Under One Tent: Towards a Localization of Humanitarian Assistance beyond Western Universalis†

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The purpose of this paper is to introduce a research project on humanitarian aid on humanitarian aid and its intersection with the resilience of nomadic peoples in East Africa, with additional reference to the works of Binalakshmi Nepram. The aim is to shed new light on the issue of humanitarian aid, an undertaking that is in fact highly multifaceted, from the standpoint of area studies. It will be illustrated with two cases: usage of rationed items by nomadic peoples and social networks driven by women. Both cases reveal that crisis support at the community level can be conceived of as an imperceptible 'inner shelter', as opposed to the more visible types of support brought in from outside the community. Therefore, it can be argued that the 'universalism' on which the world's customary humanitarianism and humanitarian aid are premised is nothing more than a Western-style understanding of those practices, regarded as the only correct norm. By making heard the voices of peoples that have been ignored or marginalized in the past, area studies strives to gradually pave the way towards a future universality that overcomes the current universalism imposed on the non-Western world by the logic of the powerful.

Against the backdrop of the world's attention on the devastation wrought by the 1984 famine in Ethiopia, nomadic societies in East Africa became the first to receive humanitarian food aid in a systematic fashion on a global scale. They constitute some of the world's poorest people, whom the endeavour to reach has become known as the 'Last Mile', living where famine- and starvation-related humanitarian crises, extreme poverty, low-intensity conflict, and climate change, along with the associated humanitarian assistance, are becoming the norm. Most of these people rely on, and are affected by, humanitarian aid to a greater or lesser degree. However, is the delivery of humanitarian aid and its receipt and consumption a one-way street?

Area studies researchers do not simply choose topics according to their own interests, but are drawn to issues that are important to the people indigenous to the areas where they are

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conducting their research. The research project introduced in this paper arose out of the author's surprising discovery that a conflict had occurred in the mountains behind a peaceful village where he had been conducting research for many years, and to which internally displaced people had fled. After securing the cooperation of researchers from various fields in Japan and abroad, the resulting project (JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25257005) was launched in 2016 for the purpose of localizing humanitarian assistance for nomadic societies in East Africa. A successor project (JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 18H03606) was subsequently launched in 2018 with a focus on resilience in African nomadic societies; it is ongoing.

The research makes some reference to the works of Binalakshmi Nepram along with the current 'rethinking aid' movements.[1] Nepram is a founder of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network that was formed in an attempt to help women whose lives have been changed dramatically because of the gun-related killings of their husbands, fathers, or sons, be it by state or non-state actors or unidentified gunmen.[2] It seems likely that the research presented below and her works have some points in common, which in turn are related to the rethinking aid movements.

I THE UNIVERSALITY GAP

The origins of humanitarianism as a Western concept date back to the eighteenth century.[3] However, after two World Wars, humanitarianism has evolved into an international regime. Since the 1990s, many international humanitarian aid standards have been established on the premise of universalism. Humanitarian assistance requires that affected peoples be treated fairly, regardless of nationality, race, or religious beliefs. However, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that most humanitarian aid standards themselves have a homogenizing effect on human diversity.[4]

Nonetheless, at specific local sites, humanitarian aid is neither a universal nor a cultureless phenomenon. Even when immersed in the most fundamental undertaking of human beings aiding their fellows, humanitarian crises and humanitarian aid sites are also evidently replete with a variety of differences and disparities.

It is a given that there is a gap between East African nomads and global north people in nearly every respect: economic wealth, language and culture, and even the very environment in which the global north people live. It is this gap that inadvertently places Western aid-givers at an overwhelming advantage simply because the 'other side' is in such a position of weakness. Paradoxically, the dispensation of humanitarian aid among fellow human beings must take place in the midst of the invisible gaps that exist between different peoples in the actual field. Nevertheless, area researchers strive to get as close as possible to local residents through field surveys. These researchers have spoken the local languages, slept in the same places, and eaten the same food. They have tried to think and behave like the people of the areas they study.

When area researchers think of human beings, they do not think of people as uniform and perceive them in a colour-blind manner; rather, they seek to always assume the existence of specific people living in a specific environment in a specific region, and recall many

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[1] Enomoto, 'Racism in the development and humanitarian sector'.
[2] Nepram, 'Indigenous women', pp. 118–9.
[3] Minn, 'Toward an anthropology'.
[4] Malkki, 'Speechless emissaries'.

different faces. Can we rethink our assumptions about humanitarian aid from the perspective of those people? In general, people in global north tend to view aid in a perfunctory manner, without fully imagining the world on the receiving end of it. However, is it possible to re-evaluate humanitarian aid from the other side, from the side of the local people who are its recipients?

As specialists in area studies, the researchers contributing to the project outlined below have arrived at the view that through thorough consideration of and reflection upon human differences, we can unveil a reimagined sense of universality and, from there, create a new mode of humanitarian aid provision. The aim of the project to hand is to shed new light on the issue of humanitarian aid, as an undertaking that is in fact highly multifaceted, from the standpoint of area studies.

The major findings made through this project to date have already been published in a special feature in an English-language academic journal in 2017.[5] Later, a Japanese translation of a book containing additional content building on this special feature was also published.[6] Two field cases from Baringo and Samburu County in Kenya serve to illuminate the direction that might be taken by humanitarian aid beyond Western universalism heading towards its localization for non-Western groups worldwide.

Nevertheless, limitations to the two projects below must be acknowledged. One major limitation is research area. Whether the scope is applicable to other indigenous communities facing humanitarian crises beyond East Africa remains unknown. This paper makes a brief reference to the case of indigenous communities in Northeast India facing humanitarian crises, as reported by Binalakshmi Nepram in Manipur, and points to the commonality of both areas.

II CONFLICT CASES IN NORTH-CENTRAL KENYA

A series of conflicts erupted in 2004 in north-central Kenya when a politician from the Pokot ethnic group incited youth to attack neighbouring ethnic groups – the Samburu, Tugen, and Ilchamus – resulting in mutual retaliation. This led to tremendous damage, including homicide, injury, livestock raiding, and torching of houses and household items, and resulted in many internally displaced persons (IDPs). The author has published several articles in Japanese and presented several papers elsewhere on this conflict.[7] Thus, this conflict is only briefly outlined here.

The conflict between the Pokot and the Samburu was the first to break out in 2004. According to a survey by the author, the death toll from the conflict amounted to 590. The number of IDPs was estimated at more than 22,000 by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).[8] This conflict has been reported by several reserchers[9] but has been neglected both by national and international organizations, with the exception of the IDMC and the Red Cross. The IDMC[10] lists a 'lack of information' and the 'neglect of conflict-induced IDPs' as distinctive attributes of the conflict.

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[5] Konaka and Sun, '*Localization of humanitarian assistance*'.
[6] Konaka, Sun, and Ohta, '*Humanitarian assistance*'.
[7] Konaka, 'Significance of field research', 'Reconsidering spatiality', and 'Pastoral livelihood'.
[8] IDMC, 'I am', p. 33.
[9] Greiner, 'Unexpected', 'Guns'; Okumu, 'Conflict'; Holtzman, 'Killing'. Greiner, 'Unexpected consequences', 'Guns, land, and votes'; Okumu, 'Conflict over Ltungai'; Holtzman, 'Killing your neighbors'
[10] IDMC, ibid, p. 33.

The media and international organizations have pointed out various factors as the primary causes of this conflict, including traditional cattle-rustling activities and clashes over scarce resources due to recurrent drought related to global climate change. However, research data collected by the author from informants of the area contrast sharply with these factors. The conflict was caused by a politician, 'X', from the Pokot, who inflamed the parochialism of the local people in order to gather votes. In 2000, before the conflict, he had made an election campaign speech as a prospective Member of Parliament claiming that the present land of the Samburu had once belonged to the Pokot. He also promised that the land taken from the Samburu would be distributed to the local supporters of the Pokot as a reward. He incited local administrative chiefs and local Pokot to continuous violence. The more raids he initiated, the more politically popular he became. On the strength of this 'election campaign', X was elected as a Member of Parliament (MP). The Samburu and Pokot had maintained good relationships and shared grazing land with one another, especially during the drought, until the politician intervened.

Acting as their patron, MP X supplied local people with hundreds of smuggled automatic rifles from Uganda and funds, ordering them to raid their enemies' livestock. Then, local people bribed local police officers with the funds and used the weapons to raid livestock. Livestock was sold at the market or butchery. About 40 per cent of livestock sales went to MP X. The proceeds were used in turn to purchase weapons on the black market.

In 2009, this conflict between the Pokot and the Samburu was mostly over, apparently due in main part to political pressure exerted by the internal security minister. Another reason was the powerful defence and counterattack by an impregnable clustered settlement of the Samburu that had purchased four bazookas from corrupt Kenyan police. Their defeat by this settlement led the Pokot to abandon their invasion.

When the Pokot realized that the Samburu were a formidable opponent, they shifted their attention to the neighbouring ethnic groups, the Tugen and Ilchamus. From 2005 to 2013, these two groups came under heavy attack from the Pokot. The death toll among the Tugen was 22 and the Ilchamus, 10. About 10,000 Tugen and Ilchamus were displaced.[11]

III TENTS: A SPHERE OF ARTICULATION

In November 2012, immediately after the outbreak of the conflict in Baringo County, the Red Cross distributed resources such as tents, water containers, tableware, cooking utensils, blankets, and maize flour as emergency relief supplies to the persons displaced by it. It is the use of the tents by the internally displaced persons of the Tugen and Ilchamus that is particularly salient to a more insightful understanding of truly 'universal' humanitarian aid.

Tents were deployed in three ways: First, worn-out tents were used as roofing materials for resettlement housing (photo 1). Second, tents were used to erect a livestock enclosure for young goats and sheep (photo 2). Third, worn-out tents were used to construct roofs, applying techniques used when organizing grazing camps (photo 3).

Of course, these tents were originally distributed by the humanitarian aid organization to provide temporary shelter for the internally displaced. However, as these tents became worn within about three months, the recipients, who endured displacement for longer periods than that, began acquiring shelter in forms other than tents through various means. This is because many nomads have the skills and knowledge to erect their own shelters

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[11] Report in *NATION*, 9 Jan. 2014.

Photo 1: Traditional House of Tugen
Photograph by the author, 8 September 2013.

Photo 2: An Enclosure of Young Goats and Sheep
Photograph by the author, 9 September 2013.

Photo 3: Grazing Camp Style Temporary Hu
Photograph by the author, 10 September 2013.

using natural materials, mainly plants, that grow in the areas in which they take up residence. In essence, the tents that were distributed were not necessarily meaningful as relief supplies that could completely replace the nomads' homes. However, the natural materials normally used by the nomads are insufficient to prevent rain infiltrating their homes; internally displaced persons are well aware of the water resistance of tents and use worn tents primarily as roofing material for their dwellings and livestock sheds. This suggests that while residing in shelters, internally displaced persons of nomadic origin were using the resources distributed by the humanitarian aid organizations in ways not expected.

Thus, this field research revealed surprising aspects of humanitarian aid provision. These mismatches in the intentions of the giver and the lateral repurposing of the recipient may be perceived as a conflict between the global aid regime and local traditional cultures. We can speak of the intermediate realm between the universal and the local in which this interchange takes place as the 'articulation sphere'. However, the articulation sphere is not a synonym for a pure, traditional, coherent, static, discrete, and homogeneous culture. On

the contrary, the articulation sphere entails the hybridity, discontinuity, incoherence, dynamism, non-discrete nature, and heterogeneity of culture. Therefore, what is at issue in the articulation sphere is the various cultural, political, and circumstantial phenomena, as experienced by the aid recipients, that are already affected by global humanitarian aid and that arose 'post-change', as opposed to culture in the traditional sense. Stated differently, it is not the unique aspects of local traditional cultures themselves that need more attention when providing humanitarian aid, but rather the uniqueness of the combination of the global and the local. This can be labelled the 'articulation sphere approach'.

IV WOMEN IN PATRILINEAL CONTEXTS

The members of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network in Northeast India are skilled at making handloom and handicraft items, which Binalakshmi Nepram praised in her lecture as 'magic in their hands'.[12] It also forms part of the intangible knowledge that has kept them alive in spite of the extremely difficult circumstances of conflict. What the works of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network reveal is the potential of women's networks under conditions of humanitarian crisis. The everyday commodities used by disaster victims are often referred to as 'non-food items' by humanitarian aid practitioners. However, the means by which such items are obtained by disaster victims is not yet well understood. In this section, a breakdown of how the 23 most indigent households among the nomadic internally displaced persons of the Samburu in Kenya acquired their minimum-level necessities is provided through an inventory survey of household commodities.

  Table 1 shows 2011 data concerning the social relationships between Kenyan Samburu nomadic internally displaced persons and members of the surrounding community who provided them with household items such as clothes, dishes, and cooking utensils. The wives' brothers accounted for the highest percentage at 36.6 per cent. This was followed by the wives' sisters, who accounted for 23.4 per cent of the total. Together, the wives' brothers and sisters accounted for 60 per cent of supporters from the local community. Table 2 shows the relationship between nomads who were internally displaced persons and the local residents who gave gifts to them, by relationship, for new household goods obtained between 2011 and 2014. Here, we can see that the wives' sisters accounted for the highest percentage, 36.4 per cent. What is clear from these findings is that the relationships between internally displaced nomads and the local residents who provided them with household items are driven in a significant fashion through women.

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12 Nepram, 'Plenary intergenerational dialogue'.

Table 1: Relationships between Local Donors of Household
Commodities and Pastoral Samburu IDPs, Kenya, 2011

Relationship	Real Number	Percentage
Wife's brother	64	36.6%
Wife's sister	41	23.4%
Clanmate	15	8.6%
Wife's mother	9	5.1%
Husband's brother	7	4.0%
Neighbors	7	4.0%
Husband's mother	6	3.4%
Daughter	6	3.4%
Husband's sister	4	2.3%
Maternal uncle of husband	4	2.3%
Friend	4	2.3%
Wife's father	2	1.1%
Paternal uncle of wife	2	1.1%
Son's wife	2	1.1%
Maternal grandmother of wife	1	0.6%
Husband of daughter	1	0.6%
Total	175	100.0%

This trend for women to serve as a conduit for support seems to be related to the husband-centred virilocal marriages associated with paternal exogamy in nomadic Samburu society. In Samburu families, where kinship is traced patrilineally, marriage partners are chosen from outside the same patrilineal kinship group. Additionally, after marriage, the bride typically leaves her parents' home to live in the village of her husband's relatives, whom she will not know beforehand. As a result, the husband will live in the same community as his brothers, whereas the wife will live in a community far away from both her brothers and sisters. As such, if a married man faces a situation where he must flee from conflict, it is likely that his brother's household also has to flee as well, as they will likely reside in the same area. By contrast, the man's sisters who left home for marriage are more likely to be living in other areas away from their brother, and thus are more likely to be unaffected by the conflict. Their network of social relationships can serve as a safety net.

In Samburu society, even in times of peace, brothers and sisters of wives often visit one another's households to greet one another and exchange gifts of money, food, and household goods. In this society, it is essentially the wives who have custody and control of the household's supply of resources, and as such, on these occasions of giving, it is inevitably the wives, rather than the husbands, who will receive such household goods.

For these reasons, it is likely that relationships based on linkages driven by women were central in the sharing of household goods with internally displaced persons. In general, a

Table 2: Relationships between Local Donors of
Newly Obtained Household Commodities from 2011
to 14 and Pastoral Samburu IDPs, Kenya

Relationship	Real Number	Percentage
Wife's sister	16	36.4%
Husband's mother	4	9.1%
Son	4	9.1%
Wife's mother	4	9.1%
Clanmate	4	9.1%
Husband's brother	2	4.5%
Husband's friend	2	4.5%
Suitor to husband's sister	1	2.3%
Husband's sister	1	2.3%
Father (within household)	1	2.3%
Brother of wife's mother	1	2.3%
Wife's friend	1	2.3%
Election campaigner	1	2.3%
Wife's brother	1	2.3%
Daughter	1	2.3%
Total	44	100.0%

stereotypical image prevails of men holding patriarchal power in nomadic societies,[13] and this can lead to the view that patrilineal kinship is important as a safety net in humanitarian crises. The results of the survey, however, reveal the opposite is the case, and that there is a need to pay heed to the importance of woman-driven social linkages. It is important to note that even in nomadic societies, which have been said to be patrilineal, the network of social relations through women has the potential to become the key to local humanitarian aid.

V 'INVISIBLE' NETWORKS

With the above in mind, what kind of humanitarian aid can be derived from the results of these field surveys? What this project has revealed is that nomadic peoples have devised their own self-help systems in the face of humanitarian crises.

This implies that the very concept of protection for victims of humanitarian crises needs to be questioned. The protection narrative presupposes a stereotypical image of victims of humanitarian crises as helpless, vulnerable, miserable, dependent, and bound by patriarchy. What this project has revealed, however, is that protection for victims of humanitarian crises is not limited to external circles, and that there is indeed a sphere of 'invisible shelter' within and between nomadic communities.

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[13] Hodgson, 'Rethinking pastoralism'; Rigby, 'Persistent Pastoralists', 'African Images'.

Sada Mire, a Swedish-Somali archaeologist who in the past was a refugee herself, made an important point at an international conference on this project.[14] While people are left with very little in the way of material things in nomadic life, much is instead preserved in the form of intangible knowledge. Knowledge of how to erect a dwelling and fashion everyday necessities is preserved through practice, and it was this very knowledge that enabled Dr Mire to survive when she became a refugee. Everyday items may become unavailable and unattainable at any time during nomadic living, and as such it was necessary to preserve the know-how to recreate such items when needed. It is thus clear that there exists a level of 'invisible humanitarian aid' created by recipient displaced peoples themselves, together with the local people, during humanitarian crises that is categorically distinct from the humanitarian aid provided by international organizations. The woman-driven network of social relations, a key element in the acquisition of household goods by nomadic internally displaced persons as described earlier, is another example of this 'invisible humanitarian aid'. It is not limited to East African nomads; the same type of phenomena can be found among indigenous communities around the world, as Nepram asserts: 'Indigenous Peoples around the world strive to be in synergy with nature. They depend immensely on the available natural resources, yet at the same time comprehend the value of these resources for the survival of their future generations.'[15]

The sphere of support at the community level can be referred to as 'inner shelter', as opposed to the visible types of support brought in from outside the community, such as maize as food aid, tents, and emergency medical supplies. This inner shelter is not as discernible as those items. Rather, the inner shelter in this context possesses the characteristics of being fleeting, highly fragile, and elastic, but nonetheless resistant to crisis scenarios. Rather than the traditional culture and society itself, it is the 'mutations' that have been produced by the changes in norms following disasters and crises which are the precise focus of the articulation sphere approach. This area has been overlooked by those working in the fields of development and humanitarian aid, as well as by area studies researchers conducting field research.

At the same time, however, when a community is threatened by a humanitarian crisis, it is rather unrealistic to conceive of a model of humanitarian aid provided solely by members of that community, without any external intervention. The macho image of displaced people that irresponsibly glorifies them as 'strong and resilient refugees' is merely the flip side of the image of displaced people as vulnerable pointed out earlier. Rather, such people have barely survived through their dependence on social and environmental networks of interdependence, as illustrated by the meagre inventory of household items sourced by Samburu women in tables 1 and 2. What is advocated here is a complementary combination of the inner shelter created by nomadic communities and the outer shelter created by external intervention. The articulation sphere method is an avenue along which to pursue this more inclusive and two-way humanitarian aid delivery.

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14 Mire, 'Comment 2'.
15 Nepram, 'Indigenous women', p. 110.

VI CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussions, it can now be seen that there are necessarily invisible forms of humanitarian aid manifesting in various parts of the world. While these modes of aid provision have not garnered significant attention to date, they are unique to each region. We can see that the universalism on which the humanitarianism and humanitarian aid on which the world's customary humanitarianism and humanitarian aid are premised is nothing more than a Western-style conception taken as the only correct norm and imposed on the non-Western world.[16] This is by no means to advocate a return to reliance on a grasp of the traditional culture of each region. What this project has attempted to accomplish is a liberation from and expansion of the current form of Western universalism, which sees Western norms as the only 'correct' norms, to a truly 'universal' universalism that can include the concerns and ideas of non-Western regions through re-assessment of what has traditionally been considered a universal form of humanitarian aid. Of course, this is not to suggest there are necessarily problems with Western norms, but that they must be understood as one set of a variety of norms that exist around the world.

This project, which advocates humanitarian aid from the standpoint of area studies, will be a step towards a new universalism that can affirm the diversity of the world as it is, in a world filled with regional diversity. By making heard the voices of peoples that have been ignored or marginalized in the past, area studies strives to gradually pave the way towards a future universality forged through the collision of regional diversities, overcoming the current universalism imposed on the non-Western world by the logic of the powerful.

Binalakshmi Nepram mentioned in her lecture that 'to change is to look around your own locality'.[17] Her attempts and those laid out above can be said to be a part of the movement of placing the local residents and the potential of their diverse forms of self-help first. Both attempts share common ground. It is to be hoped that continued discussion presenting humanitarian aid from local perspectives will be a small step towards a new common horizon of humanitarianism.

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[16] Donini, 'Humanitarianism'.
[17] Nepram, 'Responding to rising armed conflict'.

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