

**THE DYNAMICS OF COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES:  
AN ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHY PERSPECTIVE**

**BY**

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# The Dynamics of Complex Humanitarian Emergencies

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This paper on Transnational Security Issues will focus on intergroup conflicts and the resultant refugee movements. My aim will be to discuss the factors behind group insecurity as, explanatory variables in complex emergencies. Complex emergencies are a modern version of phenomena that have existed since premodern times in pastoral societies. This study is an attempt to analyze the dynamics behind complex emergencies which are a combination of *primitive* and *forced migrations* (Petersen 1957). *Primitive* migrations result from an ecological push. In *forced* migrations the triggering event is social pressure by other groups. In this analysis, I will elaborate on the following general areas into which these factors may be categorized:

- 1) Forced Migration.
- 2) Explosive Market Structures.
- 3) Kinship Capital.
- 4) Focal Points.

I will use rational choice theory and conceptual frameworks from demography to answer the following set of questions in the future:

- 1) Why do complex emergencies arise?
- 2) Why does a natural disaster play a role in causing intergroup conflict in some societies and in others leads to *kinship capital* being used to manage emergency situations?
- 3) What are the transnational networks that can be constructed to prevent intergroup conflict from developing in societies which do not have an adequate accumulation

of kinship capital ?

**Nature and Importance of the Problem:**

A complex humanitarian emergency occurs when a natural disaster plays a role in the outbreak of intergroup conflict (Bok S., 1994). McNeill's historical epidemiology theory of migration in premodern times (McNeill W.H., 1987) can be extended to the analysis of these *complex emergencies*, to understand the causes of *forced migration* that occurs. The outbreak of intergroup conflict amidst a natural disaster can be analyzed as the forced replacement of one population by another. The population being replaced suffers from high mortality caused by violence. These dynamics occur within an ecumene occupied by human populations whose social organization reflects the carrying capacity of their landscapes (McNeill, 1987). The population patterns can be understood as the output of generative social structures existing. These are the unintended consequences of attempts to cope with the environment risks determined by the ecology. A triggering event such as a drought leads to activation of this unobservable structure (Menezes L.M., 1996). Tribal warfare serves as a highly rational mechanism for adapting to harsh ecologies (Bourdieu 1966, Abou-Zeid 1966), enhancing reproductive fitness (Chagnon 1988) and maintaining equilibrium between natural resources and the resident populations following a natural disaster. These population dynamics have been in existence since historical times in the grasslands of the Eurasian steppes, the savanna lands of Africa and in the Middle East according to McNeill ( McNeill, 1987). Countries in which emergencies arise today such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Mauritania among others in Africa; Bosnia, the Nagorno-

Karabakh region in Eastern Europe; Tajikistan in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the Near East are situated in these areas.

According to Alex de Waal despite the existence of such conflict, some form of economic activity in the form of trading between hostile groups does take place (de Waal, 1990). According to Benet, market structures do exist in noncentralized segmentary societies where blood feud and intergroup conflict are prevalent. These markets maintained by intergroup truces are referred to as *explosive markets* (Benet 1957). Thus a paradoxical situation arises of the neutral jurisdiction of the market existing amidst the complexity of intergroup conflict.

An analysis of these population processes and social structures should help explain the paradoxical events that occur during emergencies when food is used a weapon of war, markets become targets of intergroup conflict, and the acquisition of territory belonging to others occurs.

**Background:**

Oded Stark and David Bloom have shown how migration can be analyzed as a supergame where migrants act cooperatively in replicating each other actions. This enables them to become more successful economically in their place of destination than the natives who behave noncooperatively (Stark and Bloom 1993). According to them, this process of coordination of actions in an economy undertaken by migrant networks is the accumulation of *kinship capital*. Kinship in this framework is not based on blood ties but, on a shared perception of efficient ways of cooperation among agents in an economy in resource allocation, in giving credit and so on.

According to Robert Bates, kinship is a social construct that is used to organize capital accumulation in high risk environments (Bates 1989). His central thesis is that

development patterns, including state building, should be understood in terms of the structure of kinship prevalent in a tribal society where kinship is a reflection of attempts to form capital and cope with the risk environment determined by the ecology in which a society is situated.

This line of inquiry regarding kinship capital initiated by Oded Stark, David Bloom and Robert Bates will be extended to the analysis of forced migration and the existence of explosive markets.

### **Method**

The *theory of focal points* proposed by Schelling and developed by Bacharach and Sugden will be used to analyze the *epistemic rationality* (Bicchieri, 1993) that is an intrinsic part of group identity in these societies. The concept of *focal points* has been proposed by Thomas Schelling as a solution to the problem of coordination in bargaining and has been further developed by Bacharach and Sugden (Schelling, 1963, Bacharach 1987, Sugden 1995). A *focal point* is defined as the point of coordination of behavior between individuals who have a shared perception of prominent ways of coordinating their actions. This will explain why these conflicts are not amenable to arbitration.

Intergroup conflict in high risk environments in the aftermath of a natural disaster can be regarded as an attempt to secure capital in order to enhance population fitness. Capital can be defined as the entitlement relations that exist in a society. Entitlement relations refers to the capacity to command resources in an economy with a *certain choice environment* (Sen 1981). In an "uncertain choice environment" capital accumulation takes the form of force exerted to gain entitlements.

The literature in bargaining theory assumes that agents in an economy can easily determine each other's reasoning which enables them to coordinate their actions

in determining an equilibrium solution to a resource allocation problem. According to Bacharach this *transparency in reasoning* implicitly assumes a common cultural identity among agents. Resource allocation problems when the information available is incomplete or imperfect can be solved easily as, each agent has the ability to infer how other agents view their options. This is because there are some prominent ways of coordination called *focal points* which are known to everyone.

In societies where complex emergencies occur, there are no prominent ways of coordination of behavior that agents can use to allocate resources. This is due to the differences in cultural identities among agents. Agents know the *focal points* for coordination accepted within their group but, do not have any knowledge about *the focal points* for coordination outside their group. During a natural disaster in a society with limited natural resources, this difference in the *focal points* and the instantaneous need to ensure group survival leads to a solution to the resource allocation problem taking the form of a Darwinian survival of the fittest dynamic. This dynamic is inherent in the sequence of events that take place in complex emergencies.

A Darwinian solution is most likely to occur in pastoral economies where there is a fixed capital reserve of livestock and fodder and the grazing grounds used by the different groups overlap. In societies where the capital reserves are not fixed, the density of population use plays a role in the development of new forms of capital (Boserup, 1981). The solution to a resource allocation problem is most likely to be the use of networks to accumulate, manage and redistribute *kinship capital*.

In the international context of humanitarian aid, the issues before the global community are:

- 1) What should an external agent do when intergroup conflict arises amidst a natural disaster?
- 2) What form should the transnational networks take to help the society move from using intergroup conflict to *kinship capital* as a solution to the allocation of scarce resources during an emergency?

This is the line of inquiry I propose to undertake in fulfilling the following theoretical objectives <sup>1</sup> :

- 1) Exploring the intersection of political economy and culture using a rational choice theoretic framework.
- 2) Developing the foundation of a research agenda aimed at rigorously integrating principles of substantive economic anthropology with models in cooperative game theory.

This perspective will be used to conduct an explanatory analysis in the future of intergroup conflict in the Farghana Valley in Eastern Uzbekistan where due to conditions of resource stress there has been an ongoing low intensity conflict between Meshketian Turks (Turkicized Georgians) and Uzbekis.

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<sup>2</sup> Citations which have been highlighted are those used in the research proposal.