

Transience and the Present Conjuncture – Crisis Economies on the Darfur-Chad Border

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War, displacement and rebellion have been an integral part of the Darfur-Chad border area's history for more than a century. Therefore, I argue that on the one hand economic activities within this area are based on historically unstable structures, with e.g. markets, work relations or trade emerging and dissolving according to chance and necessity – and thereby forming an underlying structure of 'transience' influencing economic activities within a context of continuing crisis. On the other hand, seven years of conflict in Darfur have brought in unprecedented violence as well as humanitarian/development aid to a hitherto unseen extent – factors that contribute to the region's present conjuncture with new, equally transient, economic circumstances. To sustain the argument, my contribution will provide a brief historical retrospection in relation to the area's unstable character as well as case studies/biographical sketches of spontaneous or hidden markets and individual ways of economically coping with past and present crises. With the help of these examples, I will reflect on the suggested key paradox of opportunity in crisis and ask who profits from crisis and who does not? What skills are necessary and to whose benefit and whose loss does the economy function? – to finally reach the conclusion that while in peaceful times markets and economic relations might institutionalise into stable and more permanent structures, the concepts of 'conjuncture' and 'crisis' imply a different kind of institutionalisation: one that tends to (re-)produce conflict rather than peace.