billion-dollar humanitarian aid operations mounted, purportedly, to save the millions of lives threatened by war-induced famines. We wondered how was it possible that two of Africa's most war-torn and impoverished countries could, simultaneously, be providing 90% of the animal protein for the world's fastest growing region? As we then discovered from intrepid Somali and Sudanese journalists, the great majority of these animals were not coming from the relatively tranquil areas of their respective countries, but from the front lines of their civil wars.

We present in outline an historically and empirically grounded explanation for the post-colonial destruction of the nation states of Somalia and Sudan. This is combined with a forecast that the political de-development of the Horn, and of the Sahel more generally, is spreading south into East and Central Africa as capitalism's food frontier, in the form of a moving lawless zone of resource extraction. It is destroying livelihoods and exhausting nature. Our starting point is Marx's argument that the historical growth and the continuing development of capitalism is facilitated through what he called 'primitive accumulation'. With regard to the current situation in the Horn, there is a sorry historical resonance with the violent proto-capitalist land clearances that took place from the sixteenth century onward in England, Ireland and Scotland and then in North America. While today, as in Darfur, this may be classified as genocide, the principal purpose of land clearances is to

convert socially tilled soils and water resources used for autonomous subsistence into pastures for intensive commercial livestock production, which now in Somalia and Sudan amounts to nothing short of ‘ecological strip mining’.

Simultaneously, land clearances do create ‘free’ labour by separating communities from their collective means of production, but organised rural–urban migration is also required for this secondary effect to be of benefit to distant employers. It is to this task that the international aid system seemingly devotes most of its efforts, thereby socialising the economic costs of surviving land clearances through the allocation of official and charitable relief.

An important but ignored aspect of Marx’s understanding of primitive accumulation is that, put simply, while always an internationalised and uneven process, continuous revolutions in the political economy of food have been essential adjuncts of ongoing capital accumulation. For the purpose of this debate, ecological strip mining enables, for a finite period, the concentration of solar energy and soil nutrients into livestock. As highly concentrated protein, meat has lent itself to evolving forms of industrialisation, processing, transport and storage. On a par with fossil fuel in terms of its space-time characteristics, meat remains the food, par excellence, of urbanisation and proletarianisation. Energy for mechanisation and industrialisation was, and still is, dependent upon fossil fuels to power machinery. Equally important, however, the powering of proletarian labour invariably requires the concentrated and highly capitalised nutrition provided by meat. As is now clear, global heating is being driven by both.

Ecological strip mining is the nutritional keystone of global capitalism and it has taken on new forms as the planet has urbanised. For example, destructive fish-farming, soya production in the Amazon basin, palm oil in south-east Asia and, as we argue below, militarised livestock production in the Horn of Africa. Behind such changes in the political economy of food is the same history of dispossession, theft, violence and, ultimately, the unsustainable exploitation of soil fertility and ocean ecologies. Moreover, as available long-term export/import data-sets tell us, the history of militarised ranching in the Horn is inseparable from the urbanisation of chronically food-insecure Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Linked by a violent extractive economy which shows every sign of intensifying in the present crisis, we argue that the Horn and Gulf are locked, respectively, into a widening cycle of destructive immiseration and phantasmagorical urbanism.

Capitalism and war

To say that liberalism conceals the predation of capitalism and imperialism, while accurate, tells us little about these categories. However, the effects of such obfuscation become clear if we ask the question: *how does liberalism understand and respond to wars and warlike violence?* There is a predilection, albeit selective, to interpret raw violence in terms of its transgression of human rights and the creation of humanitarian disasters. Violence is thus understood in terms of its moral and social effects. For example, as creating dilemmas that typically foreground practical and political issues relating to rights, humanitarian need and the responsibility to protect. To be clear, this contingent ‘humanitarian default’ is not a cosmopolitan blind spot with regard to the possibility of other interpretations of violence. It is a declaratory political position.

War and warlike violence were intrinsic to the historic emergence of capitalism's unnatural economy. Capitalism's long pre-history of slavery, enclosure, indenture and proletarianisation was deeply etched in fire, blood and tears. For capitalism, rather than being contingent, violence is an active, indeed essential, economic relation. Since the 1970s, the Horn of Africa has been gripped by end-to-end social civil wars. The liberal default presents this permanent war as an unbroken series of contingent humanitarian disasters. The violent de-development of Somalia, and now Sudan, are without question unalloyed tragedies. The humanitarian default, however, obscures the active process within the chaos, displacement and suffering we witness. They are but the epiphenomena of an extractive mercantile capitalism that operates through permanent war. Being necessarily international and market-seeking, it is this violent mode of production that is driving the political fragmentation, de-development and state collapse of Somalia and Sudan.

Defining the challenge

Rather than separate national economies, Horn countries are organic parts of a single, ethnically structured geopolitical economy that differentially integrates the region's labour and resources with Africa, the Arab world, Europe and beyond. Indicative of this integration, as already mentioned, the Horn of Africa is, remarkably, one of the largest exporters of livestock in the world. This export trade, moreover, is directly linked to the Gulf region's rapid urbanisation and population growth. Since the 1970s, the Gulf's total population has increased from around 10 million to nearly 60 million today. Given the Gulf's chronic food insecurity, the need to feed this burgeoning urban population has directly impelled the exponential expansion of the Horn's livestock trade.

The connections between Gulf urbanisation and Horn livestock exports are clearly documented in extensive United Nations, FAO and World Bank data-sets covering the last five decades (see endnote 2 for a brief description of what is in the database and a link to it).² From the start, the trade has been overwhelmingly dominated by the export of small ruminants. In most years over 90% of the total. During the 1970s, the numbers of sheep and goats were roughly equal. By the mid 2010s, however, sheep had come to predominate, forming some 70% of total livestock exports. While these overall figures are certainly underestimations, at this time, the declared annual export value of livestock from the Horn peaked at around US\$1.4 billion.

Although the statistical evidence is there, the challenge is to understand the underlying social and economic changes that have allowed an ostensibly poor region like the Horn to sustain over time such a large off-take of small ruminants. In the absence of any alternative interpretation of the existing data-sets coming from academia or the non-governmental organisation (NGO) world, besides Gulf urbanisation, we argue that the trade is intimately connected with the deepening social, economic and ecological crisis of agro-pastoralism in the region and the way that livestock value is now realised. Underlying the empirical data is the intensification of an environmentally destructive mode of militarised livestock production that, primarily involving sheep, is necessarily expansive, land-hungry, livelihood destroying and population displacing. Sustained by raw violence and strengthened by United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi investment in Red Sea port infrastructure, the Horn and the Gulf are locked into a deadly destruction–consumption embrace.

Rather than a hyper-transactional commodity such as gold, the glitter of which mesmerises many commentators, meat production attracts little attention in spite of it being at the core of the Horn's geopolitical economy. By extension, it underpins the decades of inter-ethnic civil wars that have led inexorably to the current crisis. Moreover, it is not simply a question of numbers or the dollar-values involved. In a region once dominated by agro-pastoral subsistence economies, changes in the ownership, rearing and export of livestock reach down into the social bedrock. Violent land clearance and the militarisation of ruminant animal production have devastated life-chances over vast swathes of territory to a greater extent than any other form of commodification. These changes embody all the terror of living on the Gulf's food frontier and the human tragedy of not only Somalia and Sudan, but conjecturally, a growing number of contiguous countries as well.

Agro-pastoralism in perspective

Because we do not consider ethnicity to be a leading cause of de-development, this debate piece does not attempt to present a detailed ethnographic account of the permanent social civil war in Somalia and Sudan. More important is the identification of contrasting and sometimes competing modes of social and natural reproduction. For heuristic purposes, two groups of agriculturalists and their environs are identified, the Bantu in southern Somalia and the Fur in south-western Sudan. Their displacement and destitution are indicative of the wider extractive economy that lies behind the increase in livestock exports from the Horn. During the colonial period, both groups enjoyed a largely sedentary mode of subsistence based upon intensive rain-fed and partly irrigated crop, fruit and vegetable production. While not entirely accurate, as both the Bantu and Fur also raised significant herds of small ruminants, these groups are termed 'farmers' because arable crop production was their principal land use.

While also undertaking relatively modest drought-tolerant rain-fed crop production, to the respective norths of the Bantu and the Fur were semi-nomadic agro-pastoralists that, besides sheep and goats, had large herds of cattle and camels. This blend reflected the greater unreliability of rainfall and scarcer surface water resources in central/north Somalia and northern Darfur and Kordofan. Again, reflecting predominant land use, we refer to such northern groups as 'herders'. Historically, the long-distance seasonal transhumance of mixed northern herds was negotiated with southern farmers to maximise use of crop residues and allow for the barter and sale of livestock, milk, crops, handicrafts and services between these groups. While friction could develop when, for example, animals strayed into fields or livestock were stolen, there were compensatory processes to maintain a mutually beneficial system of exchange between sedentary and semi-nomadic communities. Indeed, such reciprocity lay at the heart of rural self-sufficiency.

Colonial rule in Somalia and Sudan was based upon an impossible balancing act. On the one hand, seeking to extract taxes to encourage the emergence of a cash-based labour market to service, for example, new irrigated agricultural schemes – the Gezira in Sudan and Lower Shebelle and Lower Juba valleys in Somalia – while on the other, through indirect rule, attempting to maintain a degree of customary self-reliance in order to keep labour cheap. Following independence, by the 1970s, the growing need for cash, the erosion of patriarchy, and the spread of World Bank-approved export-oriented mechanised

and irrigated agricultural schemes, had begun to undermine agro-pastoral self-reliance and the ecological stability of the herders' rangelands.

During the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, state policies and external terms of trade tended to favour the farmers, and their political representatives, while disadvantaging the herders. During the last decades of the twentieth century, the shift from subsistence to commercial modes of production among groups like the Bantu, Fur and their semi-nomadic neighbours was intensifying conflicts over water and land as desertification drove herders further south. While often characterised as 'Bantu versus Somali' or 'African versus Arab', these increasingly heavily armed exchanges were in reality two historically complementary peasant modes of production being confronted with the emergence of fossil capital's inexorable demand for meat in the post-1973 urbanisation, construction and population explosions in the Gulf states. These were booming economies that opened new opportunities for livestock traders and their military patrons, fixers and owners of the major ports along the Red Sea coast.

Neoliberal primitive accumulation

The shift from a colonial to a neocolonial, or better, neoliberal model of primitive accumulation has been catastrophic for social and natural reproduction in the Horn. By the 1980s, the monetisation of the economy, together with the decay of collective forms of household agricultural production, had propelled the agronomic practices of small farmers into a period of change and intensification. Especially, into ecologically unsustainable time and labour-saving practices. For example, shortened rotations, increased mono-cropping and water-table-depleting irrigation. Among herders, similar monetising pressures were compounded by the loss of rangeland and water rights due to the aforementioned spread of commercial agriculture schemes and, in places, the settlement of river banks by small farmers. Similar to the intensification of subsistence farming, there was a compensatory shift from ecologically balanced livestock management towards more commercial, that is, export-oriented, forms of herd composition. For example, from slower maturing camels and cattle to the shorter reproductive cycles of sheep and goats. Encouraged by population growth, the cumulative effect of this general intensification was to problematise the customary ownership and usage of land.

In Somalia and Sudan, there is a long history of denying 'Bantu' and 'African' farmers, respectively, any civil or political rights. The deepening social civil war in both countries has thrown up competing ownership claims, exclusionary practices and even assertions of race superiority. For the winners, those being dispossessed, displaced and killed are newcomers, interlopers or apostates that have no rights anyway. At the same time, unlike the European proto-capitalist land clearances, there are no factories of an industrialising bourgeoisie or nascent labour movement to absorb the politically disqualified labour so created. De-development creates a modern living hell where life can hardly become cheaper, more disposable or further exposed to new forms of bondage and slavery.

By the time of the NGO invasion of the Horn in the mid 1980s, a neoliberal mode of primitive accumulation had emerged. Having much wider implications, the inner secret of this hyper-destructive form of accumulation was to transform the earlier reciprocity between groups like the Bantu and Fur, and their semi-nomadic neighbours, into a relation of *permanent*

war. A social civil war between farmers and herders which humanitarians have self-servingly normalised as an inevitable outcome of scarcity, ignorance and environmental stress.

Militarised livestock production

Just as the principal cause of the social civil war between farmers and herders is not climate change, there is nothing ‘traditional’ or ‘developmental’ about the increase in livestock exports from the Horn to the Gulf states. The rise of the Somali National Movement and the Janjaweed are often portrayed as the emergence of armed insurgencies formed from marginalised ethnic groups. While there may be some truth in this, the emergence of these groups is inseparable from the rapid expansion of the livestock export trade, first from Somalia and subsequently from Sudan.

Militarised livestock production is not an historic anomaly confined to the Horn. As a mode of production, it has a wider resonance. The defining feature of de-development, pioneered by US ‘shock and awe’ imperialism in Iraq, and now characteristic of large areas of the Middle East and Africa, is the purposeful destruction of any unitary state infrastructure and social services. Now unchecked, merchant capital is able to extract wealth at the lowest possible cost. That is, by looting, theft, extortion and bribery. International and market-seeking by nature, there is a ‘primitive’ affinity between mercantilism and the licence afforded by war. While neoliberalism is content with parasitism and rent-seeking in the global North, neocolonial primitive accumulation in the South privileges and encourages armed actors. In the Horn, military and militia violence has been the main means of inducing and shaping the social civil war between farmers and herders into a lethal extractive economy. It is surely no accident that, time and again, imperial powers have legitimised what are little more than armed gangsters when seeking to negotiate ‘peace’ or ‘reconstruct’ a so-called failed state. In terms of maintaining the Gulf’s violent food frontier, they are hand in glove.

Separated by a decade or so, the social civil war in Somalia and the protracted genocide in Darfur marked the consolidation of a new militarised mechanism for acquiring, herding and marketing livestock, especially sheep. Initially conducted through camel- and horse-mounted militias from the respective marginalised norths of both countries, this violence quickly converted profits from selling on animals stolen from politically disqualified farmers, into fleets of motorbikes and Toyota ‘technicals’, that is, pick-ups mounted with heavy machine guns, to facilitate rapid and far-reaching land clearances. These bloody clearances have freed up the land and mechanised borehole water supplies that have facilitated the expansion of coercive sheep ranching.

Using UN and World Bank data-sets for the Horn, from the 1970s to the present, following a year or two of herd consolidation, there is a correlation between periods of localised land clearance/stock theft and spikes in the export of sheep to the Gulf (see **Figure 2**). The Lower Juba and Lower Shebelle valleys offer the most favourable conditions for commercial livestock production in Somalia. Large areas of the best land and reliable water supplies, however, had been settled for centuries by Bantu migrants from the south. The main demographic impact of the late 1980s Somalia civil war was the eviction of these subsistence farmers by armed pastoralists. Given the in-built ecological destructiveness of militarised ranching, as Somalia’s sheep exports began to decline, merchant-military

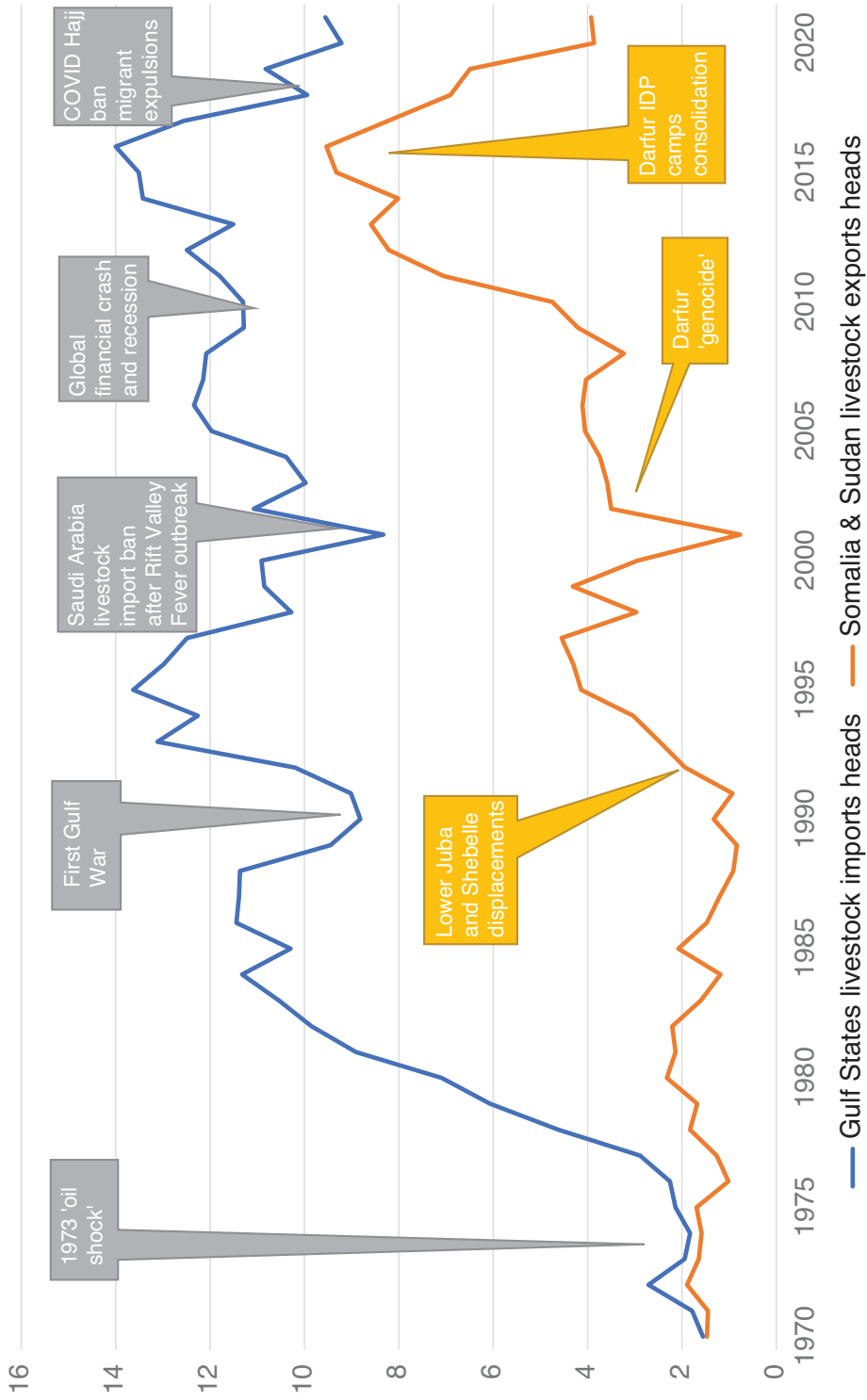


Figure 2. Gulf livestock imports (millions) and Somalia and Sudan exports, 1970–2021. Source: FAOSTAT.

capital turned towards new opportunities in Sudan. Although the conflict in Darfur is usually described in ethnic terms, the massacres and large-scale displacements involved are symptomatic of this new mode of production. Whatever their source, the advantage shifted to those having sheep, rather than sorghum, to sell. Herders and their militia sponsors were able to buy more and better arms and use them to clear non-Arab ‘interlopers’ from the best rain-fed pastures in Sudan.

Over the last three or four decades, besides helping sustain the urbanisation of the Gulf, militarised livestock production has created millions of displaced and permanently dispossessed people. Apart from usefully swelling the burgeoning ranks of the migrant-dependent international shadow and gig economies, the remainder struggle to survive through non-remunerative agricultural labour, the informal urban economy, sporadic NGO electronic-transfers of token (non-dependency-creating) amounts of cash and occasional in-kind handouts during periods of officially declared ‘drought’ and ‘famine’. Many are housed in internationally financed but ill-protected internally displaced persons’ and refugee camps. As the respective experience of banana and gum arabic production in Somalia and Sudan suggests, these centres of concentration are better understood as bonded-labour camps.

Declining profit?

Since 2015, there has been a 20% decline in the demand for livestock imports among Gulf states. The drop in Horn exports has been more precipitous. In 2021, it was down to around 4 million heads compared to the 11 million peak in the mid 2010s. The drop in Gulf demand is partly explained by reduced Hajj numbers in 2017 and then the impact of Covid-19, together with the associated dramatic, albeit temporary, reduction in the number of migrant workers in the Gulf. However, in considering the falling share of supply from the Horn of Africa one also has to consider the sustainability of militarised livestock production, not only its tendency toward ecological destruction, but also for the rate of profit to decline as the number of ewes available to steal inevitably diminishes.

Unchecked merchant capital, reflecting the strip-mining metaphor, is unwilling to invest in profit-eroding sustainable production. Ewes reach reproductive maturity at about nine months and normally gestate for about five months. They typically produce one or two lambs annually for about 10 years. All told, it takes at least 18 months for stolen ewes to produce offspring ready for market. As a form of primitive accumulation, sheep stealing brings a relatively quick reward for the armed thieves and their political backers. For the erstwhile owner, it means immediate impoverishment. But, as with most get-rich-quick schemes, feasting by the victors is, in due course, followed by famine.

Concentrated livestock production on former agricultural land soon exhausts soil fertility, especially when production is heavily concentrated around water supplies provided by mechanised boreholes. Thus, militarised livestock production is subject to declining profitability. First, as a result of the shrinking number of stolen animals in the herds going to market; second, through the exhaustion of crops and crop residues on former agricultural land; and third, as a function of declining soil fertility due to over-stocking and intensive grazing. It is also clear from both Somalia and Sudan that armed competition in

the livestock trade has fomented an expensive small-arms race among competing militias. Coercive herding becomes more costly and less profitable as the ecological strip mine matures.

Declining profitability, together with egregious ecological and community destruction, defines militarised livestock production. We suggest that around 10 to 15 years of profit is possible before military-merchant capital needs to look elsewhere for easier pickings. Taking a long view of livestock exports, the epicentre of the Gulf's food frontier has moved south through Somalia and the Ogaden before migrating to Darfur, Kordofan and now, it would seem, the southern Blue Nile. Given coercive ranching's loot dependence and thus expansive nature, there is conjectural evidence from growing Gulf investments in Kenya's and Tanzania's ports that this destructive mode of production may well be moving further south and west.

The current crisis

The depth and cruel nature of the changes in Sudan and Somalia's agro-pastoral economies cannot reasonably be attributed only to environmental change, scarcity-based inter-ethnic conflict, or avaricious generals per se. To lend these arguments weight, some hold that they combine to produce a 'complex' emergency. The only complexity, however, is the contortions necessary to fashion a parallel universe that usefully conceals the rapacity of capitalism. Particularly cynical is the claim, for example, that Somalia's long-history of de-development is the result of climate-change-induced drought. It is no accident that the same international powers and agencies fronting this claim have, for decades, been active players in the Horn's de-development.

Coercive ranching was first facilitated in the 1970s by the widespread distribution of aid-funded barbed wire, especially in central and southern Somalia. Reflecting the dual use of all infrastructure under conditions of permanent war, the paved roads, veterinary services and phytosanitary controls at key Red Sea ports have all helped an extractive merchant-military economy consolidate. Today, climate change rhetoric functions to draw a line under a half-century of such 'developmental' complicity and the abject failure of the 'humanitarian international' to provide any meaningful form of social protection, let alone a serious understanding of what is actually going on. As a reward for green-washing, the same agencies are clamouring for a slice of rebadged international aid now being served as a smoke-and-mirrors climate 'loss and damage' cake.

Violence is an economic relation in its own right and, as we have argued, merchant capital has a strong affinity with the licence afforded by war. Since the 1970s, merchant-military capital has fed well off the body of agro-pastoralism. Besides the abjection of large swathes of the Horn's population, ecological strip mining has destroyed soil fertility in order to acquire, among other things, the meat that Gulf-based urbanisation and proletarianisation demands. As official data-sets demonstrate, the human and natural despoliation of the Horn has been the handmaiden of the fossil urbanisation of the Gulf states. The profits have been pocketed by the armed entrepreneurs, traders, fixers, port authorities and, not least, Gulf construction companies, retailers and fast-food chains. The social costs, measured in the millions of people violently cleared from the land, are either being sunk in the flat-lining life-chances of the Horn, or re-socialised for invisible

disposability within an expanding global precariat now deployed by a wage-depressing Uber or Deliveroo platform near you.

One can conjecture that the recent decline in sheep exports has seen a marked drop of income within the Horn's coercive ranching apparatus. Somalia may have so degraded the quality of its rangelands through excessive exploitation that it has fought itself to an uneasy standstill. Regarding Sudan, the rivalries exacerbated by the ecologically, socially and economically finite nature of militarised livestock production are, arguably, factors in the inter-military power struggle that broke out in April 2023. Was the disappearance of sheep available to steal the ultimate cause of the ensuing disaster? True or not, this question does, at least, point to the material reality of Sudan's extractive economy.

For merchant-military capital, a big impediment to the supply of cheap exports is the existence of a bordered unitary state able to protect a socially, ecologically and economically sustainable agricultural system. For merchant-military capital, the nation states of Somalia and Sudan have long been regarded as brakes on efficient extraction. The same states, moreover, have for years been sanctioned and berated as corrupt and inefficient by Western powers and their NGO auxiliaries.

Somalia lost its unitary state decades ago. Sudan's warring parties are now in the throes of finally destroying their own. It is no accident that both the military factions involved have found a common cause in rounding on Sudan's professional and democratic classes, either killing, terrorising or driving them out of the country. To stop them forging a common political front with these classes, they have also murdered and forced the Darfuri displaced into Chad. Insulated by an international parallel system of private health, education and housing provision, the current round of intensification involves the merchant-military elite dispensing with the commercially redundant expense of modern cities, their associated public infrastructure and, not least, the political opposition that depends on them.

One can again conjecture that the takeover by UAE's DP World of port facilities in Port Sudan and Berbera will help ensure export continuity. At the same time, determined traders will cope, in part, with deteriorating roads through the possibility of financial relief contingent upon the collapse of state-based taxation systems. In adjusting to the new situation in the Horn, Sudan's immediate neighbours and the Gulf states are all jockeying for geopolitical advantage while cutting deals for market access to what's left of its agro-pastoral carcass. In this respect, continuing population growth, increasing visitor numbers, and the millions of migrant workers associated with the Gulf's planned construction of ever bigger urban phantasms will, at the end of the day, still need to be fed.

Notes

- 1 In 2017, the combined ruminant livestock exports of these countries was 5.6 million heads (source: FAOSTAT).
- 2 Mostly involving the period between 1970 and 2021, our reworking of this data is contained in 24 graphs covering the Gulf and Horn livestock trade; selected Gulf development data; and Sudan and Somalia international aid data. These graphs can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes on contributors

Mark Duffield is an Emeritus Professor and former director of the Global Insecurities Centre, University of Bristol. In the 1980s, he was Oxfam's Country Representative, Sudan. **Nicholas Stockton** is a former Senior Humanitarian Advisor with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), former Director of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, former Emergencies Director of Oxfam GB and former Oxfam GB representative in Southern Sudan and Uganda. Both have spent decades variously critiquing capitalism and questioning the international aid industry.

Indicative bibliography

In trying to understand the published data-sets regarding the Horn's livestock trade, the following authors helped clarify what was happening.

- Alliez, Eric, and Maurizio Lazzarato. 2016. *Wars and Capital*. South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e).
- Desai, Radhika. 2023. *Capitalism, Coronavirus and War: A Geopolitical Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2022. *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System is Devouring Democracy, Care and the Planet – And What We Can Do about It*. London and New York: Verso.
- Getachew, Adom. 2019. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Gunder Frank, Andre. 1971. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. London: Pelican.
- Idrissa, Rahmane. 2021. "The Sahel: A Cognitive Mapping." *New Left Review* 132 (Nov–Dec): 5–39.
- Kadri, Ali. 2015. *Arab Development Denied: Dynamics of Accumulation by Wars of Encroachment*. London and New York: Anthem Press.
- Malm, Andreas. 2016. *Fossil Capitalism*. London and New York: Verso.
- Marx, Karl. 1974. *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, Volume 1*. Moscow: Moscow Progress Publishers. Original edition: 1887.
- Meillassoux, Claude. 1974. "Development or Exploitation: Is the Sahel Famine Good for Business?" *Review of African Political Economy* 1 (1): 27–33.
- Monbiot, George. 2022. *Regenesis: Feeding the World without Devouring the Planet*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Moore, Jason W. 2013. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London and New York: Verso.
- O'Brien, Jay. 1983. "The Formation of the Agricultural Labour Force in Sudan." *Review of African Political Economy* 10 (26):15–34.
- Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London and Dar es Salam: Bogle-L'Overture Publications and Tanzania Publishing House.