

Aid and complicity: the case of war-displaced Southerners in the Northern Sudan

Mark Duffield*

ABSTRACT

The paper is concerned with the unintended consequences of aid as a relation of governance: in this case, the failure of aid agencies to improve the lot of displaced Southerners living in North Sudan after more than a decade of engagement. It is argued that aid, as a governance relation, is complicit with wider forms of oppression to which Southerners are subject. The aid-based IDP (Internally Displaced Person) identity, for example, resonates with state forms of deculturation. At the same time, developmental ideas of self-sufficiency articulate with the commercial need for cheap agricultural labour. Developmental strategies have tended to reinforce the subordination of displaced Southerners rather than enhancing their autonomy. Examples of this collateral effect are examined in relation to share-cropping, food aid, debt and asset stripping. The paper ends by calling into question the appropriateness of aid as a vehicle for a shared duty of care.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with aid as a relation of governance. That is, as encompassing a series of interventions, techniques and strategies employed by aid organisations that, in producing desired results, have the power to reorder the relationship between people and things (Dean 1999: 9–39). The attempt by NGOs to help the poor strengthen their capacity for self-sufficiency, for example, involves a relation of governance. Looking at aid from this perspective draws out its ambiguity and complexity. Here, the unforeseen effects of this relation are of particular concern. Aid organisations exist to support the disadvantaged and oppressed and often work under difficult conditions. Many of their beneficiaries would not be alive today were it not for such activity. In this respect, aid continues to hold out the prospect of a common humanity united by shared feelings of concern and a duty of care. At the same time, however, the specific representations and techniques through which people are understood and helped – the

* Institute of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, UK.

means by which agencies attempt to govern them – can also have unplanned and contradictory consequences. In the case of Sudan, despite more than a decade of engagement, NGOs and UN agencies have failed to improve the abject condition of displaced Southerners living in the North. This outcome is a collateral effect of aid as a governance relation. The actions of aid agencies are complicit with wider systems of exploitation and oppression to which Southerners are subject, including state forms of deculturation and the need for ultra-cheap agricultural labour. More generally, the paper raises the question whether aid as a technology of governance, that is, as a series of discursive practices to change how people behave, can ever be an adequate vehicle for a common humanity and shared duty of care.

DISPLACEMENT IN SUDAN

Since the beginning of the present war in 1983, the UN estimates that about 4 million Southerners have been internally displaced from the war zone in South Sudan (UNHCU 1998). This represents one of the largest such populations in the world. Of the 4 million, about half (1.8 million) are thought to be settled in or around Khartoum while most of the remaining (2.2 million) are settled in the so-called ‘transition zone’ – that is, the socially ill-defined border areas between North and South Sudan where Arab and African ethnic groups respectively meet and overlap. While most of the transition zone is not characterised by open conflict, it is an area of periodic tension and inter-group clashes. Within this zone, displaced Southerners mainly live in abject conditions in small, poorly appointed settlements or camps usually close to established villages or towns. Since the era of Northern state-sponsored slave raiding in the nineteenth century, systems of dominance and subordination have shaped North–South relations (Johnson 2000). For many Northerners, the displaced now living among them are a physical embodiment of the Southern rebellion and the vulnerability and abuse of this population has been well documented (Africa Watch 1990; Africa Watch 1992; Amnesty International 1995; Karim *et al.* 1996; African Rights 1997).

On security grounds, since the late 1980s, the government has restricted the access of expatriate members of international NGOs and UN agencies to the transition zone. Following the military coup in 1989, during the early 1990s, an official programme of Sudanisation regarding the staffing of international NGOs complemented this policy. In general, the government prefers that expatriates only fill the

most senior Khartoum-based posts. Moreover, all recruitment of Sudanese staff has to take place through, or with the knowledge of, the Sudan Labour Office. Consequently, where international NGOs are still operating within the transition zone, Sudanese nationals, mainly Northerners, run their offices and programmes. While this initiative came from the government of Sudan as a means of controlling international NGOs, and was initially resisted by them as an infringement of their autonomy (GOS 1993), Sudanisation has subsequently been reinterpreted by aid agencies as in line with the developmental aims of capacity building and partnership.

This paper concerns displaced Southerners in the transition zone of South Darfur in Western Sudan.¹ It is estimated that since 1988, when the first major wave of war-related displacement to the North took place, about 100,000 Southerners have now settled in this area (UNHCU 1998). Although agro-pastoralists in origin, having lost their direct access to cattle and other subsistence resources, the majority of Southerners in the transition zone are dependent on wage labour and periodic relief assistance for their survival. Southerners constitute the bulk of the agrarian labour force involved in the commercial production of groundnuts. Most of the displaced in South Darfur are Dinka from the Mulwal clan originating from northern Bahr el Ghazal (Ryle 1989). They are settled among Baggara Arabs, notably Rizegat and Mahliyya. Between the Dinka and the Rizegat, in particular, there is a long history of animosity relating to grazing rights in northern Bahr el Ghazal. Each dry season, as Rizegat cattle move south toward Dinka territory, tensions mount in and around the displaced camps of south Darfur. Action by the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) against Rizegat encroachment has frequently led to violent retaliations against displaced Dinka.

Although displaced Southerners have been part of the portfolio of many aid agencies in North Sudan for well over a decade, their generally wretched condition, that is, their poor health and physical well-being, their economic marginality, low political standing, and so on, has shown little, if any, improvement. This lack of progress is examined in relation to two things. First, the longstanding dependence of Sudan's commercial agriculture on cheap and politically or socially disenfranchised labour; a requirement that has created a special and subordinate position for Southerners. Second, the change in aid policy during the early 1990s concerning the linking of relief to development in conflict situations (Macrae *et al.* 1997). Basically, it is no longer sufficient for humanitarian agencies to save lives. Their activities must

also support and emulate development efforts aimed at creating self-sufficiency among the groups with which they work. For most of the past decade, what humanitarian assistance displaced Southerners have received has been given as part of, and subordinate to, a project geared to achieving such developmental objectives. This paper argues that the shift in aid policy towards promoting development in conflict, contrary to helping displaced Southerners, is complicit with Sudan's exploitative political economy. In this respect, rather than provide a solution, aid agencies are part of the wider system of dominance in which Southerners struggle to survive.

SUDAN'S NON-LIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

During the nineteenth century, Sudan's commercial agricultural economy developed first in the Nile region of the North. An historic feature of Sudan's political economy is its dependence for profitability, especially within commercial agriculture, on cheap labour that lacks station, rights or the expected protection conferred by citizenship. In many respects, the political economy of Sudan can be understood in terms of a succession of different populations and social groups to which these characteristics have been ascribed. During Turco-Egyptian rule (1821–81) and then Mahdist rule (1881–98) commercial agriculture in the Nile region came to depend on state-sponsored slave raiding in the South (Johnson 2000). During the colonial period (1899–1956), slavery was abolished and the South, which was not brought under effective administration until the 1920s, was closed to Northern interests. Commercial agriculture in the North, however, entered a new period of expansion based on African migrant labour from the countries to the west of Sudan (mainly of Nigerian and Chadian origin). Such people are commonly known as 'Fellata' and formed the backbone of the labour force on the Gezira cotton scheme and in the opening of the fertile but underpopulated agricultural lands of Eastern Sudan (Duffield 1988).

Because of their industriousness, the Fellata were generally looked on with favour by the colonial regime. In contrast, the Arab pastoralist groups who made up the bulk of the population in Northern Sudan proved reluctant to join the wage economy. Although non-Sudanese, some Fellata achieved positions of rank within the system of local administration. While the Fellata were a sizeable minority in Northern Sudan, their association with the British discouraged participation in the nationalist movement. This was dominated by Arab groups from

the Nile region. When Sudan achieved a relatively amicable negotiated independence in 1956, the Fellata were largely denied Sudanese citizenship through the manner in which the Nationality Laws were framed and enacted; they were marginalised within the post-independence political structure (Duffield 1988). The limited political status of the Fellata combined with widespread and virulent racial prejudice facilitated the exploitation of Fellata labour. In the Nile region of Sudan, 'Fellata' is used by Arab groups as a derogatory term associated with ignorance, disease and shiftiness.

Westerners (including groups from Darfur as well as those further west) remained the mainstay of the commercial agricultural labour force until the 1970s. From this period, as long-distance overland migration declined, their place began to be taken by Southerners from South Sudan. In a parallel process, and one that mirrored the erosion of the Fellatas' political status, successive post-colonial regimes progressively undermined the position that Southerners had achieved within the colonial structure of local government (Keen 1994). While this process has been deepened by the current war, it is important to note that it has been underway since the 1960s. While Southerners are by law Sudanese citizens, their incorporation into the Northern economy coincided with the increasing Islamisation of elite politics and the decline of secularism. Southern labour in the North lacks political status not for being non-Sudanese (as with the Fellata), but for being non-Islamic. The exploitation of this labour is once again facilitated by widespread and virulent racial prejudice. Indeed, the Arab–African racial hierarchy that exists in Northern Sudan is in some ways comparable with that of apartheid South Africa. To a very significant extent, Southerners – together with the Nuba of the Nuba Mountains region in Southern Kordofan – have lacked political or legal redress against land appropriation, the hyperexploitation of labour, violence, theft and other abuses (Africa Watch 1991).

In the past, apart from the exercise of unaccountable force, a variety of legal, political and commercial measures have been used to reproduce the cheap and de-socialised labour on which the commercial agrarian economy depends. As the long history of violence and conflict in Sudan suggests, such a political economy is inherently unstable. Displaced Southerners currently in the North occupy a marginal and subordinate position. The Dinka, whose vulnerability has been intensified by their perceived association with the SPLA, find themselves especially subject to a wide range of unequal and highly exploitative relationships. These range from household slavery, non-

sustainable share-cropping arrangements, casual agricultural and urban labour, domestic service and so on. The relations of patronage and oppression that shape Sudan's exploitative political economy are largely ethnically structured. At the same time, Dinka sub-groups themselves have evolved different strategies for economic and cultural survival. Displacement due to conflict and famine has both speeded up and radically changed a process of economic migration that was already underway. By making it difficult to maintain connections with home and kin (and the associated protection and resources), forced migration has deepened the pre-existing exploitative and desocialising tendencies that shape Sudan's political economy.

Since the late 1980s, state policy has been consistent in relation to its vision for displaced Southerners; that is, physical dispersal and containment, deculturation through the mixing of ethnic groups and Koranic education, and integration as cheap labour into the agricultural and urban labour force (African Rights 1997). 'Peace camps' in the transition zone, the demolition of squatter settlements around Khartoum, the privileged position accorded Northern and Islamic NGOs in terms of access to the displaced, and so on, have been geared to this aim. Moreover, this broad policy has survived the change of regime from civilian to military government. While objecting to the abusive practices that have accompanied this policy, donor governments and aid agencies have nonetheless been complicit, albeit in an indirect and often unconscious fashion, in this process of desocialisation. The nature of this complicity, among Western governments at least, is not usually manifest in terms of outward displays of support. Rather, it is contained within the representations and inner logic of aid policy itself; it is reflected in the discursive practices that policy, as a governance relation, uses to arrange people and things to achieve desired outcomes. It is through such practices and techniques that aid converges with the mechanisms of desocialisation and exploitation inherent within Sudan's political economy.

FROM DEPENDENCY TO LIBERAL SELF-MANAGEMENT

It has already been mentioned that relief and humanitarian activities are now expected to complement and link with development aims. In order to show how aid policy as a technique of governance is complicit with the long-term characteristics of Sudan's political economy, especially its need for ultra-cheap desocialised labour, we must understand what 'development' means. In the past, development was

associated with modernisation resulting from the efforts of an international regime of investment, technology transfer and trade to stimulate economic growth (Escobar 1995). In its present 'sustainable' form, the meaning of development has changed significantly. Rather than giving people 'a hand out', it is much more concerned with giving them 'a hand up'. Concerning Africa, development is widely understood in relation to a notional threshold of sustainability. Below this threshold, communities and households are regarded as in a state of food insecurity and growing impoverishment. If this condition continues, the resulting economic and social degradation can lead to a cycle of breakdown and deepening humanitarian dependency (EC 1996: 12–13). Above this threshold, however, households are regarded as embarking upon the process of development. From a position of food security, households can begin to build up subsistence reserves and 'develop more reliable means of production or ways of increasing their income and organise [a] more reliable social safety net' (EC 1996: 12).

Current notions of development are premised upon economic self-sufficiency. Households appear as free and self-contained economic agents. With proper access to functioning markets and sufficient human and material resources and skills they are assumed to be able to secure their own economic and social well-being. Where such resources and skills are lacking or, as in relation to gender, customary practices have discriminatory effects, development agencies can provide a lending and reforming hand. The process of structural adjustment supported by donor governments and the international financial institutions, while often criticised by aid agencies, complements development understood in these terms. In other words, development has become an adaptive process of household self-realisation and social reform within a liberal market environment. This model of development can be termed *liberal self-management* and reflects the logic of a number of discursive practices through which aid agencies are currently attempting to govern the world's poor.

Liberal self-management as a relation of governance is complicit in several ways with the dependence of Sudan's political economy on cheap desocialised labour. For example, it does not contradict the state's intention to incorporate displaced Southerners as a subordinate component of the commercial labour force. In many respects, these liberal and non-liberal dynamics share similar aims. Although Western donor governments and NGOs have frequently clashed with the government of Sudan over its treatment of the displaced, the differences expressed have not been over absolutes; they have usually turned on

matters of degree. Both donors and the government concur on the need to find an economic future for the displaced. Moreover, most aid agencies are unable to think beyond the limits of liberal self-management. In this respect, the integration of Southerners into the commercial sector is not in dispute. Where there have been differences in the past it is over how this should be done and, in particular, the abusive and brutal methods that the government has often employed (UNHCU 1997). In other words, it is not state policy *per se*, but the degree of coercion that worries donor governments and aid agencies; it has been the issue of heavy-handedness that has prompted those incidents of diplomatic *démarche* that have taken place.

Another relation of complicity between aid policy and state authoritarianism concerns the issue of dependency. Since the nineteenth century liberal forms of governance have attempted to discipline the poor through the complementary concerns of dependency and empowerment (Dean 1999: 60–72). In Britain, for example, the New Poor Law of 1832 restricted alms giving and introduced a punitive workhouse system. It was part of a series of initiatives that, by discouraging reliance on charity, sought to promote the transformation of the poor and destitute into wage labourers. Such measures were complemented by numerous disciplinary technologies including public health campaigns, police patrols, planned public spaces, moral education, and so on, that set out the boundaries of civility. Backed by a reformatory network of prisons, asylums and workhouses for those who transgressed the civil code, through such means of empowerment individuals came to exercise their freedom by acting upon themselves, curbing their desires and disciplining their conduct in their newly found private lives (Rose 2000: 61–84).

In its encounter with aid, especially in its newer sustainable form, Africa today finds itself still enmeshed in nineteenth-century liberal discourse. Since the Sahelian famine of the 1970s, aid agencies have been concerned that relief assistance creates dependency among recipients. This fear, for example, haunted the relief operations in Northern Sudan during the 1980s. It was not until the changed international climate of the 1990s, however, that the fear of relief assistance eroding the self-discipline of the poor began to translate into cuts in humanitarian aid, even in the context of ongoing conflict and political instability (Fox 1999). One of the main arguments supporting the policy of linking relief to development has been that of limiting relief dependency. Since the early 1990s, the government of Sudan has also supported this growing international stance (RRC 1992). It has

consistently called for cuts in food aid on the grounds that such assistance was internationally demeaning, that is was aiding the rebels in the South and, importantly, was undermining its attempts to economically integrate displaced Southerners and hence increase their self-reliance (see Karim *et al.* 1996).

The policy of linking relief to development was initially conceived in relation to the existence of a comprehensive array of development funding bodies, tools and agencies operating in the countries concerned. The intention of the policy-makers was that relief should link to these tools and agencies in a planned and coordinated fashion (OECD 1998). Since the late 1980s, however, Sudan has been subject to an embargo of Western development assistance and enjoys strained relations with the international financial institutions owing to its record of human rights abuses and its alleged support for international terrorism. The non-state nature of the warring parties in the South has also resulted in an effective development embargo there. In other words, while the rhetoric of relief to development has been adopted by many aid agencies, in organisational and financial terms, there has never been anything in Sudan for relief to actually link to.² Given this situation, one of the main effects of linking policy in Sudan was to rationalise a major reduction in food aid during the mid 1990s despite the continuing disruption of war and inability of displaced Southerners to secure their daily needs. Connected to ideas of dependency, this reduction appears as a form of discipline administered by aid agencies to the recipients of food aid in order to promote the liberal virtues of prudence, thrift and industriousness among them.

While the recent return of famine to South Sudan in 1998 has seen a temporary increase in food aid, during the course of the 1990s the trend has been one of decline. Between 1994 and 1995 food aid distributed under the umbrella of the UN's Operational Lifeline Sudan (OLS) umbrella dropped by 70% from around 85,000 to 24,000 mt (Karim *et al.* 1996). Despite the absence of corroborating evidence, fears among donor governments about creating dependency and hence undermining the economic independence of the receiving groups have been foremost in shaping this trend (*ibid.*). By 1997 in North Sudan, for example, the Brussels HQ of the European Commission had begun rejecting NGO requests for food aid despite such petitions being supported by survey evidence and having the agreement of the EU delegate in Khartoum (Duffield *et al.* 1999). Regarding displaced Dinka in southern Darfur, from the mid 1990s, the reduced food aid available was repackaged by NGOs as food-for-work projects,

rehabilitation programmes and, especially, as a means of agricultural support (SCF-UK 1997). That is, by limiting free food distribution to the April to August pre-harvest lean season, and only providing a partial ration, it was argued that this would help the Dinka to cultivate their own farms and, at the same time, encourage them to work as hired agricultural labour (SCF-UK 1996). In addition to agricultural support, in some places development projects to encourage behavioural change through the discipline of thrift (micro-credit schemes, seed banks, etc.) industriousness (the loan of fishing nets, training in handicrafts, agricultural extension work, etc.) and new forms of social organisation (the formation of women's groups, health education, etc.) have been established by NGOs.

THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

Aid agency attempts to discipline the displaced through the reduction of food aid while renewing efforts to encourage liberal self-management are consistent with state policies to integrate Southerners as ultra-cheap labour. Reducing food aid has often been seen as a means of freeing up the displaced for work. The complicity of aid agencies with the subjugation of displaced Southerners, however, extends beyond the economic sphere; an important aspect of this tacit involvement concerns how the international community understands the war-displaced. The representations used to know displaced Southerners broaden the relations of complicity to include those of desocialisation. For the state, desocialisation involves the active suppression of non-Muslim ethnic and cultural identities. The government has frequently proclaimed, often as a means of rebutting international charges of abuse, that all Southerners, including the displaced, are Sudanese citizens. Such statements, however, do not function as a means of setting out the duties and obligations involved with citizenship in a liberal sense. They reflect a willingness on the part of the state, through squatter demolitions, population relocation, the physical layout of resettlement areas and the manipulation of access to food aid, basic health care and primary education, to attempt to ignore, dilute and ultimately suppress Southern cultural histories. Citizenship is not based on cultural plurality but rather a bounded homogeneity that reflects Northern interests and dominance.

Among aid agencies, a different but complementary process of cultural suppression exists. In their first encounter with NGOs during the 1980s, the Dinka in the transition zone were transformed into the

abstract economic categories of liberal self-management. They became individuals and households arranged and ordered in terms of the wealth and resources they were deemed to possess or, in the case of the Dinka, not to possess. At a stroke, all sense of history and cultural difference was lost. Displaced Southerners ceased to be members of distinct ethnic groups coming from different regions and ecosystems, following diverse survival strategies and integrated in different ways into the systems of Northern patronage and power. To those agencies charged with a duty of care, Southerners became 'Internally Displaced People' or 'IDPs' as they are more usually known. IDPs do not register as social beings struggling to survive through reciprocating networks while enmeshed by relations of debt, clientage and exploitation. Instead, they become economic actors known through their position on the scale of scarcity and abundance through which aid policy understands the world. As one sympathetic anthropologist noted at the time (Ryle 1989: 6):

[IDP] terminology tends to homogenize and dehumanize the inhabitants of the South. It conspires inadvertently with a strain in northern discourse about non-Muslim and non-Arab inhabitants of the Sudan which lumps all southerners together and defines them thus with negatives, as non-believers, without real religion, not fully deserving of moral respect. It cannot be stated too strongly that recognition of the distinctive social relations of particular groups of southerners, as with any other peoples, is a necessary prerequisite for effective intervention.

This statement was written over a decade ago as a critical reflection on the NGO encounter. Over the ensuing period, rather than aid agencies changing or reforming the IDP identity, its characteristics have endured. This resilience suggests that how IDPs are represented is not a problem of understanding, that is, of forming a fuller or more complex view of displacement. The homogenised and de-ethnicised IDP identity serves an important governance function. It is through the IDP identity that aid policy attempts to order people and things to achieved desired outcomes. The space created by the loss of Southerner culture and history to the power of agency representation has been filled by the universal economic categories of liberal self-management. It is through these categories that displaced Dinka become known and subject to aid's powers of governance.

While they may be more disadvantaged in one location as opposed to another, there is no necessary or structural connection between the displaced and whatever environment they are in. They just exist on a relative scale of 'disadvantage' and 'vulnerability'. The prime unit for

this abstraction is the household (or HH to use a common NGO acronym in Northern Sudan). As in other countries subject to this process of development, over the years large numbers of aid agency field reports and base-line studies have been produced that differentiate population in terms of households divided up according to the resources that they control or have access to. The main focus is on the uneven distribution of internal assets between and within households. Such unevenness may result from the natural life-cycle of the family or the exclusionary effects of gender. Usually based on rapid and participatory forms of local analysis, households have been ranked and differentiated according to a variety of wealth criteria. This includes the size of household membership, the number of dependent children, the frequency of female-headed households, the amount of livestock, the area of land owned or rented, and so on. Ranking households according to such criteria typically distinguishes the rich, the average, the poor and the very poor within a given community. Through such discursive techniques and forms of representation, the population has been transformed into the abstract economic categories of development as a relation of governance.

DISPLACEMENT AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

For aid agencies, the ranking of households according to wealth and scarcity is an essential technique of governance. By distinguishing the poor and vulnerable – including IDPs – it allows NGOs, for example, to target help and resources on them. This help is understood as allowing the poor to act on themselves in such a way as to begin a process of self-realisation; a process that will lift them out of dependency and on to the path of liberal self-management. Through the lens of the IDP identity, the war displaced Dinka in the transition zone have been transformed into little more than economic migrants – or at least, an extreme form of economic migrant. They have found themselves on the ‘lowest rung’ on a ladder of relative advantage and disadvantage (SCF-UK 1996). IDPs are a special case of migrants who have lost all assets and resources in their involuntary move to unfamiliar areas from which they are unable to return. From this perspective, the main problem for displaced Dinka in the transition zone is that of the absence of economic parity with surrounding groups (UNHCU 1999). It is this structural disadvantage that is regarded as preventing them from exerting their economic independence, engaging freely in local civic structures and thus claiming their full rights as citizens. This general

understanding has, essentially, shaped IDP policy for the past decade. Consequently, developmental programming, where it has been carried out, has attempted to address the economic disparity between the Dinka and the surrounding communities. Projects have focused on the provision of seeds and tools and, usually in the form of a loan repaid out of proceeds, such things as fishing nets and donkey carts have been provided. In recent years, there has also been an increased effort among NGOs in south Darfur to provide some displaced Dinka with access to their own land (Abd-el-Gadir 1999).

The displacement of the Dinka, however, was a political act. They were forcibly uprooted not by accident or poverty, or some other form of structural disadvantage; they were displaced *because they were Dinka*. Moreover, those Northern systems and groups both directly and indirectly involved in causing that displacement are largely synonymous with the 'host community' among whom the Dinka are settled. Rather than a lack of economic parity, which of course exists, the main problem faced by displaced Southerners is that they are enmeshed in ethnically structured systems of exploitation and appropriation. In Southern Darfur, the Dinka are subject to dominant networks and power relations linking local merchants, commercial farmers, government officials and military officers. However, in support of the developmental ideal of liberal self-management, since the early 1990s the main thrust of aid policy has been to achieve economic parity for IDPs. Apart from specific developmental projects, the other aspect of this has been the reduction of food aid in order to 'reduce dependency' and encourage the Dinka to pursue agricultural employment. In the transition zone, those commercial farmers who provide such employment are often linked in various ways to those political forces responsible for displacement. They are not neutral or disinterested providers of work. As a governance relation, aid policy has to understand populations in such a way that it can act upon them. In relation to displaced Dinka, one can begin to sketch how this necessity contains the reasons for its failure.

AID AND DINKA SUBJUGATION

Aid policy has supported a system of dominance and direct and indirect asset transfer for over a decade. At the same time, this system is more complex than just a process of local appropriation. That is, forms of everyday diversion and theft on the part of Northerners that can be checked with appropriate agency counter-measures. It is more complex

because, as argued above, through the economic and desocialised categories of liberal self-management and the IDP identity, aid agencies are themselves complicit in this process of exploitation and subjugation; aid policy is part of this process. In order to show this connection in more detail, it is necessary to briefly examine the conditions under which Dinka live in Southern Darfur.³

Share-cropping and other employment

In Southern Darfur, as in other areas of the transition zone, Northern security officials monitor and control displaced Southerners through an appointed system of Dinka ‘Sultans’. This is the local term for chief or headman. Such individuals are invariably government placements, usually having no connection with Dinka aristocratic lineages or titled families. Conversion to Islam and the wearing of a turban and *jelabiya* is common among such men. As middlemen between the displaced and government officials, commercial farmers, aid agencies, and so on, such sultans occupy an influential position. They play the role of labour, credit and aid brokers on behalf of the displaced and, by controlling access to such things, they are able to wield authority. At the same time, the practice of informing on potential Dinka rivals among the displaced, especially the threat of denouncing them to state security as SPLA sympathisers, strengthens their position. This authority creates a guarded atmosphere of dependence and intimidation that exists in displaced settlements in the transition zone.

Within the transition zone, displaced Dinka, especially men, are the backbone of the labour force in the commercial production of groundnuts. Over the past twenty years, Southerners have effectively replaced other sources of local and migrant labour in this activity. Because insecurity prevents the Dinka returning to their homelands to the South, displaced settlements have been effectively integrated in the transition zone as labour camps. In parts of southern Darfur, for example, displaced Dinka account for 85 % of the agricultural labour force, with some merchants employing between 100 and 150 on their groundnut farms. The dominant labour relation is that of share-cropping. Basically, a farm owner hires a number of Dinka labourers for the agricultural season. This involves clearing the land, planting, weeding and harvesting the crop. Apart from agricultural inputs, the owner provides the labourers with water and basic foodstuffs free of charge during the period of cultivation. At harvest time, in lieu of wages the crop is divided between the owner and the labourers.

However, owners also provide labourers with credit, usually at a high interest rate, to enable them to buy essentials and support their families. This debt and its accumulated interest is deducted from the labourer's share of the harvest. The outcome is that at the end of the season many Dinka are left with little to show for six or seven months of hard work (Abd-el-Gadir 1999). In effect, owners have their farms cultivated and harvested for what may be little more than the price of the food and water necessary to sustain their labourers while they are at work.

There are several characteristics of share-cropping that make it a particularly exploitative relationship; in some respects, it takes on the characteristics of slavery or bonded labour. The more fertile land suitable for groundnut production tends to be some distance from habitation. Due to the absence of transport, labourers usually sleep on the farms, spending weeks at a time in the bush. In order to minimise the amount of food and water they have to provide, owners do not allow women with dependent children onto their farms; only able-bodied adults are taken on. This has the effect of splitting families and making share-cropping a largely male activity (el Amin 1998). Women with dependent children have to rely on earning a frugal living in the IDP settlements or, if living close enough, in the small towns of the transition zone. Activities such as the gathering and sale of firewood, mat making, brewing, prostitution and domestic service predominate. The division of the family, the giving of food and water only to able-bodied share-croppers, together with the non-remunerative nature of work generally, underpins a system of debt and poverty.

Food aid, wage labour and debt

While the amount of food aid given to the displaced has been reduced, it plays an important role in the exploitation of the Dinka. To a certain extent, it helps to maintain the low cost of Dinka labour and, at the same time, like the groundnut harvest, it provides collateral for loans. Food aid is now only provided for a few months during the pre-harvest lean season. Moreover, this is usually only enough for half the basic food needs of the population concerned. At most, it represents about 10–15 % of annual food requirements. While this must certainly teach Dinka not to be dependent, the inability of share-cropping to support Dinka families throughout the year suggests that, if anything, targeted food aid acts to fill the gap left by non-remunerative agricultural

labour. In other words, although food aid was reduced to discourage alleged dependency, its targeted and developmental equivalent acts as a form of subsidy to commercial groundnut farmers; a sort of international commercial subsidy that allows them to provide – or at least, to get away with providing – little more than immediate subsistence needs of their labourers.

The precarious reproductive and nutritional situation of the Dinka in South Darfur is well illustrated in a 1998 food economy assessment (OLS 1998). While the displaced are almost wholly dependent on wage labour, having few subsistence resources of their own, only 50% of annual food intake was through monetary purchase, 18% through cultivation, 10% in the form of relief supplies and 6% through collecting wild foods. This left an annual food deficit of 14% (which increases to 24% if one excludes the 10% food aid provided as relief assistance). For those conducting this survey, which is a regular undertaking to help assess food aid requirements, such a deficit is not seen as a concern in itself. At least it does not attract any special mention. What the survey suggests, however, is that the combined returns from share-cropping, farm labour, casual urban employment, domestic service and other available activities fall well short of that needed for basic survival, let alone liberal self-management; little wonder that their condition and physical well-being has failed to improve over the past decade.

While about 10% of annual food requirement is currently met by food aid, it cannot be assumed that this amount actually reaches the displaced. Like the future groundnut harvest in the share-cropping relationship, food aid is one of the few forms of collateral that the Dinka possess. Dinka sultans usually arrange loans from local merchants, again attracting high interest rates, which are repaid from food aid allocations. In the past, this debt has been repaid as soon as a food aid delivery has been made to the displaced settlement. Some accounts describe merchants arriving with their own lorries to immediately reload the relief commodities. This is usually a time of great tension in the displaced settlements and has often led to disturbances and outbreaks of violence. In the mid 1990s, it was estimated that as much as 25% of food aid was being transferred to local merchants in this manner (Karim *et al.* 1996: 204). When one adds a similar amount taken by the local relief committees for the host community, less than half of their allocation may be going to the displaced. In other words, rather than representing around 10% of annual food needs, food aid may only account for 5% or less.

Looting and asset liquidation

Besides exploitative and non-remunerative work and onerous debt relations, the Dinka are also subject to other forms of oppression. They endure high levels of physical insecurity and run the ever-present risk of having any assets they may possess forcibly appropriated. In general, such resources come from NGOs and have been given or loaned with the intention of improving economic parity; for example, fishing nets and donkey carts, the latter usually being used to transport and sell water. Since the 1980s, there has been a history in Northern Sudan of displaced Southerners being stripped by more powerful groups of any assets they may possess. A number of mechanisms exist to accomplish this. In south Darfur, for example, donkey carts have often been confiscated as a result of the non-payment of debts (UNHCU 1999). In some places, Dinka have ended up working as labourers for a daily pittance on carts that had originally been given to them. At the same time, displaced Dinka with fishing nets and fish are frequently attacked in the bush and relieved of their possessions. The dry season is a period of tension when the risk of such violence is at its highest. This is when Rizegat herders move south towards Dinka grazing lands in northern Bahr al Ghazal. Resistance by the SPLA to this movement have frequently been met in south Darfur by Rizegat-led attacks on displaced settlements and the wholesale looting of property. In an incident in 1998, for example, an NGO lost all fifteen of its donkey carts from the camp at Abu Matariq. Only three were eventually returned. This volatile security situation has also given rise to its own survival strategies. In particular, when violence is thought to be imminent, displaced Dinka living in areas of greatest risk will themselves often sell off whatever goods they have in order to secure transport to safer areas. Once tensions have subsided, they will again move back. This process of asset transfer, looting and self-liquidation, like that of debt and bonded labour, is intimately connected with the logic and operation of aid.

CONCLUSION: RIGHTS-BASED PROGRAMMING OR THE
RESPONSIBILITY OF CARE?

The measures adopted by aid agencies to encourage self-reliance among displaced Dinka have basically failed. Over the past decade there has been no appreciable improvement in their economic position, health, physical well-being or political standing. Rather than being

complex, the reasons for this are fairly straightforward. As an economic construct linked to the discursive practice of liberal self-management, the IDP identity is blind to the relations of subordination and exploitation within which the Dinka are enmeshed. It should therefore not be surprising to learn that the IDP language of economic disadvantage has been readily adopted by the government of Sudan. This complicity has meant that reductions in food aid, rather than lessening dependency, have forced a greater reliance among the Dinka on highly exploitative and non-sustainable forms of agricultural labour. At the same time, those resources given or loaned to the displaced to lessen their economic disadvantage have usually ended up in the hands of more powerful surrounding groups. Assets meant to strengthen economic parity have, quite simply, been taken off them. In the transition zone, the IDP identity has acted as a sort of conduit whereby the discursive technologies of aid have helped to feed exploitative local networks.

It would be wrong to suggest that donor governments and aid agencies are unaware of the crisis among displaced Southerners (see Loveless 1999). In 1996, for example, humanitarian activities in Sudan, in both government and non-government areas, were subject to a major review (Karim *et al.* 1996). A key finding of this evaluation was that the UN system had failed displaced Southerners in government areas. One of the main responses by aid agencies to this continuing crisis has been the extension to the displaced of changes occurring in aid policy more generally. That is, the development of 'rights-based' programming. IDPs have become part of a shift in aid policy towards embracing a human rights approach, whereby asserting the rights of aid beneficiaries and partners, especially the right to protection and development, has become a central project aim. Agencies such as CARE, OXFAM, UNICEF and SCF-UK have developed a rights-based dimension to their work in Sudan.

In some respects, a rights-based approach would appear to address the shortcomings of aid policy described above. The subordination and oppression of the Dinka in the transition zone is clearly a human rights issue. However, if one examines what aid agencies mean by 'human rights' in relation to a rights-based approach, they do not have in mind the legal, civic and political rights that have traditionally dominated rights discourse. Rather, it is human rights remapped in terms of their social, cultural and economic expectations and modalities (O'Brien 1998). From this perspective, aid agencies have, for example, redefined 'development' as a human right. Rather than rights being established

through legal and political confrontation, development as a human right becomes a process of negotiation and dialogue (Speth 1999). In effect, rights-based programming represents the repackaging as a human right the existing developmental model of liberal self-management. Rather than a break with complicit aid policy, rights-based programming represents its reinforcement. As UNICEF (1997: 5) has pointed out, rights-based programming ‘does not mean that everything we do must change. In fact, the policies and programmes of co-operation supported over the last 20 to 30 years are very largely consistent with [it].’

A similar form of reinvention has also been extended to the idea of protection. When the lack of protection offered by aid agencies to displaced Southerners was first clearly identified as a problem in the mid-1990s, it was protection understood in a legal and political sense (Karim *et al.* 1996). In responding to this criticism, however, the UN has redefined ‘protection’ in terms of establishing the conditions necessary for achieving liberal self-management. Hence, the most important aspect of protection is strengthening the IDPs ‘own self-support through meeting their basic needs such as food production, rebuilding livestock assets, and contributing toward health and education services’ (UNHCU 1999: 4). In other words, achieving the (failed) policy goal of local economic parity for IDPs has been redefined in terms of protection: aid agencies are not changing what they do to incorporate human rights, they are changing the way human rights are understood so as to reinvent and legitimate the work they already do.

Those agencies that have adopted a rights-based approach have done so by asserting the importance of social, cultural and economic rights. Paradoxically, however, those same agencies widely suppress ethnic identity and its implications in their everyday work. This is despite the claim to embrace social and cultural rights. In a country where the ethnic dimensions of conflict and exploitation are clearly manifest, information on the ethnicity of aid beneficiaries or project partners, for example, is seldom collected let alone subject to analysis. This is even more noticeable given that in many Western countries, collecting such information is a publicly mandated activity. In Africa, however, there is a coyness bordering on embarrassment about ethnic identity among aid agencies. It is as if there is an implicit belief that collecting such information will inflame a quality that many believe Africa is already too well endowed with. From this perspective, the abstract economic categories of development with their discursive

emphasis upon the classification of population in terms of households ranked according to wealth appear as a mollifying substitute for otherwise dubious ethnic and customary relations. On those occasions when NGOs do work together in North Sudan, cooperation is invariably on a sectoral basis, for example, health, nutrition, education, transport, and so on. This very mode of organisational comportment singles a preference for modernity. Aid agencies, however, might be more effective if they supported displaced Southerners in terms of how they themselves attempt to survive (Ryle 1989). That is, not through the suppression of their own ethnic and social identities but by consciously cultivating and maintaining ethnic networks and systems.

Different clans and sub-clans among the Dinka, for example, have adapted to displacement in distinct ways. Some have split their families as a way of attempting to maintain their cattle in the South. Others have sold or transferred their cattle to others and moved family members to the North. If aid agencies attempted to identify these mechanisms and supplied appropriate support, their efforts might be more successful. In relation to the above discussion, for example, NGOs might be more effective if, instead of providing seeds and tools, they paid off the debts of the displaced or campaigned for a living agricultural wage. Instead of providing loans for donkey carts, perhaps they could maintain an emergency transport fund that allowed Southerners to move out of insecure areas without having to sell-off their meagre possessions. However, in framing alternatives in this way, one quickly comes up against the limitations of development as a relation of governance. As agents of modernity, aid agencies are not in the business of supporting ethnic networks or culturally specific modes of survival. Development emphasises the interplay of structural disadvantages and other natural causes in the creation of poverty. Since we cannot change nature, this carries a strong moral obligation for the disadvantaged themselves to change *their* ways. The proper business of aid therefore is to provide the incentives and know-how for the poor to create new forms of social organisation and identity. Supporting ethnic networks jars with this view. One way of addressing this problem lies in the rejection of development as governance relation in favour of re-establishing an international duty of care. Instead of trying to set the poor free by inducing them to change their behaviour, it would require providing help without demanding a return or insisting they become something new. Such a duty would also entail confronting those, whoever they are, who would oppress and exploit. As long as development remains a technology for governing the global

margins, it will continue to be complicit with the systems of authority and exploitation that it encounters.

NOTES

1. This paper draws on my experience as OXFAM's Country Representative for Sudan between 1985 and 1989 and, more recently, fieldwork completed in March–April 1996 and March 1999 as a consultant working for the UN and EU respectively.
2. In relation to war-affected societies, Sudan is an exception that has come to prove the rule. Owing to their geographic location and the nature of the warring parties involved, most complex political emergencies are unlikely to attract the comprehensive array of development tools and funding opportunities envisaged in linking policy.
3. This section is a summary of Duffield *et al.* 2000: ch. 4.

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