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Humanitarianism at home: Exploring practitioners' perspectives on the relevance of humanitarianism in Australia

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CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Australia has faced various unprecedented challenges in recent years: the extended bushfire season of 2019–20, wide-spread and increasingly severe storms and flooding, and the grave health and socio-economic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Such events have prompted greater awareness of our shared vulnerability to disasters. They have also exacerbated food insecurity, homelessness, poverty, family violence, and increased the vulnerability of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia. Where disasters and similar issues are identified in low-income countries, they are typically framed in terms of humanitarian need and may even be the subject of international humanitarian action. Why is it then, that the language and practices of humanitarianism are not ordinarily applied in Australian settings? What indeed is humanitarianism when it is not international? What, if anything, do international experiences of humanitarianism have to offer in Australian contexts? This paper describes a research program that has been prompted by these questions and shares some preliminary findings concerning the perspectives of Australian practitioners on the relevance of humanitarian values, knowledge, and practices in Australia.

Introduction

What is the relevance of humanitarianism in Australia? While many Australians can conjure hazy notions of what humanitarians do overseas—images of aid workers delivering convoys of food to victims of war, famine or disaster come to mind—it is less clear whether or how humanitarianism is practiced in Australia during times of disaster or in response to human needs. This lack of clarity arguably derives from a long-standing association with humanitarian action as an international project aimed at the amelioration of "distant suffering" (Boltanski, 1999) by the "heroic humanitarian worker… [as] righteous foreigner" (Slim, 2010, p. 1205). Historically, this popular construction has not only concealed the relationship between Western humanitarian aid and Western imperialism, but further perpetuated a myth that humanitarian response is something that only happens 'over there' among lower income countries. Yet if humanitarian principles and values are indeed universal, then the exercise of humanitarian values, knowledge, and practices, is relevant whether at home or abroad. Towards the aim of deepening our understanding of humanitarianism and decolonising humanitarian practice, this paper describes some preliminary findings derived from the perspectives of Australian practitioners on the notion of 'humanitarianism at home'.

In some regards, emerging conversations about humanitarian practice in domestic contexts have been imposed by recent 'unprecedented' disasters in numerous high-income countries, such as Australia, the US, and across western Europe. In the Australian context such events include devastating bushfires during 2019–20, widespread and damaging storms and flooding during 2021, and the ongoing health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19. These events have prompted an acute awareness of our shared vulnerability to disasters and have even, at times, inverted the more expected dynamic of Australia as a provider of emergency assistance to other countries (Book & Coghlan 2020). At the opening of Parliament in February 2020, amid the devastating 2019–20 fire season, for example, the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison acknowledged the scale of the devastation across the nation and noted the offers of assistance coming from as many as 70 countries:

> Over 300 firefighters were sent from the United States, Canada and New Zealand, to whom we are so grateful. We also had offers of assistance from the UAE, which is greatly appreciated. There was military assistance from New Zealand, the United States, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore and Japan, and from our wonderful family in PNG and Fiji … Our Pacific family has been so incredibly generous. Our neighbours, such as Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands, have given generously from not much—reminding me of the widow's mite—to our bushfire relief. (Parliament of Australia, 2020).

The destruction from the bushfires and far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 have been such that the normal government structures and processes that aim to manage emergencies and enable recovery were overwhelmed (Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements [RCNDA], 2020; Atkinson and Curnin, 2020). Consequently, government at all levels has been called to better prepare for and respond to disasters, leading to the creation of initiatives such as Bushfire Recovery Victoria in January 2020, Resilience NSW in May 2020, and the establishment of a Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNDA, 2020). At a local level, these events have also challenged many Australian communities, raising questions about their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster (Tin, Hart and Ciottone, 2020). The experience of these emergency events has also led to many positive examples of community-led recovery and innovative models of government service delivery (Victorian Council of Social Service, 2020).

Does the concept of humanitarianism then simply not have utility in Australian settings?

The successive crises of recent years have also precipitated greater engagement from traditional and non-traditional humanitarian actors, the private sector, and not-for-profits. The involvement of humanitarian organisations like the Australian Red Cross was already well established and reflects their pre-existing humanitarian mandates. However, what has been striking is the growing number of not-for-profit actors now operating in sectors that would certainly be considered humanitarian in overseas disaster settings. This includes sectors represented in the United Nations humanitarian cluster system such as shelter, protection, early recovery, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and food security. For example, addressing food insecurity and food waste is a key focus of organisations such as OzHarvest, Second Bite, Fareshare, FoodBank, Halal Food Aid, and Sikh Volunteers Australia. Although these organisations have reported recent and dramatic expansions of their operations, their experiences also indicate that food security issues in Australia predates the recent crises due to bushfires, storms, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Convery and Henriques-Gomes, 2021).

While some cross-fertilisation between the international humanitarian sector and domestic emergency management and community service provision is evident, in part due to the significant transfer of personnel and expertise from the international humanitarian roles to domestic roles, there appears more generally to be a major disconnect between the principles, practices, and approaches of the international humanitarian system and those

of domestic emergency management. It is notable that only passing reference to 'humanitarian' or 'humanitarian services' can be identified in the voluminous grey literature that has emerged in the wake of the 2019–20 fires and COVID-19. Does the concept of humanitarianism then simply not have utility in Australian settings?

Reading against the grain of a literature which is largely silent regarding the synergies of international humanitarianism and domestic disaster response, there have been some attempts to draw these areas together (e.g. Flint, Henty and Hurley, 2020; RCNDA, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). In the context of the 2019–20 bushfire response some commentators have identified the emergence of "hyper-local, agile humanitarian responses to the crisis using the knowledge, skills and resources they had on hand" (Wilson et al., 2020, p.74) Conversely, others have noted examples of bushfire recovery interventions that made similar mistakes, and experienced parallel challenges, to those consistently met in international humanitarian responses. For example, the task of managing unsolicited bilateral donations, or donated goods, is a recurring problem of international humanitarian and domestic disaster responses, with most responding agencies indicating a strong preference for cash donations instead (Flint, Henty and Hurley, 2020). Yet, it remains striking that use of the words 'humanitarian' and 'humanitarianism' is mostly absent in Australia, where the structured and legislative language of emergency management, disaster response and recovery is predominant. Consequently, there is limited reference to, or intentional application of, humanitarian principles and practices in the domestic context, along with limited exploration of the potential for domestic responses to be informed by lessons drawn from international humanitarian action.

While comprehensive or formal attempts to apply international humanitarian principles, practices and knowledge in domestic responses may be limited, anecdotally there is a significant transfer of experience and knowledge from the international sector to Australian contexts. As the career paths of many of the practitioners interviewed for this research reveal, the boundaries between international and domestic work are highly fluid. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic but also reflecting a significant shift in the international humanitarian sector toward increased local leadership and reduced expatriate roles in many international responses, many seasoned expatriate humanitarian professionals have reportedly returned to Australia to take on various domestic emergency management and disaster recovery roles. This represents a dramatic shift in the humanitarian workforce with implications for both domestic and international emergency management that have not yet been fully explored.

These opening paragraphs have sought to demonstrate that it is timely to give renewed reflection to the relevance of humanitarianism in domestic settings. These settings include various forms of work in domestic emergency management and recovery, in community development, disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and social service delivery aimed at increasing wellbeing and resilience across a range of areas (e.g., health, aged care, disability support, homelessness, refugees and asylum seekers, etc.). While such 'social services' are rarely described as humanitarian in Australian contexts, when such activities are conducted overseas they often framed as forms of humanitarian action. Why is this case and is it important?

This paper aims to encourage a conversation about the meaning and relevance of humanitarianism at home. Having briefly outlined some of the contemporary events which have prompted the emergence of this conversation, the following section provides a historical perspective and explores academic and grey literature which frames our knowledge of humanitarianism in Australia. Next, we describe our research program, the methodology being employed, and the data collection presently underway. The findings and discussion are then focused on the initial responses of the research participants to our question about the meaning of the phrase 'humanitarianism at home'. Building on these initial findings, the paper concludes by identifying a set of questions to be further explored as part of an ongoing research program.

What is humanitarianism?

The founding idea of humanitarianism is the recognition of shared humanity – a belief in the basic dignity of all human beings regardless of race, status, age, gender, ability, or geography (Slim 2015). The principle of humanity has come to be identified as the first of four core humanitarian principles, along with impartiality, neutrality, independence. However, in the broadest sense, as adopted in this research, it is recognition of our shared humanity and a desire to promote human welfare that characterises humanitarianism. With recognition of our shared humanity emerges the humanitarian imperative. That is, a "right to receive humanitarian assistance and to offer it" (International Federation of the Red Cross, 1995), in order to save lives, prevent suffering and promote human dignity (Slim, 2002).

In the contemporary era, the guardian of humanitarian principles has been the International Committee of the Red Cross. The four core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, originated as four of the seven fundamental principles intended to guide the Red Cross movement (Bartnett and Weiss, 2008). The remaining fundamental principles of voluntary service, unity and universality were deemed specific to the Red Cross movement, but the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence have since been widely adopted by most international humanitarian organisations and for many, define humanitarian action (Barnett and Weiss, 2008). Significantly, while some scholars have pointed out that humanitarianism is popularly

understood in terms of international action to relieve "distant suffering" (Boltanski, 1999), there is nothing inherent to humanitarianism that implies that it needs to be international in scope. This gives rise to the key question explored in this paper which is what is humanitarianism when it is not international? In other words, what is humanitarianism when it is at home?

In one letter to the editor in 1848, humanitarians advocating for the abolition of the death penalty were ridiculed for their "maudlin, blundering compassion", for their "mingled weakness and effrontery" and mocked for their "super-celestial philanthropy"

The recognition of a moral obligation to help others in need is ancient and common to all major religious and cultural traditions (Yeophantong, 2014). However, the appearance of the word 'humanitarian' in the English language seems to be relatively recent (Macquarie Dictionary, 2017). The term is not widely used in the Australian or British media until well into the 19th Century. From the 1830s onwards, Australian newspapers begin for the first time to refer to various individuals and a wide range of reform movements as 'humanitarian'. Among other things, humanitarians in the 1830s argued for "matured plans of effective [re] conciliation" between the Aboriginal population and European settlers (Philaleth, 1833). Others in the 1840s advocated for the abolition of capital punishment, for prison reform and an end to convict transportation. In the 1850s, humanitarians in the Australian colonies celebrated the abolition of the slave trade and organised relief efforts to address famine in Donegal, Ireland (Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal, 1858). Then, as now, there were a wide range of highly divisive debates in the daily press. Frequently the term 'humanitarian' was used to denigrate progressives and social reformers. In one letter to the editor in 1848, humanitarians advocating for the abolition of the death penalty were ridiculed for their "maudlin, blundering compassion", for their "mingled weakness and effrontery" and mocked for their "super-celestial philanthropy" (Harpur, 1848).

In the 1850s and 1860s a specific form of humanitarianism with an international focus entered the popular imagination. The coordination of assistance provided to wounded soldiers during the Crimean War by Florence Nightingale (1854–56), after the Battle of Solferino by Henri Dunant (1859), and during the American Civil War (1861–65) by Clara Barton gave each of these individuals a measure of humanitarian celebrity status. Growing sentiment for humanitarian activities resulted in the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863) and ratification of the 1864 Geneva Convention (Maxwell and Walker, 2008). This sparked a trend of increasing institutionalisation and internationalisation of humanitarianism—a trend that has continued into the contemporary era (Barnett and Weiss, 2008). For the better part of 150 years the popular imagination of the humanitarian has been captured by an exotic vision of international aid work, led by expatriate representatives of various international or non-government organisations (de Waal and de Waal, 1999).

What is humanitarianism at home?

In this paper the concept of 'humanitarianism at home' is juxtaposed against international humanitarian action which we argue is the dominant form of modern humanitarianism. A small but important body of academic literature has similarly focused on humanitarian action within Australia and other high-income countries. The phrase 'everyday humanitarianism' used by Richey (2018, p. 628) draws attention both to the manifold ways that 'citizen/consumers' engage in humanitarianism and try to 'make a difference' as well as the everyday practices of humanitarian aid workers. In the Australian context, in a study of local community-led responses to the 2019–20 bushfires, Wilson et al. (2020, p. 13) identify a framework of "everyday humanitarian behaviours that can be enacted in any humanitarian context". Research by Olliff (2018) draws attention to the 'everyday humanitarianism' of refugee diaspora organisations in Australia as humanitarian actors in their own right, who not only provide support to members of their community in Australia but also actively respond to the needs of 'their people' located in their homeland or in sites of displacement. Vivekananthan and Connors (2019) have similarly highlighted the important humanitarian assistance provided following disasters to the Pacific through Australia-based diaspora networks.

The term 'domestic humanitarianism' has also gained analytic purchase and has been used by Altman to describe advocacy work and support provided within Australia to refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia. Altman (2018, p. 2) blogs how her notion of "the domestic humanitarian combines a universalised humanitarian impulse with feelings of duty or responsibility tied to citizenship: providing 'humanitarianism at home'." Other scholars also use the term 'domestic humanitarianism' to describe the controversial work of archetypal international humanitarian organisation Medicins Sans Frontiers to provide services within France (Hanrieder and Galesne, 2021).

Through our conception of 'humanitarianism at home' we seek to provide a lens to examine a wide range of activities that would be considered humanitarian if they were carried out overseas. These activities include but are not necessarily limited to:

- emergency management
- disaster prevention, response and recovery
- services in support of refugees and people seeking asylum

- foodbanks and related services focused on reducing food insecurity
- aged care, disability support and palliative care
- crisis and emergency accommodation and associated protection activities.

As the broad scope of potential settings outlined above already foreshadows, this paper adopts a broader than usual definition of 'humanitarianism'. 'Humanitarianism' carries a range of definitions. As Olliff observes, in broad terms "humanitarianism has been taken to mean an ethos or 'cluster of sentiments' that places value on human beings and compels action in response to human suffering" (2019, p. 2). This describes rather well the wide scope of actions that take place in both domestic and international settings to address human needs in times of disaster or suffering. While international humanitarian action is now subject to an expansive academic and grey literature, consideration of the relevance of humanitarianism at home is largely absent from academic conversations.

Methodology and sample

Toward the aim of exploring the concept of 'humanitarianism at home', the research program was launched with an online event held on 4 November 2021[1]. The event gathered a range of speakers, with domestic and international experience, and included some of Australia's leading social justice advocates and champions. The presenters were each invited to share about their work and their reflections on humanitarianism in Australia. Invariably, they shied away from identifying as humanitarians. Instead, their presentations tended to emphasise our collective responsibility for the vulnerable and the alleviation of their suffering, and the actions we can take to empower marginalised groups and to protect their dignity and advance their human rights.

Commencing with the event participants, we invited expressions of interest from those interested in joining a qualitative interview in the topic, and/or nominating colleagues who might be interested in receiving an invitation. Invitation emails were sent to potential research participants, including practitioners working in disaster response and recovery, emergency management, social and community services in Australia. All were invited to contribute to the research by sharing knowledge and experience related to humanitarian values, knowledge, and practices in Australian contexts.

Following our receipt of expressions of interest, potential respondents were then sent an email with a plain language statement attached. The potential participants were invited to confirm their interest in participating and nominate a preferred time. Each interview commenced with an opportunity for participants to ask any questions about the plain language statement and commenced once the participants provided verbal consent and confirmed that they would formally send an email confirming this in writing.

The qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted via the teleconferencing platform Zoom. Audio recordings were subsequently converted into text using the transcription services provided by Rev, which included a combination of human transcription and artificial intelligence. The interviews were conducted between November and December 2021, with further interviews scheduled for January and February 2022. This paper presents preliminary findings derived from the initial 15 interviews conducted in late 2021. Specifically, our findings are focused on the participants' responses to the opening question: "You have kindly agreed to participate in this research project about 'humanitarianism at home'. Please explain what this phrase means to you?"

The sample included 15 participants, comprised of eight males and seven females, all of whom identified as Australian. The participants generally occupied senior positions within their government, non-government, and corporate organisations, having worked in their fields for an average of 15 years.

We employed an inductive qualitative approach aimed at understanding "social processes in context" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 2). The social processes in this context relate to the conceptualisation of humanitarianism by practitioners working in Australia and how they relate this notion to their everyday practice. The transcriptions were imported into Nvivo software and contrasting conceptions of the phrase were coded to discrete nodes.

The data reported in this paper is preliminary and reflects our initial steps towards developing a grounded theory, aligned with the methodology outlined by Charmaz (2005; 2006; 2008; 2014). Through employing grounded theory methodology, we aim to sketch out what this phrase means to the research participants, towards the broader aim of developing a working theory of how practitioners apply the concept of humanitarianism in their lives.

Most of the research participants have worked and volunteered in Australia and abroad, in various areas that relate to resilience, preparedness, emergency response, recovery, and social services more broadly. This research aims to reflect on this emerging conversation that has been gaining momentum in the past few years.

1 For further information and a full speaker list, see https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/the-centre/events/humanitarians-at-home/ .

Findings and discussion

A host of discrete meanings were ascribed to the phrase 'humanitarianism at home' by the participants. At this preliminary stage of analysis, six predominant responses are described which reflect on the phrase as a multifaceted and poorly understood concept, that provides an interesting opportunity for learning. The participants further associated the phrase with a set of core guiding principles and with the international professional humanitarian sector itself, the influence of which was considered limited in the domestic context. Interestingly, humanitarianism was generally described as being at odds with emergency management and traditional command and control approaches, or otherwise as a strategy for bringing cultural change within the sector.

Multifaceted, poorly understood and an interesting opportunity for learning

The phrase 'humanitarianism at home' was encountered by the research participants as encompassing a range of meanings and they expressed genuine interest in articulating these. In addition to describing what the phrase meant to them personally, many participants further described a host of meanings associated with the term. As explained by Janelle, "I could think about it in multifaceted ways … humanitarianism means different things to different people." Jacinda concurred, pointing out that the:

> …term humanitarianism in Australia, is you know, [understood] quite differently, it's [laughing], you might be working in, you know, working with animals or working in a … you know, a local charity…!

While identifying humanitarianism as multifaceted, Janelle argued that it remains poorly understood in Australia by:

> … lots of people, even if they work in social work or social services in Australia, [many people don't know about] … humanitarian principles and standards. You know … Australia is not a rights-based country in many ways. We're not about our rights …You know, it's not ingrained in people's brains … [they] just automatically think they have them… it's not something we really question or understand.

Similarly, Naomi considered that "humanitarianism means different things to different people". She further described her perspective as a practitioner, that:

> … humanitarianism at home is about response to … disasters particularly in the domestic context. I, would think of that immediately … preparedness for that, responses to that … as opposed to community service work or development work.

Similarly, for Bob, the phrase 'humanitarianism at home' reflects:

> … a broader humanitarian context that includes a multitude of, um, uh, I would say, outcomes in, in regard of, you know, prevention work, preparedness work, but you leave response out, but then also take in recovery as well … So, yeah, it, it is an interesting term. I've sort of found that with Fire and Rescue … I was heavily involved in, in developing our natural disaster and humanitarian capability… driving that forward from being a pure rescue focused … to be a broader, um, more capacity building, prevention preparedness, uh, and recovery capability … I don't know if I've answered your question that well … it is such a broad, broad term.

Among the respondents there was a general sense that their own understandings of humanitarianism, as derived from the international humanitarian sector and its guiding principles, differed somewhat from those of average citizens. Similarly, there was a shared belief amongst the respondents that further reflection on humanitarianism in Australia would be an illuminating and productive endeavour.

> Jacinda: So, we define it in a very specific way… But I guess I'm, I'm just keen for us to join the dots and to sort of say that people have a right to receive assistance everywhere, and we can learn from the different ways in which that happens internationally …

> I feel like the term humanitarianism is something that is used very much on the international stage in particular context, and I know that this is something from us in the civilian humanitarian world so when I say that I guess I'm talking about the [United Nations] UN, Red Cross movement, [non-governmental organisations] NGOs, you know because humanitarianism means something quite different if you talk to military actors … I'm passionate about it because I feel like humanitarianism is something that is seen as something that we do elsewhere to people who are other … in far flung places…

"I'm passionate about it because I feel like humanitarianism is something that is seen as something that we do elsewhere to people who are other … in far flung places…"

Humanitarian Principles and the International Professional Humanitarian Sector

The participants generally enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and tended to emphasise the relevance of humanitarian principles to the Australian domestic scene. Responding to the question about 'humanitarianism at home', Jacinda explained that humanitarianism within the international sector has a:

> distinct definition, … being based on those four key principles humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality … And I suppose, when you look at a

> domestic context people are not talking about those principles so much. And, and it doesn't mean that it's any less political here.

Janelle similarly emphasised the relevance of humanitarian principles:

> … I guess what generically comes up to me [in response to the question] is you know, responding to an emergency or disaster in Australia, but with a set of principles and practices that are kind of international if that makes sense … having a practice of standards at home around how we respond to these different emergencies.

Jim responded by reflecting on his experiences at home and abroad, and the relative lack of clarity around the application of humanitarian principles in Australia:

> So, I have found that, internationally, it's quite clear what the roles are, and it's quite a large mandate actually, and the way humanitarian workers work overseas, I think there's sort of, an agreed code of working that, you know, you are working collaboratively, um, with a whole lot of organisations, including the government of that, of that country. And I think it's a lot, less defined in Australia.

While professing the relevance of humanitarian principles in Australia, there was acknowledgment of the tensions between these principles and associated challenges in applying them. Furthermore, professional tensions were identified between those who had worked domestically and those who had worked abroad, and between development and or social services, and humanitarian assistance.

Naomi considered that "… to me as a practitioner, humanitarianism at home is about response to disasters particularly in, um, the domestic context." Without further prompting, Naomi then elaborated further to include:

> preparedness for that, response to that… as opposed to community service work or development work … and I think, yeah, it's, it's based on particular values of, um [humanity] neutrality and impartiality, independence.

In response to an invitation to elaborate on this distinction between humanitarianism at home and community service or development work, Naomi explained:

> So professionally we consider that there's kind of different parts of a continuum in, in this, this work broadly that there's development work, which internationally we would call it development work. And domestically I think it would be referred to as community services work, which is about, uh, supporting the work of, um, working in communities to, uh, look at issues related to poverty typically, and alleviation of poverty and other associated issues like health or access to education or, um, access to housing … [inaudible]. Uh, and that is different to humanitarian work, uh, which respond to agencies and disaster…

Humanitarianism as a strategy for transforming emergency response

The participants were particularly interested in applying humanitarian principles, practices and standards that exist within the international sector to the domestic sector of work known as emergency management. As described by Sam:

> For me the phrase 'humanitarianism at home' … is about the learning from humanitarian practice for application within the domestic OECD environment. And how you actually meld that with traditional doctrinal emergency management approaches with a more agile and flexible approach.

Similarly, Jacinda explained:

> I love the idea of cross-learning and understanding that providing was the responsibility, and the obligation to provide assistance to people who are in need or to alleviate suffering is something that happens everywhere. And we need to I think reflect a little bit more on what that looks like in in Australia … responding to crises in Australia is still very much dominated by uniforms and is seen as emergency management and has not generally, in my experience has been defined as humanitarianism.

Sandra responded as follows:

> It's a really, great question… I love this because I work in the emergency management sector domestically. I actually think that many people who work in this sector don't think of themselves as humanitarians to be really honest with you, but I personally do. I think that the work that we do in emergency services is very much humanitarian. It's about helping people when bad things happen.

For Sandra, the language and the culture of emergency management differs from the mainstream ideas about humanitarianism in Australia. From her perspective:

> Many of the people that work in this sector, come to it because they're doers, right? We get we get shit done, right? Something happens, we fix it. Whatever it is, there's a fire we put the fire out there's a flood we put sandbags up we rescue people out of floodwaters, you know, whatever it might be, the balloon goes up with we're highly trained highly skilled we know what to do.

For a range of the participants, therefore, the application of international humanitarian principles and professional practice in the domestic context provides an opportunity for learning. Some participants argued that a humanitarian perspective provides a means of challenging the linear command and control processes and thinking associated with an Incident Command System, such as that frequently adopted by uniformed emergency management organisations in Australia.

Conclusion

As has been discussed, this paper has focused on scoping a new area of research focused on domestic humanitarianism and describing the first impressions of the participants to the phrase 'humanitarianism at home'. At this preliminary stage of analysis, it is apparent that the participants generally encountered the phrase as a multifaceted and poorly understood concept that provides an interesting opportunity for learning. The participants tended to associate the phrase with the four core humanitarian principles and with the international professional humanitarian sector itself, the influence of which was considered limited in the domestic context. Interestingly, humanitarianism was generally described as being poorly understood in Australia, and as being generally at odds with emergency management and traditional command and control approaches.

The events of recent years, the literature considered, and the enthusiasm expressed by the research participants suggests that this is a productive area for further research. In particular, the reflection on the relevance on humanitarianism in Australia provides opportunity for reflection and learning that is relevant to humanitarian practice, emergency management and community development, whether at home and abroad. These initial conversations, moreover, raise a number of questions that warrant further exploration:

- What are the identifiable components of the concept of humanitarianism and how are these relevant to humanitarian practice, the professional distinctions between preparedness, community development and social services, and the pursuit of social justice as a common good?
- Why do we think of the provision of food aid or disability support as a humanitarian act when it occurs overseas but not when it occurs at home?
- What if anything can emergency response in Australia learn from international humanitarian knowledge and practices?
- To what extent is this learning and transfer of humanitarian knowledge practice already occurring by virtue of international humanitarian practitioners returning to apply their skills at home?
- What, if anything, is there anything to be gained by placing a humanitarian lens to areas as diverse as aged care and disability support, to emergency response in Australia?

Both the literature and the findings suggest that the pursuit of a research program aimed at understanding humanitarianism at home is a promising endeavour. The reflection on the application of humanitarianism at home presents an opportunity to promote greater reflexivity in praxis, with potential benefits for the advancement of humanitarian values and the expression of humanitarian intervention, at home and abroad.

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