

ANDREA BEHREND'S. *LIFEWORLDS IN CRISIS: MAKING REFUGEES IN THE CHAD–SUDAN BORDERLANDS.* LONDON: HURST 2024. 307 P. ISBN: 978191172322-6

JOSIANE MATAR¹

Lifeworlds in crisis, a book by Andrea Behrends, takes the reader on a journey through the Chad–Sudan borderlands over the past two decades, beginning in 2000. Drawing on Edmund Husserl's concept of the *lifeworld*, Behrends offers a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of how people in Chad sustained their everyday lives amid the ruptures brought about by violence, war, and displacement.

Building on her experience conducting research in volatile and crisis-affected settings, the book is structured into three parts—defined both temporally, in relation to different phases of the conflict, and spatially, by tracing her interlocutors' trajectories of displacement and their navigation of uncertainty. Across these chapters, Behrends employs rich ethnographic vignettes to convey the lived realities and suffering experienced by her interlocutors, offering both an intimate portrayal of daily life and a critical engagement with broader theoretical debates on crisis, migration, humanitarianism, and belonging. The book not only presents the adaptive strategies of displaced people but also reflects a deep commitment to understanding how lifeworlds persist and transform in the face of ongoing uncertainty.

The opening section of the book traces the lives of Sudanese migrants as they arrived in Chad between 2000 and 2003, prior to the escalation of conflict. Behrends highlights how they gained access to land and essential resources, establishing forms of social integration that were both practical and relational. Through field narratives and engagement with existing literature on belonging and social networks, she offers a longitudinal perspective on how these early efforts at settlement shaped later strategies for navigating crisis and displacement.

The second part of the book focuses on the war period (2003–2010), examining how individuals either avoided or strategically accessed humanitarian and development aid amidst escalating conflict. Behrends traces the diverse tactics her interlocutors employed, foregrounding their creativity in navigating aid systems. Importantly, this section also reflects on her own involvement in facilitating access to resources—blurring the lines between researcher, advocate, and participant. This positionality speaks to broader anthropological debates around ethics and researcher involvement in crisis contexts. Beyond documenting the experiences of displaced individuals, Behrends expands her analysis to include the internal dynamics of the humanitarian sector. She offers critical insights into competition between aid agencies, the constraints facing aid workers, and the ways beneficiaries actively engage with systems of categorization to negotiate security and belonging. Rather than framing humanitarianism solely through institutional policy, she brings attention to the agency and

¹ DPhil candidate in Migration Studies, University of Oxford. Email: josiane.matar@worc.ox.ac.uk

situated knowledge of those receiving aid. She highlights how they actively engaged with categorization systems, developing flexible and situational forms of belonging as tools for negotiating survival and protection.

In the third part of the book, Behrends shifts her focus to the post-war period, turning to the role of the Chadian state and its evolving presence in the borderland region. She examines how both local communities and aid agencies perceived and interacted with state authorities, revealing the shifting dynamics of governance in the aftermath of conflict. This final section introduces a tripartite analytical framework that brings together the perspectives of the state, aid agencies, and borderland residents. Through this lens, Behrends explores how competing visions of governance and development intersect, diverge, and mutually inform one another. She critically unpacks the different ways each group understood what it meant to govern and be governed, offering a layered analysis of statehood, authority, and negotiation on the margins.

A particularly compelling contribution of Behrends' work lies in her sustained attention to both those who fled and those who remained. This dual focus presents an important dimension to displacement studies, which often treats refugees as a homogeneous group, overlooking the varied experiences and trajectories shaped by different forms of mobility and immobility. Furthermore, the recurring presence of her interlocutors across different chapters, and the evolving relationships she develops with them, invite readers to follow their lives over time. This ethnographic continuity is one of the book's most significant methodological and analytical strengths.

This sustained engagement with her interlocutors is matched by a writing style that is both accessible and analytically rigorous. The book remains engaging even for readers unfamiliar with the Chad–Sudan conflict. Behrends' thoughtful integration of ethnographic storytelling with theoretical reflection allows the text to function both as a scholarly resource and as a deeply human account of lives shaped by instability. Her comprehensive and reflexive approach makes this work especially valuable for anthropologists, migration scholars, and humanitarian practitioners.

Beyond its rich ethnographic and analytical contributions, *Lifeworlds in crisis* also offers a framework for thinking through crises that extend beyond war and violence. It prompts critical reflection on how lifeworlds are shaped by economic collapse, political instability, and the prolonged uncertainty experienced by refugees caught in long-term limbo in host countries where return is not possible. In raising these questions, Behrends opens important avenues for further inquiry into how survival is negotiated in contexts marked by structural immobility and fragmented governance. The book stands as a vital contribution to scholarship on refugee agency, resilience, and the everyday politics of belonging and survival in times of protracted crisis.

This work is copyright of the author.

It has been published by JASO under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NonDerivatives ShareAlike License (CC BY NC ND 4.0) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal as long as it is non-commercial and that those using the work must agree to distribute it under the same license as the original. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

