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Protracted crisis, food security and the fantasy of resilience in Sudan

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Abstract

In the past decade, food security and nutrition practices have become central in the promotion of resilience in protracted crises. Such approaches have been welcomed by the aid community because of their potential for linking relief and development. Social and political analysts, however, have criticized resilience approaches for failing to consider power relations and because they entail an acceptance of crisis or repeated risk. In this context, regimes of food security and nutrition practices have become increasingly targeted, privatized and medicalized, focussing on individual behaviour and responsibility rather than responsibility of the state or international actors. This article uses examples from Sudan to examine how and why the resilience 'regime of practices' has functioned as a form of neoliberal governmentality, and argues that it has created a fantasy in which conflict in Darfur is invisible. This allowed food aid to be withdrawn and removed the need for protection despite ongoing conflict and threats to livelihoods; thus crisis-affected populations have been abandoned.

Keywords

Conflict, food security, governmentality, medicalization, resilience, Sudan

Introduction

In 2004, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan called Darfur the world's worst humanitarian crisis (BBC, 2004). This was soon followed by the World Food Programme's (WFP) largest food aid operation. Yet 15 years later, while conflict and violence were ongoing, international agencies were withdrawing food assistance and unable to access many conflict-affected populations. Levels of acute malnutrition in much of Darfur remained well above internationally recognized emergency thresholds but were considered a consequence of people's own actions and behaviours rather than ongoing attacks and other threats to livelihoods. Aid organizations have encouraged resilience by promoting behaviour change and health services. This 'regime of practices' (Schaffer, 1984: 175) suited not only international aid agencies who have to programme remotely, but also the previous Sudanese government because it hid their own actions as the cause of ongoing crisis. It absolved the international community from the responsibility to protect. This

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has been particularly convenient in a context where the EU has collaborated with the Sudanese government to stem migration to Europe and for the US to at least partially lift economic sanctions. The revolution of 2019 has changed the situation dramatically – in particular with the new prime minister's priority being to negotiate peace. At the same time, however, an economic crisis continues in 2020, with an estimated 9.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance. The situation in Darfur remains fragile, with ongoing sporadic conflict and violence, and large numbers of people remain displaced (UN OCHA, 2020).

The situation in the 2010s sharply contrasted with nutrition practices in Darfur in the 1980s and 1990s. In the earlier period, international aid workers could travel freely around Darfur. They travelled to remote villages, where they stayed for several days to make sure they talked to different people, observed how they lived, and could interpret nutritional data within that particular context. They would make recommendations for income and agricultural interventions as well as food aid, to support livelihoods while recognizing that the main social, political and economic causes of malnutrition were beyond the capacity of the community to address. Advocacy to bring about policy change, and representing crisis-affected populations to the Sudanese government and international actors, was considered a key part of their work (Young and Jaspars, 1995). This was also the time of Operation Lifeline Sudan in response to conflict and famine in southern Sudan, when the UN (with the support of Western donors) negotiated access to war-affected populations (Karim et al., 1996).

This article examines how such a contrast in aid practices came about in a relatively short period of time and argues that resilience practices led to the creation of a fantasy that perpetuates and maintains crisis. The article analyses resilience practices, in particular food-based resilience practices, as a way of governing beyond the state – governmentality, in Foucault's terms (Foucault, 2007). In other words, how a range of techniques, tactics and organizations (and their underlying ideology) influence behaviour and power relations, and become a way of managing populations. Rather than only looking at what policies and institutions intended to achieve, this article also examines the effects of the actual regimes of practices used. This includes the production of a 'regime of truth' in which a particular discourse is produced through specific tools or techniques accepted as valid at a particular point in time (Foucault, 1980). As such, the analysis also uses the work of Bernard Schaffer (1984) on public policy and David Keen's (1994) *Benefits of Famine* – analysing policy by examining what policy practices actually do. The failure of relief in response to the 1988 famine in Bahr Al-Ghazal, Sudan, for example, was a success for government counterinsurgency, and for the merchants and soldiers who made a profit out of distress sales of livestock and high grain prices (Keen, 1994).

The article also builds on the resilience literature, in particular that which analyses resilience approaches as a form of neoliberal governmentality. Resilience is generally understood as adaptation to instability and unpredictability, whether by systems, communities or individuals. Rooted in ecosystems theory, it has entered security and policy domains, including military programmes, critical infrastructure, counter-terrorism, migration and – more recently – development (Walker and Cooper, 2011; Cavelty et al., 2015). Resilience or adaptation approaches have been criticized for promoting individual transformation rather than addressing the structural causes of poverty or crisis, or adapting to risk rather than preventing it (see, for example, Welsh, 2014; Cavelty et al., 2015). Whether resilience is a concept, ideology, approach, buzzword, governing rationality or something else, is still open for debate (Anderson, 2015). As a governing rationality, resilience approaches can be seen as promoting the creation of autonomous and responsible subjects who can adapt and survive in situations of repeated crisis or uncertainty (see, for example, Joseph, 2013; Welsh, 2014). They shift responsibility from the state or international community to the individual, which according to Joseph (2016) has been justified on the basis of the failures of international

interventions; the thinking being that it is better to focus on local capacities. This 'responsibilization' is not only implicit in policy documents, but in a whole assemblage of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, laws and so on (Howell, 2015: 68). Furthermore, the concept of resilience can be seen as both dehumanizing and depoliticizing: rather than addressing protracted crisis through political resistance to the conditions which produce suffering, populations are expected to 'accept the necessity of living a life of permanent exposure to endemic dangers' (Evans and Reid, 2013: 95). Resilience approaches therefore expect crisis-affected people to reduce their own vulnerability but not to address its causes. Resilience as neoliberal governmentality has been disputed by a number of scholars, however, who argue – for example – that there are multiple resiliencies, that there is no such thing as a uniform 'resilient' subject, and that social relations have an important role (Anderson, 2015; Cavelty et al., 2015). Rather than focussing on individual responsibility, there may also be collective forms of resilience. Groups or cooperatives may be able to develop alternatives to neoliberal market-based resilience responses or to resist them (Cavelty et al., 2015; Zebrowski and Sage, 2017).

In development or humanitarian contexts, promoting resilience has become a key aim (Levine and Mosel, 2014). It has been seen as a form of humanitarian governance (e.g. Dijkzeul and Bergtora Sandvik, 2019), of neoliberal governmentality (Duffield, 2012), as people's actual strategies in response to climate variability and crisis (Young and Ismail, 2019) or programmatically as a link between relief and development in protracted crises (Levine and Mosel, 2014). Dijkzeul and Bergtora Sandvik (2019) argue that resilience has become an essential component of disaster risk management in the past decade, with a shift in responsibility to local rather than international actors. Duffield (2012) has similarly highlighted how since the 1990s, humanitarian response has become more concerned with people's coping strategies (or behaviour) and that, with the expansion of the aid industry, aid workers themselves are expected to become resilient to constant external threats. In a later publication, Duffield (2016) links resilience approaches with the advance of digital humanitarianism, which enables self-organization in the absence of social welfare and critical infrastructure. Resilience has also been linked with migration: both in terms of promoting resilience being an intervention to stop migration (in particular to Europe), and migration being a form of resilience in its own right, for example in the case of climate refugees (European Commission, 2016; Cavelty et al., 2015). In disaster studies, researchers may analyse what people do to become resilient and how this is influenced by local institutions (see, for example, Young and Ismail, 2019). For humanitarian policy, it offers a solution to a protracted crisis through creating opportunities for adaptation. These opportunities, however, are only at the micro or everyday level and do not address the structural causes of crisis (Joseph, 2016; Hilhorst, 2018). In refugee camps, for example, encouraging 'self-government' and entrepreneurship to survive in the face of declining levels of aid, can be seen as promoting the acceptance of the dismal conditions of the camp (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015). This element of survival within long-term displacement is also evident in the recently agreed Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration (UNHCR, 2018; Global Compact for Migration, 2018).

As Howell (2015: 70) has argued, resilience-oriented governance is not a 'fait accompli'. Rather, it is an aspiration to how people should behave in situations of instability and risk, and as with all forms of governance there will be failure and resistance. Howell (2015) and Hilhorst (2018) have both called for research on how resilience approaches actually play out in different settings, and this article provides such an analysis using evidence from Sudan. It complements existing critical security studies which have mostly focussed on resilience in the UK or the US (see, for example, O'Malley, 2010; Evans and Reid, 2013; Zebrowski and Sage, 2017) and resilience studies in disaster contexts by providing a critical security analysis.[1] It demonstrates how, in Darfur, resilience approaches have led to a fantasy in which crisis-affected populations are abandoned.

Furthermore, while the article uses examples from Sudan, in particular Darfur, the argument it puts forward is of significance to other countries and populations in the Global South. Sudan has functioned as a laboratory for aid practices for at least 50 years, so what happens in Darfur is a good test case for what happens with aid practices generally. This article draws in part on PhD research, including fieldwork in 2012 and 2013.[2] This included interviews with long-term aid workers, aid agencies working in Darfur, government officials, beneficiaries, traders and transporters, in both Khartoum and North Darfur. The author visited Sudan again in 2014, 2016 and 2017 to disseminate PhD findings, and for studies on the cereal trade (Buchanan-Smith et al., 2014) and on migration (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018). The article starts with an analysis of how resilience ideology came to dominate aid practices in Darfur, Sudan. The following section analyses how food-based resilience practices have produced a regime of truth which has made conflict and power relations invisible and which enabled the withdrawal of humanitarian aid while conflict and violence were ongoing. The article then argues that resilience is also a fantasy, because it entails an element of denial, and examines the functions and effects of this fantasy. The final section, before conclusions, reviews Darfur's ongoing humanitarian crisis.

How did food-based resilience practices come about?

Aid organizations use a variety of resilience practices, ranging from health, food and agricultural interventions to capacity building or self-help, mostly focussing on the individual or household. Reasons for their adoption include a desire to promote global stability and to stem migration, their cost-effectiveness, potential for capital accumulation and their anti-political nature. This section first describes how little is known from official information about the prevailing humanitarian situation in Darfur to justify resilience approaches, and then describes the kinds of resilience interventions and why food security and nutrition became key, followed by an analysis of how and why this came about.

Current food-based resilience practices in Darfur

In 2019, information on the humanitarian situation in Darfur was hard to come by. But what is known is that aid practices have changed from saving lives to promoting resilience. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) humanitarian needs overview highlights that there were still 1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in need in Darfur in 2018 (UN OCHA, 2018a). Using the expression 'IDPs in need', rather than 'IDPs', represents a change from how needs were presented earlier. 'IDPs in need' means that only 'vulnerable' IDPs are reported (2018a: 5), thus reducing the numbers said to need humanitarian assistance. Overall needs actually increased, however, because of temporary access to conflict-affected areas, such as Jebel Marra in the centre of Darfur, which the government had previously denied (2018a). Displacement from this area due to government bombardments resumed in 2018 (UN OCHA, 2019). WFP food security monitoring, meanwhile, which in 2018 only covered displaced camps, has shown dramatic increases in food insecurity (WFP Sudan, 2018). The national nutrition survey conducted in 2013 found a prevalence of 28% acute malnutrition in rural North Darfur (Federal Ministry of Health, 2014) – well above the generally recognized emergency threshold.[3] While much detail on the nature of protracted conflict and associated risks is lacking from official information, this situation indicates an ongoing crisis for large sections of the population.

In the past decade, resilience has been a central part of humanitarian operations (see, for example, Dijkzeul and Bergtora Sandvik, 2019), including in Darfur, yet this approach has been accompanied by an overall decline in material assistance (see below). Interventions have largely focussed

on behaviour change, capacity building and treatment. The 2014 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) strategic response plan, for example, mentions the repair of clinics and schools, support for self-help groups, animal health and agricultural extension and skills training as promoting resilience (UN OCHA, 2014). The top priorities for improving resilience were training teachers in psychosocial support and hygiene promotion campaigns in schools (2014: 39). Resilience as an aim is still evident in later humanitarian needs overviews, where it is mentioned in relation to the need to safeguard livelihoods, particularly in situations of protracted displacement (UN OCHA, 2018 and 2020). Food security and nutrition has become key in promoting resilience. In WFP's 2013 strategic plan, for example, food aid objectives include building resilience by supporting nutrition, the establishment of safety nets and working with the private sector (WFP, 2013b). This was re-affirmed in their policy on building resilience for food security and nutrition, which somewhat confusingly turns this around and highlights the importance of improving nutrition to build resilience (WFP, 2015). Nutrition is seen as key to resilience because well-nourished people can work harder and are better able to withstand shocks and stresses (2015; FAO, 2012). Food security interventions such as production support, income generation, public works and famine early warning initiatives have all been re-invented as resilience interventions (Levine and Mosel, 2014). Donor representatives in Sudan saw food vouchers as promoting resilience by strengthening markets and dietary diversity (Interview 1, 2014). Most recently, resilience, or rather the lack of resilience, has been linked to migration. Like resilience approaches generally, efforts to curb migration are focussed on food security, nutrition and health interventions (e.g. the EU's interventions to tackle irregular migration and displacement in the Horn of Africa, see European Commission, 2016). In Darfur, such interventions include strengthening local health and nutrition services, and supporting water catchment systems to support livelihoods (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018).

How did a resilience regime emerge?

These resilience approaches came about by changes in both global and local politics, and the perceived failures of previous livelihoods-centred approaches. Prior to the 2000s, food aid practices were part of a livelihoods regime; a regime in which food aid practices aimed to save livelihoods as well as lives.[4] The livelihoods regime is characterized by International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) targeting emergency food aid directly at communities or individuals, and support for 'coping strategies' to assist populations to remain on their land and, as such, promote self-reliance (Buckley, 1988). As Duffield (2012: 481) has argued, during this aid regime, 'emergency' was internalized and normalized as part of society and the focus shifted to individual agency and choice. Livelihood support was prominent in humanitarian interventions throughout the 1990s, including market, agricultural and income support as well as food distribution and a range of new assessment and monitoring systems (Young et al., 2004). By the end of the 1990s, however, many populations – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – found themselves in situations of protracted crisis, suffering repeated or persistently high levels of acute malnutrition (Ockwell, 1999). Newly developed famine early-warning systems had not led to early response, and methods for targeting the most vulnerable were usually failing. Every single evaluation of food aid operations in Darfur in the 1980s and 1990s concluded that they had not met the objectives of supporting livelihoods, usually defined as supporting coping strategies and preventing asset depletion and distress migration (see, for example, Buchanan-Smith, 1989; Osman, 1993; DfID, 1997).

These experiences of the 1990s came together with heightened fears of global instability, brought about by the 'war on terror', the 2008 food and finance crisis and the prospect of further crises due to climate change. Resilience, or the ability to resist and adapt to shocks, became the

way of thinking about intervening in situations of protracted crisis. Risk and uncertainty became accepted as inevitable, and security came to be seen as the result of individual agency and foresight – or resilience – rather than about preventing risk (Walker and Cooper, 2011; Duffield, 2012). Food-based initiatives to promote resilience included a UN Comprehensive Framework for Action following the 2008 food crisis (FAO, 2008), and a number of public–private partnerships (PPPs), which aimed to improve the functioning of markets and promote greater private sector engagement, as ways of meeting immediate needs and building resilience (2008). One PPP initiative is the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, established in 2010 and consisting of the UN, donors, INGOs, businesses and scientists (SUN, 2014). Its aim is to scale up a standard package of medicalized nutrition interventions, which were recommended in a highly influential set of articles in the *Lancet* in 2008 (Arnold and Beckmann, 2011). These articles concluded that substantial reductions in malnutrition could be achieved by a basic set of interventions such as food fortification, vitamin supplementation and education on breastfeeding and weaning practices (Black et al., 2008). A simultaneous trend in the 2000s has been the growth of ready-to-use therapeutic foods, as part of a community-managed acute malnutrition programme. The nutrition interventions endorsed by the *Lancet* articles and the use of ready-to-use therapeutic foods form the basis of most agency and donor guidelines on nutrition, thus leading to the widespread medicalization of malnutrition: a focus on measurement, treatment with specialized food products and education. As such, it provides a prime example of the hyperneoliberalism of the resilience regime. Despite global financial systems being a major cause of the 2008 food crisis, the response has been to 'responsibilize' individuals to change their behaviour to become more resilient, and to focus on treatment with specialized food products. Ready-to-use therapeutic foods and other 'nutraceuticals', sell the possibility of survival within a context of permanent emergency (Street, 2015: 369). As Schaffer (1984) suggested might be the case for much of public policy, the actual effect is to maintain the status quo. It also creates opportunities for profit.

In Sudan, food-based resilience practices such as medicalized nutrition, targeted food aid and food vouchers were also convenient from a political and a logistical perspective. By 2008, much of the humanitarian operation in Darfur was managed remotely, with programmes implemented by national aid workers and/or organizations but managed by international staff. The former Sudanese government denied access to areas with rebel presence, and aid workers faced the risk of kidnap or attack (Stoddard et al., 2009). In such circumstances, it is easier to implement a standard package of interventions rather than develop context-specific approaches. Another advantage, from the perspective of international staff, is that risks are transferred to private sector operators or local NGOs. By 2010, moving food aid within Darfur had become almost impossible because of government access denials, militia presence and numerous checkpoints operated by militia, rebel movements and villagers (Interview 2 and 3, 2013). In addition, with President Bashir's indictment for war crimes by the International Criminal Court and the subsequent expulsion of 13 INGOs in 2009, gathering any information on the humanitarian situation in Darfur has been extremely politically sensitive. These issues are discussed further in the following sections, in particular how the practices of the resilience regime produced a depoliticized regime of truth in which food aid could be withdrawn amidst ongoing conflict and be presented as scientific progress.

Creating a fantasy: The function and dangers of regimes of untruths

In Darfur, food aid practices in the past decade have created a regime of truth in which conflict is invisible; people are malnourished because of their own actions; food security is minimal; and displaced people are lazy and dependent on food aid. This enabled international agencies to remain in Sudan, but it also facilitated the former Sudanese government's counter-insurgency strategy,

part of which was to control and manipulate food aid for political purposes. Aid beneficiaries and long-term Sudanese aid workers have different truths, but they have little influence on aid practices because they are distant from those with the power to determine aid programmes. This section first discusses what went missing in the practices of the resilience regime, then how the regime of truth created by food-based resilience practices can also be considered a fantasy and finally the functions this served.

What has been lost in the resilience regime?

Food-based resilience practices focus on nutrition and food security themselves as the objects of intervention, rather than the causes at the level of populations. They imply that by treating malnutrition with specialized food products, encouraging behaviour change or implementing standardized packages of food security interventions, it is possible to create well-nourished and healthy people, able to adapt to or withstand shocks. As malnutrition also affects cognitive ability (Victora et al., 2008), better nutrition would also assist populations in making difficult decisions within an environment of severe resource constraints. Nutrition science is not alone in taking this cognitive turn. Since the World Bank's 2015 development report, entitled *Mind, Society and Behaviour*, cognitive science has become a key aspect of development, while ignoring its structural dimension (Duffield, 2018). Furthermore, researchers and aid organizations have argued that nutrition interventions contribute to economic growth; in Sudan reportedly raising GDP by 3% (Victora et al., 2008; WFP and UNICEF, 2014). However, focussing on treatment and behaviour change also means paying less attention to the structural social, political and economic causes of malnutrition and food insecurity. The *Lancet* articles explicitly excluded these structural causes:

> Although addressing general deprivation and inequity would result in substantial reductions in undernutrition and should be a global priority, major reductions in undernutrition can also be made through programmatic health and nutrition interventions. (Black et al., 2008: 243)

> We excluded several important interventions which might have broad and long-term benefits, such as education, untargeted economic strategies or those for poverty alleviation, agricultural modifications, farming subsidies, structural adjustments, social and political changes, and land reform. (Bhutta et al., 2008: 418)

The articles also explicitly excluded populations in situations of crisis (Bhutta et al., 2008: 418). This trend towards removing the social, political and economic context from knowledge about food security and nutrition is further exacerbated by a trend towards quantitative assessments. From the early 2000s, WFP has been searching for a single quantitative indicator which can reflect the severity of food insecurity and which can be used to compare different areas or population groups (Aiga and Dhur, 2006). From the start of the Darfur crisis, WFP has used dietary diversity and the Food Consumption Score (FCS) as key indicators of food security. Yet, these indicators have been little studied in emergencies, and may not be suitable for food-aid-dependent populations, or for the ultra-poor (see, for example, Coates et al., 2007; Wiesmann et al., 2008). Furthermore, a number of studies find that these indicators tend to underestimate food insecurity compared to others (Maxwell et al., 2014; Leroy et al., 2015). So what could be the reason for adopting the FCS as the key indicator of food insecurity? Assessments based on quantitative indicators say little about the nature or causes of food insecurity. Like the medicalization of nutrition, it de-politicizes or, rather, it removes the political and other structural causes of malnutrition and food insecurity. Ongoing violence by government-aligned militia, limitations in freedom of

movement or access to land or employment – and the political nature of this vulnerability – were hidden in WFP's assessments because of the quantitative nature of the data. From an operational perspective, however, this had clear advantages. First, under the previous government, for aid organizations to be able to work in Darfur it was important that their assessments were unobjectionable and uncontroversial. Reporting on the conflict was likely to lead to further expulsions. Second, given that much programming in Darfur has been done remotely, data based on quantitative indicators can be collected by mobile phone and analysed far from the crisis itself (Mock et al., 2016). Third, it delinks food security from nutrition, meaning that with high levels of acute malnutrition but relatively low levels of food insecurity, the belief that malnutrition is a result of behaviour or people's own actions can be more easily supported.

While it can be argued that nutrition or food security assessments in the 1980s and 1990s never fully examined the political causes of malnutrition and food insecurity either, a combination of qualitative and quantitative information did at least provide for a context-specific analysis, which incorporated the knowledge of Sudanese assessors and crisis-affected populations (Young and Jaspars, 1995). In addition, one aspect of nutrition in emergencies in the 1990s was to examine the constraints on aid reaching the most vulnerable (Young, 1999). In the 2000s, assessments and evaluations tend to focus on new practices such as food vouchers and recovery-type food interventions, such as school feeding and food-for-work. Yet, food aid in terms of general food distributions remains the major part of assistance, in Sudan and globally (WFP, 2013a). The last exercise to examine targeting in Darfur was a WFP-funded study in 2008, but at this time food aid was not actually targeted (Young and Maxwell, 2013).

Finally, resilience approaches have enabled the withdrawal of assistance:

> the 'resilience' objective is not to shift the burden of humanitarian response onto crisis victims but that strengthening the resilience of households, groups and communities will enable them to enjoy greater autonomy and dignity and reduce the number of calls for short-term external assistance. (UN OCHA, 2014: 18)

As mentioned in the previous section, by the end of the 1990s, many people in sub-Saharan Africa found themselves facing a protracted crisis. Early warning had rarely led to early response, and targeting strategies rarely reached the most vulnerable (see, for example, Buchanan-Smith and Davies, 1995; Jaspars and Shoham, 1999). Aid workers had to show ever higher levels of malnutrition to get a response, reflecting what Bradbury has called the 'normalisation of crisis' (Bradbury, 1998). In the 2000s, aid practices have created a new regime of truth in which general food distribution is no longer needed despite high levels of acute malnutrition (WFP, 2013a).

This regime of truth, in which people are still malnourished and food insecure but food aid is not required as a response, can be maintained because of the limited information on the indicators of humanitarian crisis and the distance between aid workers and crisis-affected populations. This is an emotional as well as a physical distance, which facilitates stereotyping and again makes it easier to withdraw assistance. Even aid workers in Darfur, when working with crisis-affected populations, adopted a stereotypical view that people did not know how to look after their children or that malnutrition was a cultural or behavioural issue:

> Mothers do not know how to cook . . . They have a child every year which means they wean too early. (Interview 4, 2013)

> People in X have too many wives, and too many children . . . We distributed a ration for two months . . . [which] did not change anything. (Interview 5, 2013)

A regime of truth in which food aid is no longer needed also addresses concerns about food aid dependency in protracted crises. This has long been a concern of aid organizations and a reason for cutting aid when crises become protracted, regardless of the humanitarian situation and ongoing risks (see, for example, Macrae et al., 1997; Harvey and Lindt, 2005). Even the worst humanitarian failures can be seen as a success in that at least they did not create dependency (Keen, 1994). In the 15 years of humanitarian assistance in response to conflict in Darfur, the discourse on the displaced has changed from the need for international protection to one in which displaced populations are seen as lazy and cheats. Government officials and aid workers alike viewed the displaced as enjoying free goods and services in the camps, as having developed 'coping strategies', but at the same time they had little information about the actual risks that people continued to face or about malnutrition and mortality.

Creating a fantasy

The regime of truth created by international aid practices, in which conflict-affected people are food insecure or malnourished because of their own actions, can also be seen as a fantasy because it involves an element of denial. Cohen (2001) defines 'denial' as a state in which something is known and not known at the same time. A fantasy involves denying or distorting reality (Marriage, 2006: 489). The fantasy in Darfur was characterized by aid workers being able to talk about food aid dependency despite food aid having steadily declined since 2008. It also meant aiming for recovery interventions in rural areas, when many villages were empty and access remained restricted – thus making it difficult to implement such programmes. It meant believing that an acute malnutrition prevalence, almost double the accepted emergency threshold of 15% wasting[5] (WHO et al., 2000), is the result of poor feeding and hygiene practices while also knowing that access to land remains extremely restricted for some population groups and that attacks and displacement continue. In the case of Darfur, it also involved denying the reality or truth as experienced by crisis-affected populations or long-term Sudanese aid workers, which contrasts with that of international aid workers. It required the denial of ongoing conflict and violence.

The fantasy created by aid practices in Darfur is similar to that discussed by Marriage (2006) for South Sudan. In South Sudan, aid workers created a fantasy about principled and sustainable programming by denying the effects of conflict and violence on being able to provide assistance. Aid workers attributed limited impact to aid dependency, lack of participation or non-compliance with humanitarian principles. This was a fantasy in which the disaster affects people less and assistance achieves intended aims or could do with additional training or capacity building. It provided 'psychological protection to aid workers and political protection to the institution of assistance' (2006: 490). Donors were able to continue funding the programme, and aid workers could convince themselves that they were doing their best under difficult circumstances. In Darfur, aid workers created a fantasy that food aid was no longer needed because malnutrition and food insecurity were the result of people's own actions. The creation of this fantasy was facilitated because of the difficulties of gathering information and it was necessary because providing material assistance had become almost impossible in the face of persistent access denial and ongoing violence. Not only was food aid no longer needed, but new practices of promoting resilience could be presented as scientific progress and thus an improvement on previous approaches.

The Darfur fantasy includes several forms of denial. The first is interpretive denial: things are given a different meaning. A good example is how what was considered normal or acceptable in terms of levels of wasting changed over time. Whereas in the 1980s and early 1990s a prevalence of acute malnutrition above 15% was considered a crisis requiring an emergency response, by the late 1990s much higher prevalences were needed to elicit a response. By 2012, WFP no longer

considered the same levels of malnutrition as needing emergency food assistance for the general population (WFP, 2013a). Simultaneously knowing and not knowing is perhaps more significant. Aid workers in Darfur could at the same time talk about aid dependency and malnutrition being a result of poor feeding practices, and about ongoing violence and displacement. One local aid worker explained how the withdrawal of food aid after government relocation of displaced people from camps to peri-urban areas was a success because people were less dependent on aid, while at the same time saying it led to more crime because they had no other way of making a living (Interview 6, 2013). This kind of denial can be a way of dealing with the stress and moral dilemmas of working in humanitarian crises. Walkup (1997) suggests detachment and reality distortion as one way that aid workers cope with being confronted with ongoing crisis and suffering that they are unable to address. Remote management and resilience practices provide excellent vehicles for this: international aid workers are already detached and resilience ideology provides a way of viewing limited aid distribution amidst ongoing crisis as positive and promoting resilience. Another form of denial is that aid workers simply stop investigating causes they cannot address, leading to a focus on individualized treatment and behaviour change. Such a focus on everyday opportunities for adaptation denies people the possibility to be effective agents in addressing the structural causes of risk and uncertainty in the wider world (Joseph, 2016). It also denies the obligation of the international community to intervene. The staff of one aid organization in Darfur, for example, in response to a nutritional survey examining differences in households with malnourished and well-nourished children preferred to focus on the ability of mothers to care for their children rather than the differences in access to land or employment (Interview 7, 2013). Similarly, national nutrition surveys examine mostly health, sanitation and behavioural indicators in relation to nutritional status, and thus conclude that the solution is treatment with ready-to-use therapeutic foods and education on hygiene and feeding behaviours (Federal Ministry of Health, 2014). While at some level, aid workers know that conflict and violence is ongoing, both the official and the day-to-day narrative is that malnutrition and food insecurity is due to people's own actions, and that resilience can be achieved by changing their behaviour. This builds up over time, and becomes a fantasy that not only provides psychological protection for aid workers but also has a number of political and economic functions.

The risks and functions of regimes of alternative truths

The denial of ongoing crisis has a number of functions. The Darfur resilience fantasy is depoliticizing in that it hides ongoing conflict and the structural causes of malnutrition, but the effect of this is also highly political. In addition to allowing aid agencies to remain in Darfur, it hid the hunger-producing counter-insurgency tactics of the previous Sudanese government and those of its closely aligned private sector. It also removes international responsibility to protect civilians in situations of internal war, and enables collaboration with the Sudanese government for business purposes or to stem migration. This section discusses each of these effects in turn.

Food aid has supported a private sector which is closely aligned to Sudan's former government and facilitated counter-insurgency operations, as well as making conflict and power relations invisible (see Jaspars, 2018b). From the first food aid operations in the 1980s, transporters and traders have benefited from food aid. Until the 1990s, this often involved delaying operations to increase the cost and maximize profits, and in the early 2000s a limited number of transporters grew into multi-national operations as a result of WFP contracts (2018b). The reduction of food aid from 2008 converged with government counter-insurgency tactics and policies of emptying the camps. The government has had a policy of encouraging return since 2010 (Government of Sudan, 2010) and has used increasingly forceful strategies to bring this about. More recently, the

government has talked about closing the camps (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015) and integrating IDP camps into urban areas as townships. Denial of access to rebel-held areas meant that by 2014, international food aid was going mostly to those living in government-controlled areas. By 2017, most of Darfur was in government hands, and through food or financial incentives many of the leaders in the IDP camps had been brought over to the government side (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018). As such, the manipulation of food aid was arguably one of the more successful elements of the previous Sudan government's counter-insurgency, although ultimately the overall strategy did not decisively defeat the insurgents and made the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into one of the most powerful forces in the country (and in the new government). The key point here, however, is that these aid effects were not analysed, thus denying that politics is involved in who is food insecure and who receives aid.

A fantasy in which malnutrition and food insecurity is the result of cultural and behavioural factors denies the political causes of suffering. It removes government responsibility for creating food insecurity through its war strategies, denial of access and manipulation of humanitarian assistance. It removes international responsibility for protecting civilians from large-scale loss of life at the hands of their own government. According to Edkins (2000: 25), the transformation of hunger from a social and political to a medical condition turns it into a blame-free event: 'A sick body implicates no one and can be treated with drugs.' On the other hand, viewing malnutrition as the result of individual behaviour, as discussed earlier, shifts responsibility from the state or international actors to the individual. This contrasts with the social nutrition of the 1980s and 1990s, which treated malnutrition as a social and political problem at the level of populations (Jaspars, 2019). The disappearance of politics, or the government's war strategies, was also convenient for the EU because it enabled collaboration with the Sudanese government on stemming migration to Europe. EU collaboration included support for border management and promoting resilience and is intended to influence people's mobility. The projects implemented in Darfur are largely focussed on agriculture, nutrition or health (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018). There are several problematic aspects to this. It assumes, first, that aid, whether food security, health or something else, will stop migration. Second, that people migrate – in particular to Europe – because of a lack of resilience. And third, that resilience requires people to stay in one place. The literature on migration, however, shows that the links among development, food insecurity and famine are complex and vary according to nature and reasons for migration (Carling and Talleraas, 2016; Sadliwala, 2019). Forced migration may be a response to ongoing attack and persecution, and thus little affected by material aid (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018), and for pastoralists migration is a key aspect of adaptation to climate variability (Young and Ismail, 2019). The aim of stemming migration through resilience aid practices is therefore another policy based on fantasy. Furthermore, the assumption that resilience requires people to stay in one place implies that there is good and bad resilience. Good resilience is when people stay in place and adapt to the local context and bad resilience is when people flee Darfur and migrate to Europe. From 2014, migration to Europe has been criminalized. Turner (2018) notes a similar trend among aid practices for Syrian refugees in Jordan. Official, approved, self-reliance included income generation projects, but when refugees informally linked their homes to the camp electricity system, it was seen as chaos, or crime; they were 'too self-reliant'. Resistance to the governmental effects of resilience practices is rarely seen as a form of resilience in itself.

In Darfur, the ability for ordinary crisis-affected populations to influence resilience-based aid practices or their effects appeared to be minimal. Aid agency and government regimes of practices were so dominant and so distant, that they suppressed the views, perceptions and experiences of conflict-affected people, and of Sudanese aid workers. For them, both international and government food aid has been used as a political tool. In focus group discussions with food aid

beneficiaries, they perceived the practices of the resilience regime mainly in terms of a reduction in food assistance in order to make them work or return home, rather than based on an improved ability to access food (Focus groups 1, 2 and 3). They contested the reduction of food aid based on this assumption, because they continued to face risks to their safety and their access to land was limited. They also questioned whether household-level assistance could achieve development. Like the Ethiopians in the study by Hilhorst et al. (2019), they preferred material assistance to some form of behaviour change, or, in the case of Ethiopia, capacity building and empowerment. Their main form of resistance consisted of either trying to capture aid by presenting themselves as IDPs or other categories of need or vulnerability (see also Turner, 2019), or ignoring what they think aid practices are trying to do and finding other ways of making a living or keeping safe.

Resilience or abandonment?

For most people in Darfur, the resilience regime has consisted of a reduction in food aid, increasing food prices and ongoing violence and threats to livelihoods. From 2008 food aid (or food assistance) has gradually decreased, in part because of funding and declines in access (at first due to insecurity and later denial of access), but also because of an assumption that people could meet part of their own food needs (Buchanan-Smith et al., 2014). By 2017, only 40% of IDPs in camps received food assistance, meeting only a small portion of their food needs, and rural populations received food aid only when they experienced a shock like drought or floods. Part of the aim was to reduce dependency (WFP, 2015). The previous section showed that this reduction in food aid has facilitated counter-insurgency and policies to empty the IDP camps and/or to bring their leaders over to the government side.

As food aid decreased and international organizations adopted resilience practices, the former government and its aligned militia continued to attack and cause death and destruction in Darfur. From 2013, violent conflict and displacement once again increased. This was to a large extent associated with the creation of the RSF, a paramilitary group formed from militia which fought alongside the government. RSF attacks, conflict between Arab militia and between militia and government, caused the displacement of over 1.2 million people between 2013 and 2016 (UN OCHA, 2018a, 2018b). Confrontation between the Sudan Armed Forces and the rebel movements halted temporarily in 2017, but resumed in 2018 resulting in renewed displacement from Jebel Marra, which had been a rebel stronghold (UN OCHA, 2019). At the same time, militia attacks on IDP camps and rural populations continued with impunity. The number estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018 remained similar to that at supposedly the height of the humanitarian crisis in 2004 (UN Panel of Experts, 2017; Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018).

While information is limited, indications are that most people's livelihoods remain extremely precarious, dependent on marginal activities such as casual labour, selling firewood and charcoal or petty trading. In 2017, displaced populations continued to face restrictions in movement due to risk of attack and young men were frequently detained on suspicion of rebel activities (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018). Their original land, for many, remains occupied by Arab nomadic groups on the government side of the conflict (Abdul-Jalil and Unruh, 2013). Criminal or militarized strategies increased throughout the conflict; including, for example, demanding protection payments, joining militia or paramilitary groups, as well as looting and theft (Abdul-Jalil and Unruh, 2013; Young et al., 2009). Between 2014 and 2016, an increasing number of Darfuris (in particular the ethnic groups associated with the rebellion) migrated to Europe because of the ongoing risks to their safety and the limited livelihoods options in Darfur (Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018). It is yet to be seen whether the peace efforts of the transitional government will increase their protection and livelihoods.

In Darfur, resilience approaches have left people to find any means to survive in a permanent emergency. It has been everyone's individual responsibility to keep safe, find food and prevent malnutrition. As Evans and Reid (2013) write, on the one hand it makes sense to support people taking on these responsibilities, but on the other hand it has a dehumanizing political effect because it fails to recognize the ability of people to bring about larger structural change. A key question is therefore not only what resilience approaches have done in Darfur, but what resilience is. People have been forced to adapt to a permanent crisis because its wider political and economic causes have not been addressed. Do the precarious, criminal or desperate migration strategies constitute resilience? Are people resilient when they are merely surviving attack, harassment and other forms of persecution? It appears that in this case, the practices of the resilience regime actually maintained the vulnerability of parts of the population, because they ignored power relations and the structural causes of conflict and crisis in Darfur. Crisis-affected populations have been left to find solutions themselves and, as such, this represents their abandonment.

Conclusions

In Darfur, the resilience practices of the 2010s have led to an abandonment of crisis-affected populations. Resilience practices can be seen as a form of neoliberal governmentality because they urge the creation of responsible subjects who can adapt to permanent emergency. In Darfur, food-based resilience strategies have focussed on addressing malnutrition and food insecurity through individual treatment and encouraging behaviour change, rather than by addressing its structural causes. Conflict and power relations as causes of malnutrition have been made invisible and emergency levels of acute malnutrition were no longer considered to need a general food aid response. This in turn facilitated counter-insurgency measures by the former government which included the manipulation of food aid. For Western nations, making conflict invisible has been convenient as it allows for collaboration on stemming migration to Europe and it enabled the former Sudanese government to be seen as a legitimate business partner. It remains to be seen whether the transitional government can support an impartial humanitarian operation (given the deep state and private sector involvement in the past) and how the West supports aid and collaborates on migration.

In Sudan, resilience became a smokescreen for the persecution and human rights violations in Darfur. Rather than engaging with the Sudanese government on human rights abuses as causes of migration, health, nutrition and agricultural support can give the illusion of resilience and migration management. Cavelty et al. (2015) suggested that resilience is a chimera, a vision of something that relates to past events, and ideally to the future, but never actually in the present. It is an aspiration for how people should behave. Howell (2015) asserts that ideas of resilience-oriented governance are to some extent fantastical, as failure (or contestation) is inherent in governance. This article supports these conclusions and takes them further. Resilience is a dangerous fantasy – one that has been produced through practices that place responsibility for survival on the individual while, in the case of Darfur, conflict and crisis are ongoing. They contributed to the normalization of human rights abuses in Sudan. As such, as a critical security analysis of resilience approaches outside of the West, the case of Sudan illustrates not only a trend of shifting responsibility for adapting to crisis onto individuals, but also how resilience approaches enabled international collaboration by hiding conflict and violence, while at the same time facilitating counter-insurgency nationally.

Compared to aid critiques of the past, challenging resilience practices is difficult. In Keen's (1994) work on the political economy of famine and relief in Sudan, for example, the international community's inability to reach crisis-affected populations with relief was generally acknowledged as a failure. His work added a new dimension in that it revealed that it was a success for

government, merchants and those with commercial farms. In contrast, international organizations view the limited assistance provided in the resilience regime as a success, or scientific progress, and as a way of working in a protracted crisis. However, while resilience practices may give the illusion of success for aid workers, the private sector, the government and donors, it is not beneficial for crisis-affected populations themselves.

The article has also raised key questions about the role of crisis-affected populations themselves and the role of the private sector in aid practices and in resilience. How can ordinary people resist or influence the diffuse governmental power of aid practices in the resilience regime? Can they bring about a change in the system, rather than simply adapt their behaviour or ignore, co-opt or adapt international aid practices? Some scholars have argued that there may be a possibility of alternative or collective resilience approaches, and thus a transformation of politics. In the case of Darfur, however, the international aid and government regimes of practices were so dominant and so distant from crisis-affected populations, that opportunities for resistance appeared limited. At the same time, people's actual responses to protracted emergency, such as migrating to Europe, are not an approved form of resilience and are instead considered a crime. To give a more complete picture of what resilience practices are actually doing, further research is needed on people's ability to resist the governmental effects of aid, including an examination of the nature and extent of private sector involvement. This then needs to be examined within the larger framework of containment and deterrence.

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Notes

1. A search for 'resilience' in *Disasters* journal yields 409 results.
2. Published as a book in 2018: Jaspars (2018a).
3. A new survey was conducted in 2018 but the report is not yet publicly available at the time of writing.
4. For more on the livelihoods regime, or on regimes of food aid practices generally, see Jaspars (2018a).
5. Another term for acute malnutrition.

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