

Book review

Behrends, Andrea, 2024

Lifeworlds in Crisis: Making Refugees in the Chad–Sudan Borderlands

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Lifeworlds in Crisis: Making Refugees in the Chad–Sudan Borderlands is an engaging book that addresses the gap in the literature on refugee precarity in the Chad–Sudan borderlands. The book pursues an intersectional approach to examine crises and gendered forms of migration and unpack the complex web of cross-border activities and the multifaceted experiences of refugees in the Chad–Sudan borderlands. Andrea Behrends engages with critical questions about borderland migration regimes and civil society responses to crises and precarious livelihoods. She provides a compelling account of the contexts and conditions of lifeworlds in crisis that illustrates how crises profoundly reshape refugees' social and spatial worlds.

Behrends discusses the nuanced strategies that households and communities in the borderlands employ to navigate everyday situations of severe crisis and uncertainty. Also, she examines the interventions of international, military, and non-governmental organizations that have reshaped the social landscapes of the borderlands. She assesses livelihoods before, during, and after the Darfur war and discusses how communities struggled to sustain their livelihoods when social and institutional arrangements were disrupted.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, organized around the themes of displacement and emplacement, provides an exposition of how the war had shaken many lives, with some families losing almost everything and recovering very little. Behrends highlights the resilience of the communities who reacted to violence, displacement, and everyday insecurity in the borderlands following the outbreak of war. Drawing on ethnographic data collected from participants in the study, Behrends expounds on the increased mobility brought about by the 2003 Darfur war, its negative impact on the established modes of subsistence in the borderlands, and the different responses of various communities.

Part II focuses on the refugee camps and the everyday realities of people living in and around the camps in the borderlands. It discusses the tensions and dynamics in the borderlands, which had become an arena that embodied the struggles of displaced refugees engaged in precarious work. Behrends examines the socio-

spatial processes in the Chad–Sudan borderlands by exploring the dynamics that are influenced by the area’s socio-spatial features (space-dependent dynamics) and the dynamics that shaped the area’s physical-spatial structure (space-forming dynamics). This exploration sheds light on factors that determined whether refugee households returned to their former homes or remained in Chad. Behrends argues that despite the urgency and trauma of war in the Chad–Sudan borderlands, the fabric of daily life, in the form of routines, practices, and social interactions, survived in the face of forced mobility and displacement.

Part III provides a close analysis of the Chadian government’s intricate categorizations of the borderlands, such as delineating security zones and allocating resources. Behrends shows how, because of the trauma of war in the Chad–Sudan borderlands, refugee livelihoods became difficult for all displaced people who did not have the capacity to access land, housing, food, work, and healthcare. The crisis described in the book highlights the highly dynamic ways of living in or near war zones.

A compelling feature of the book is the richly textured discussion of refugee precarity and the permeability of borders in the Chad–Sudan borderlands. The book also provides nuanced insights into crises, migration, and migrant legal-status complexities. Behrends frames the Chad–Sudan borderlands as dynamic socio-spatial phenomena that require a critical and socially embedded understanding of the crisis and migration nexus. The author’s disentanglement of the socio-spatial processes in the borderlands not only highlights the materiality and permeability of borders but also helps to unpack the crisis and migration nexus. While the book has a shortcoming of limited data on official policies on refugees in the Chad–Sudan borderlands, it nevertheless addresses an important niche on borderlands.

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