The Nomadic ethics of leaving no one behind: Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus pastoralists in North-Central Kenya

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the nomadic ethics of pastoralists and agropastoralists in Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus in Northern Kenya, focusing on their attitudes towards displacement. The investigation revealed that displaced pastoralists approached evacuation with a specific ethical mindset. Each ethnic group had its criteria for deciding which people, animals and objects to transport during the evacuation. To survive critical situations such as conflicts and droughts, every ethnic group seemed to have defined what could be termed a 'minimum set of possessions', which is strongly linked to their owners' bodies. In essence, when considering an emergency evacuation, if individuals prioritize the most vulnerable parts of

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their bodies, it is understandable that they would also prioritize those most vulnerable within their community. Nomadic pastoralists in Northern Kenya have developed the spirit of 'leaving no one behind', in a completely different context from the West, shaped by nomadism and uncertainty. Finally, the arguments' perspectives are extended by an African ethics study led by African scholars as well as a care ethics study stemming from feminist thinking. [Nomadic ethics, displacement, Kenya, Samburu, Tugen, Ilchamus]

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the nomadic ethics of pastoralists and agropastoralists in Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus in Northern Kenya, focusing on their attitudes towards displacement—a topic that has received little attention in previous research. Traditionally, ethical representations of nomads have been characterized as 'egalitarianism' (Lewis & Samatar, 1991) or 'gerontocracy' (Spencer, 1965) by structural functionalists influenced by Durkheimian tradition, which emphasizes social rules and rights. It must be noted that these classical representations oversimplify and essentialize nomadic ethics. Nevertheless, the ethics of East African nomadic pastoralists have rarely been discussed or updated since those early studies. Indeed, pastoralist researchers have not adequately addressed the significance of nomadic ethics, despite its growing importance in contemporary contexts.

In contrast to this stagnation in our academic discourse, a significant shift known as the 'ethical turn' occurred among social anthropologists around 2010 (Fassin, 2012, 2014; Lambek, 2010; Mattingly and Throop, 2018). This transformative shift was influenced by prominent thinkers like Foucault and the ordinary language philosophy school. The ethical turn raised fundamental questions on ethics, but this study does not cover a holistic review of the anthropology of ethics. This study primarily addresses the 'ordinary ethics' school of thought led by Lambek (2010) and Das (2012). They focused on the ethics inherent in our explicit and implicit understanding of daily life. Another school of thought is 'virtue ethics', led by Laidlaw (2013) and Mattingly (2012). They propose that ethics should be linked to concepts of virtue and freedom, challenging the notion that ethics is solely an imposition of social rules and norms.

While the ethical turn should thus be mentioned in the first instance, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine or overcome the approaches proposed by the ethical turn. Rather, the problem is that the ethical turn has been influential in anthropology to the extent that unconsidered aspects of ethics in each specific field, which do not necessarily overlap with the interests of the ethical turn, have been overlooked. This study highlights the ethical issues of nomadic pastoralists, who have been mobile-attuned to various uncertainties such as recurrent droughts and incessant conflicts, regardless of whether ethics fall into the category of social norms, ordinary ethics or virtues. Contrary to both streams after the ethical turn, 'emergency ethics' might matter more than 'ordinary ethics', and 'social duties' should be given more emphasis than 'virtues' if ethics are to be seen from the nomadic pastoralist's point of view, struggling in the humanitarian crisis.

Generalizing the various contexts of pastoralists is next to impossible. However, uncertainty and unpredictability are fundamental aspects of nomadic pastoralism, as supported by previous studies (Krätli and Schareika, 2010; Roe et al., 1998; Roe, 2020; Scoones, 1995). Uncertainty refers to the condition of knowledge where future outcomes are unknown and remain unpredictable (Stirling, 2010), and pastoralists are certainly facing various uncertainties such as recurrent droughts, incessant conflicts, forced migration and displacement due to land grabbing, the spread of livestock diseases, volatile market fluctuation, and so on. For that reason, understanding the ethics associated with uncertainty becomes crucial in the context of pastoralists. Therefore, this study underscores an aspect of nomadic ethics using an analytical concept, the 'ethics of uncertainty', which refers to the ethics that appear as certain attitudes and behaviours (mindsets), when we face uncertainty mostly at the time of emergency, though it submerges in daily life. The 'ethics of uncertainty' is so latent and implicit in normal settings of daily life that it is quite rare even for pastoralists themselves normally to be conscious of, express and talk about them. This study does not intend to give a whole picture of the 'ethics of uncertainty', rather it elucidates certain aspects of nomadic ethics with a lens of this concept.

In its simplest terms, nomadic movement and migration are the most typical actions undertaken by nomadic pastoralists in response to uncertainty and unpredictability. Nomadic movement and migration are not ethical issues per se. Ethical issues may emerge and be observed, particularly when nomadic people are displaced due to unforeseen conflicts, disasters, conservation, land privatization, and so on. In situations requiring no-

madic movement, nomadic pastoralists face the challenge of selecting and prioritizing the most crucial individuals, animals and belongings to accompany them. However, difficulties arise when they cannot transport all people and belongings. In most emergencies, pastoralists cannot afford to transport all people, animals and belongings. Consequently, they encounter an ethical predicament regarding what to carry and what to leave behind in life-threatening situations. This is never the whole picture of ethics of uncertainty, but a quintessential aspect of it.

This study investigates the 'nomadic ethics of uncertainty' by analysing the mindset towards displacement among pastoralists in Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus communities in Northern Kenya following a series of conflicts between 2004 and 2009. It outlines the conflict and displacement, describes the ethical mindset during an evacuation, and explores the underlying factors by analysing the 'minimum set of possessions' as an extension of one's body. The study argues for the existence of a distinct 'nomadic ethics of uncertainty' in contrast to Western ethics. Finally, the perspectives of arguments are extended, connecting them to the arguments on African ethics led by African scholars and arguments on care ethics stemming from feminist thinking.

AN OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH AND METHOD

This study is mainly based on (i) the results of supplemental semi-structured online interviews on nomadic ethics with five interlocutors from the Samburu, Tugen and Ilchams groups in March 2023 and (ii) relevant previously published papers (Konaka, 2021, 2022, 2023). Interlocutors were selected with respect to the depth of local knowledge. Although intensive ethics research was conducted in March 2023, all information was cross-checked and endorsed by the author's on-site research, comprising anthropological participant observation and semi-structured interviews in Samburu since 1992, Tugen since 2013 and Ilchamus since 2014.

The household possession survey presented in the later section targeted Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus internally displaced persons (IDPs) who suffered the most through the series of conflicts. The survey of the household possessions of the Samburu IDPs was conducted in August and September 2011, three years after the conflict had ended. From 2005 to 2009, they were displaced from their homes at various intervals. For the

Tugen IDPs, the survey was conducted in September 2013, which was approximately one year after they were displaced from their homes. A total of 47 households participated in this study: 23 Samburu, 10 Tugen and 14 Ilchamus. Besides the survey, seven qualitative interviews were conducted on the topic of material culture. Consequently, the total number of main interviewees was 59. The field research has been conducted in Maa language (Samburu and Ilchamus), Swahili (Tugen) and English. To protect my interlocutors, the details of various geographic locations were withheld from this study.

Every methodology employed in this research is intended to reveal indigenous ontologies and epistemologies through collaborative creation with local people, although the author must admit that they work within the conventional field of anthropological research rather than in more advanced indigenous dialogue.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

This study focuses on internal displacement caused by a conflict in North-central Kenya between the Pokot people and their neighbours—the Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus. The conflict was instigated by a Pokot politician who incited the Pokot youth to attack neighbouring ethnic groups. The conflict soon escalated, leading to tremendous damage on all sides, including killing, livestock raids and the torching of houses and household items. Given that the conflicts and displacement have been investigated in depth in previous studies (Konaka, 2021, 2023), this study will provide only a brief outline of the events.

The conflict between the Pokot and the Samburu broke out in 2004 and mostly ended in 2009. Numerous Samburu pastoralists were displaced during the same period. The death toll has been estimated at 590 casualties, based on the author's survey. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported over 22,000 IDPs (2006, p. 33). Several researchers, including Straight (2009, 2017), Greiner (2012, 2013), Okumu (2013), Holtzman (2017), and Ervin (2020), have studied and reported on this conflict. However, apart from the IDMC and the International Red Cross Society, national and international humanitarian organizations have largely disregarded this conflict.

The conflict, initially attributed by media and international organizations to traditional cattle rustling and resource competition due to climate change, was claimed by local in-

terlocutors to be caused by a Pokot politician (referred to as 'X') exploiting parochial sentiments for electoral gain. During the 2000 electoral campaign, X publicly declared that the land occupied by the Samburu belonged to the Pokot and promised to reclaim it and redistribute it to his supporters if elected. Subsequently, his popularity grew as he encouraged acts of violence, including raids, by administrative chiefs and Pokot youth. In December 2002, X was elected a Member of Parliament. Before the conflict, the Samburu and Pokot peoples were on good terms with each other and shared grazing land for years, particularly during periods of drought.

Interlocutors claimed that X had supplied his local supporters with hundreds of automatic rifles smuggled from Uganda during the conflict, and he encouraged and sponsored their raids. It was also alleged that this money was used to bribe local police officers. More weapons were purchased with the proceeds from the sale of raided livestock. It is worth noting that the disarmament efforts by the Ugandan government in Karamoja, starting in December 2001, may have contributed to the smuggling of weapons from Uganda to Kenya (Stites & Akabwai, 2010, p. 27).

After the conflict erupted, the Samburu and Pokot peoples fled to other areas, and large sections of the area that formed the borders between the two communities became a 'no man's land'. Over time, the Samburu IDPs began organizing their defence by forming clustered settlements that were exceptionally large and fortified, resembling spontaneous IDP camps. Clustered settlements serve as defensive positions and survival strongholds during times of conflict. In 2010, there were at least 10 verified clustered settlements in the district-border area with an estimated population of 6,700. Although there may have been some assistance from national and international aid organizations, such support was unlikely.

Following political pressure from the central government and strong reactions by the Samburu themselves—particularly after a clustered settlement had acquired four bazookas (allegedly from corrupt officers in the Kenyan police force)—the conflict between the Pokot and Samburu communities mostly subsided by 2009.

Attacks by the Pokot community extended to the Tugen and Ilchamus peoples, continuing even after their plans to invade the Samburu were abandoned. Between 2005 and 2013, 22 Tugen and 10 Ilchamus were killed; another 10,000 were displaced. Unlike the

nomadic Samburu, the Tugen and Ilchamus reside in dispersed settlements and do not form clustered settlements.

The Pokot, Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus are livestock farmers. The Maa-speaking Samburu live in highland savanna at an altitude of approximately 1,500 metres and are nomadic. They are predominantly pastoralists organized around a dual system of permanent settlements and satellite cattle camps. The Pokot and the Tugen speak the Southern Nilotic Kalenjin language and, like the Ilchamus (Maa-speaking), grow crops (rain-fed) at an altitude of about 1,000 metres. These largely consist of maize, finger millet and sorghum. While the Ilchamus and Tugen have more permanent settlements (Hodder, 1982, pp. 16–17), the Pokot are more similar to the Samburu as they are mostly pastoralists and semi-nomads.

ETHICAL MINDSET DURING EVACUATION

The investigation revealed that displaced pastoralists mostly could not afford to transport their livestock, assets and household goods and were compelled to leave them in their original settlements. Those items and livestock left behind are abandoned and mostly robbed by the enemies. There is no specific safe place for livestock keeping and belongings. Under such circumstances, each ethnic group had a specific pattern of behaviour regarding which individuals, animals and objects would be taken during the evacuation and migration process. It can be referred to be a specific "ethical mindset" that appears when pastoralists evacuate the land.

For instance, it is forbidden among the Samburu to leave behind a disabled person, older adult person, divorced daughter, post-delivery pet dog and specific small household items during evacuation and movement. To do so is considered a 'sin' (*ngoki*) and could lead to misfortunes. The reasoning and context for this, and the relationship to the local religious deities, are not clear even to the locals. However, it can be assured that it does not originate in Christianity, which was introduced during and after colonialization. It is said that the person who sinned might die or bad things would happen to them and their family. Thus, special consideration was given to 'vulnerable persons'. A Samburu elder discussed the ethical attitude of not leaving older adults and disabled persons behind during an evacuation:

Slow elderly (*lararin*), blind (*lmodooni*), crippled (*lng"ojine*), and deaf (*ming"ani*) should not be left behind when moving in search of pasture or even when running away from the enemies. They must be carried along using donkeys or camels. If they are left behind, it will bring curses to the family. I give an example of a Loimisi clan member who left their old mother behind as he moved with his family in search of pasture. His family was cursed and two of his sons died while singing with their agemates. They were possessed and fell down, then died one after another. (Online interview with an older adult Samburu man in March 2023, translation by the author)

Another Samburu elder discussed the ethical attitude of not leaving behind daughters of certain categories:

It is considered very bad behaviour to leave daughters belonging to certain categories at abandoned settlements. Special attention is paid to an adult daughter who is married but has returned to her birthplace because of disagreements with her husband, or who is not formally married but has children and lives with her father's family. When moving in search of pasture or running away from enemies, daughters of such categories should not be left behind. If one did, she might curse and bring misfortune to the family. I remember the case of a family of Lmasula phratry, the Lparasoro clan, who made such a mistake by leaving their daughter behind. After their mistake, many of the family members were eaten by a lion; their livestock also were eaten by lions, and the few people who remained were scattered to the other clans. Up to the present, the number of the Parasoro clan members are very few among the Samburu clans. (Online interview with an older adult Samburu man in March 2023, translation by the author)

The Samburu kinship systems are paternally organized and follow a virilocal (patrilocal) residential pattern. After marriage, all brides must leave their natal family and join an unknown family as a member of the patrilineal kind of her husband. However, divorced

daughters and unmarried mothers who failed to affiliate with the family of their husbands have to return to their natal family feeling ashamed. Therefore, divorced daughters and unmarried mothers fall under the marginalized and ambiguous category of their patrilineal kinship system, socially ranked in a lower position than married men and women. The ethical attitude is also directed towards their pet animals, as explained by a Samburu elder:

> It is considered bad behaviour to leave a mother dog that has recently given birth in an abandoned settlement. It is because the puppies need to nurse from the mother. If you leave such a mother dog in an abandoned settlement when moving in search of pasture, misfortune and curse may follow you and your family. Puppies might cry if they don't get milk and also might die of hunger if left alone in the abandoned settlement. Injured dogs can at least move to follow the owner, but puppies cannot. So, a dog that has given birth and cannot leave her puppies must be brought.

> But, if you are abruptly running away from the enemies and you didn't leave the dog intentionally, it would be understood. So, in that case, it would not be recognized as bad behaviour. It is also not bad behaviour to leave a male dog or female unpregnant dog, or all categories of cat, even if it is pregnant one. (Online interview with an older adult Samburu man in March 2023, translation by the author)

The behaviours are slightly different among the Ilchamus community. An Ilchamus elder explained their attitude towards pets:

> Pets like dogs and cats should not be left at an abandoned settlement, because if they are left crying and searching for its owner, it will bring curses to the family, and bad things will happen to the family. All pets, whether young or old, pregnant or not pregnant, should not be left behind in abandoned settlement when moving in search of pasture or running away from the enemies because the pets will cry searching for

the owner, and this will bring curses to the family. (Online interview with
an older adult Ilchamus man in March 2023, translation by the author)

The prioritized items during the evacuation of each ethnic group are summarized in
Table 1. Although a slight difference can be observed between Samburu and Ilchamus,
as exemplified in the attitudes towards pets, each ethnic group shares general
commonalities in their ethical mindset during evacuation. This mindset is adhered to not
only when pastoralists migrate in search of pasture or water but also when fleeing from
enemies. Although strict adherence to the ethical mindset may not be necessary for pets,
as with the Samburu, it is essential for the disabled, for older adults and for vulnerable
daughters within the patrilineal kinship system. The cases suggest that ethical choices are
not choices at all; they are social duties, enforced by prohibition and the threat of
supernatural consequences. However, it can be pointed out that those duties are
somehow context-dependent, as the case of dogs illustrates, although not so much as
Zuckerman's (2022) case study.

Notably, these ethical mindsets are deeply rooted in the belief in curses and are cul-
turally constructed in the nomadic livelihood. Originally, Samburu and Ilchamus beliefs
comprised blessing and curse practices by older men and women who are considered to
have the power to bless and curse the younger generations. Elders are supposed to bless
initiates at various rites of passage, while cursing young people who behave unsocially.
An older person only curses in their mind; however, it is believed that by doing so they
can cause damage to the cursed person and their family and livestock. It can be suggest-
ed that the belief in curses that protect vulnerable persons including elders might stem
from the culture of gerontocracy and the belief in curses by elder persons (see Spencer,
1965). Belief in curses may also constitute another aspect of the 'ethics of uncertainty',
since under the uncertain conditions of recurrent droughts and incessant conflicts, what
knowledge elders provided was the only reliable measure to survive before the introduc-
tion of scientific knowledge through formal school education. Thus, leaving weak elders
behind might mean losing a store of communal knowledge that teaches them how to act
against crisis.

Table 1. Assets given priority consideration during the evacuation of each ethnic group based on interview data with interlocutors

Priority assets	*Ethnic group*		
	Samburu	*Tugen*	*Ilchamus*
Disabled person	Y	Y	Y
Older adult	Y	Y	Y
Divorced daughters	Y	Y	Y
Unmarried daughters with children	Y	Y	Y
Pet dog	Y	Y	Y
	*Post-delivery pet dog only		
Pet cat	N	Y	Y
Specific small household items	Y	Y	Y

MINIMUM SET OF POSSESSIONS

The reasons why nomadic pastoralists prioritize not leaving vulnerable persons, pets and specific household items behind during evacuation can be attributed to socially imposed norms and obligations. However, with the emergence of the 'ethical turn', it is crucial to explore the underlying motivations behind these ethical practices. A survey conducted by the author from 2011 to 2014 targeted 941 items from 47 households of displaced pastoralists from three ethnic groups (Konaka, 2023). The tables show the composition of items other than clothing and accessories carried by the displaced pastoralists during the evacuation for each ethnic group (Tables 2, 3, 4).

Table 2. Composition of items other than clothing and accessories carried by the Samburu during evacuation (based on information from 23 households)

Items	Actual Number	Percentage
Livestock and milk containers*	6	29%
Hatchet	5	24%
Stool*	4	19%
Rugs*	2	10%
Cooking and eating utensils	2	10%
Water vessel	2	10%
Total	21	100%

*Ominous items (items where leaving them behind would lead to misfortune) for the Samburu.

Table 3. Composition of items other than clothing and accessories carried by the Tugen during evacuation (based on information from 10 households)

Items	Actual Number	Percentage
Livestock and milk containers*	11	50%
Rope*	3	14%
Spatula*	3	14%
Milk container fumigator	2	9%
Stirring rod	1	5%
Hatchet	1	5%
Whisk	1	5%
Total	22	100%

*Ominous items (items where leaving them behind would lead to misfortune) for the Tugen.

Table 4. Composition of items other than clothing and accessories carried by the Ilchamus during evacuation (based on information from 14 households)

Items	Actual Number	Percentage
Cooking and eating utensils	4	44%
Stool*	1	11%
Spatula	1	11%
Stirring rod	1	11%
Water vessel	1	11%
Other items	1	11%
Total	9	100%

*Ominous items (items where leaving them behind would lead to misfortune) for the Ilchamus.

The research findings indicated that each ethnic group had established a 'minimum set of possessions' to ensure their survival during critical situations like conflicts and drought. Table 5 provides an overview of the items generally perceived as essential within this 'minimum set of possessions' for each ethnic group. Figure 1 depicts how the Tugen stored their 'minimum set of possessions' in a specific corner of their homes.

Table 5. Items perceived as necessary by each ethnic group during evacuation

Group	Items
Samburu	Livestock milk container, rug, stool, fire rod, allow, roof sheet
Tugen	Livestock milk container, rope, insect repellent rod, spatulas, stirring rod
Ilchamus	Livestock milk container, stool

Note: Based on an interview with informants from each ethnic group.

According to an older adult Samburu woman, these items were more important than livestock:

> If the enemy attacks, you must flee with those items you have prepared at the time of your circumcision. When we hear the first gunshot, we grab those items first, never mind if the enemy takes your livestock away.

> Your items are the first things you must flee with. They are more important than livestock. (Interview with an older adult Samburu woman in March 2016, translation by the author)

Samburu men and women expressed similar sentiments during the survey on material culture. Each ethnic group believed that abandoning specific items during evacuation would bring misfortune. For the Samburu, these items included livestock milk containers, rugs made from livestock hide, and stools.

Livestock milk containers are made by mothers of circumcised boys. After marriage, wives are instructed to cherish the container as if it were her husband. When the husband dies, the container is abandoned in a bush. Similarly, a livestock milk container is made for daughters upon marriage. It is smeared with red clay on their wedding day and tied to their back, symbolizing future motherhood. Abandoning the container while fleeing was believed to result in difficulties in conceiving. As with the husband, the container is abandoned in the bush after her death. Therefore, the container represents the identity of a Samburu woman through reproduction.

During circumcision, rugs made from livestock hide are laid under the body of a man or woman. These rugs become stained with the person's blood and are regarded as representing their body. Similarly, hides from animals slaughtered for specific ceremonies are treated in the same manner. The rug is abandoned in the bush when its owner dies, like the livestock milk container. Stools hold significance as they are owned by the head of a family. They are used to welcome guests, during the shaving of a person's head before circumcision, and for celebrations. The stool symbolizes the head of a family and is handed down from the father to the first-born son.

The Tugen attributed a belief to certain items—such as livestock milk containers and ropes—that abandoning them during evacuation would bring misfortune to their owners. When an owner dies, his livestock milk container is abandoned. However, only ropes made from the hide of cows slaughtered during circumcision ceremonies are taken during an evacuation, not regular ropes. The Tugen believe that if these items are abandoned or stolen by an enemy, the owner will be unable to acquire property in the future.
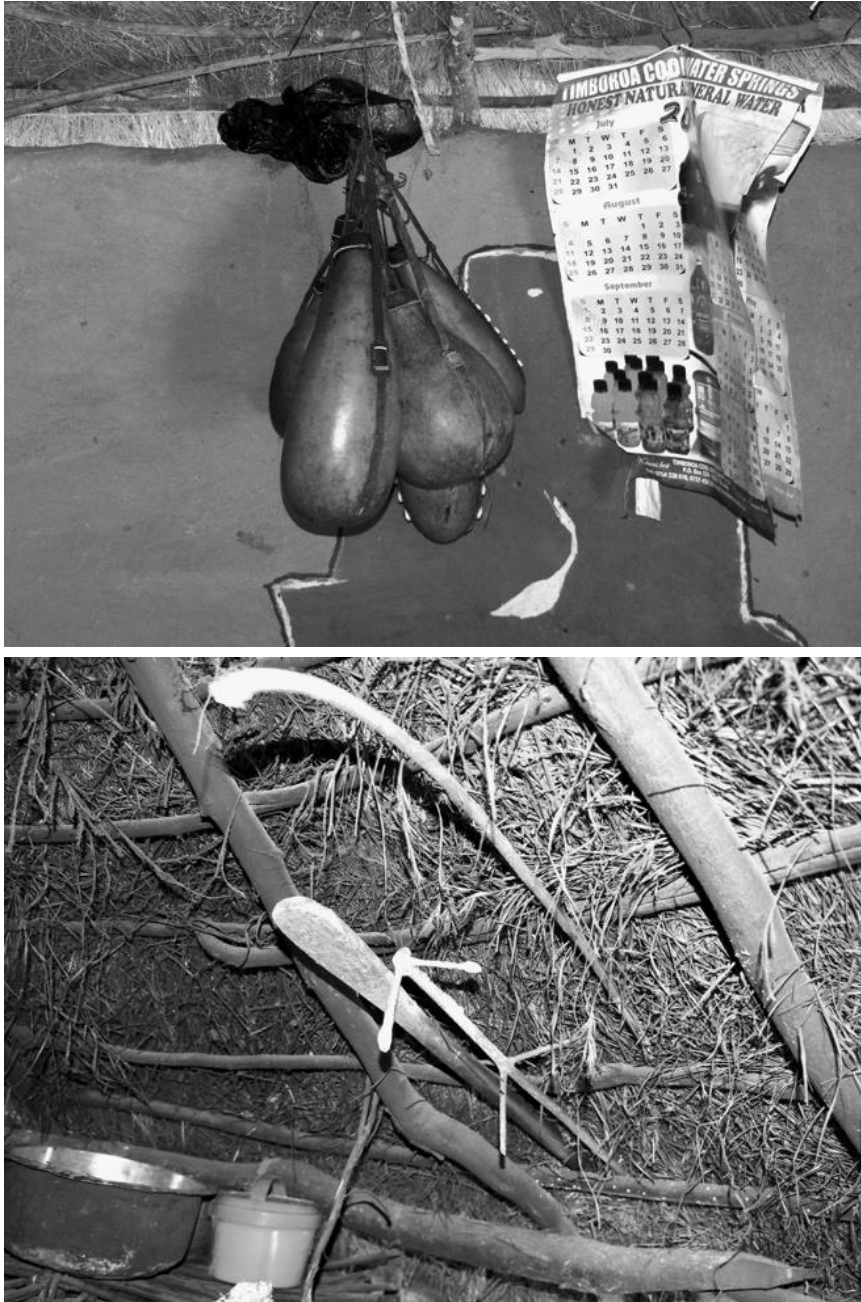
Figure 1. Livestock milk containers placed at a particular place in the house, Baringo County, Kenya, September 8, 2013 (photographed by the author)

The Ilchamus believe that abandoning rugs made from the hide of livestock during evacuation brings misfortune to their owners. This act of abandonment and subsequent burning by an enemy poses a physical threat to its owner. For women, it is believed that abandoning their rug may hinder their ability to conceive. The rug is significant in the Ilchamus community, as when a person dies, the corpse is laid on the rug and then buried.

In all three ethnic groups, there is a common belief that when certain items are not taken during fleeing or moving camp—or if they are forgotten, lost or broken—misfortune will befall their owners. A Samburu woman shared how her family was always cautious to avoid losing these items. If enemies find these items after fleeing, severe misfortune is believed to befall the owners. When a family cannot flee with the items during an attack, they may return later to retrieve them. In cases where a family cannot bring the items during an attack, they may risk their lives to return and retrieve them later. In summary, any behaviour that can lead to abandonment of the items is prohibited.

THE MINIMUM SET OF POSSESSIONS AS AN EXTENSION OF THE BODY

Our discussion has revealed that the possessions carried by IDPs during evacuation are closely tied to their owners' bodies. This is especially true of the Samburu. For them, items like the livestock milk container and the rug made from livestock hide are not ordinary belongings but are integrally linked to their owner's body, as shared by an older adult Samburu woman.

> We, women, make a milk container as a body and proper name of our son who is supposed to be circumcised. You see, my three sons all have their milk containers each stored. Wives should cherish these as their husbands' bodies. That is the reason he never leaves his milk container behind in his village when fleeing. If he does so, it seriously threatens the health of his body, due to illness, accident or homicide. If a woman leaves her milk container behind when fleeing, it means her body is also spoiled. In that case, she will never bear a child again with her spoiled body.

(Interview with an older adult Samburu woman in March 2016, translation by the author)

Recognizing these possessions as an integral part of a person's body highlights the significance of not abandoning them when fleeing.

As mentioned, the items carried by households forced to flee embodied greater social value than the livestock they had abandoned, even by pastoral communities who regarded the animals as significant socioeconomic assets. The value that was attributed to this minimum set of possessions was neither monetary nor utilitarian. Instead, these possessions were seen as literal extensions of their owners' bodies.

Since this minimum set of possessions is an integral part of the owner's body, it raises the question of whether they carry hidden, symbolic meanings. According to the interlocutors, they carried the items because they were part of their bodies and not because they symbolized or represented anything. Notably, they did not mention the word "symbolize" despite having an equivalent word in their vocabulary. This realization prompted us to reject the differentiation made between a subject and an object—between someone who represents something and the thing being represented. From an ontological perspective, things are treated as *sui generis* meanings (Henare et al., 2007). In this context, the minimum set of possessions carries its own meanings. The importance of these items does not stem from a belief that they represent or symbolize hidden meanings that require interpretation or decoding. This view was never held by pastoralists.

CONCLUSION

Despite settling down more frequently, East African pastoralists still maintain a core material culture rooted in the nomadic movement. This is evident in the evacuation practices during conflicts. The concept of self-identification has transcended the boundary between the human skin and the external world. Nomadic movement—in which humans, livestock and objects are constantly on the move as a nomadic unit—generates this body that is unrestrained by the skin. In the nomadic worldview, family, livestock and household items are not considered separate entities, but rather integral parts of themselves. Thus, in East African pastoralist communities where uncertainty and nomadism are inherent, the distinction between the human body and objects or

possessions becomes blurred. Instead, a reciprocal relationship is formed where objects become part of the human body and vice versa.

The concept of the 'minimum set of possessions' as an extension of the nomadic body provides insight into why vulnerable individuals such as disabled persons and divorced daughters should not be left behind. Within the framework of the nomadic unit as an 'extended body'—which comprises family, animals and belongings—determining the highest priority during evacuation becomes crucial. Just as you would prioritize an injured finger as part of your own body in an emergency evacuation, the most vulnerable members of the nomadic unit require utmost attention and care to ensure they are not left behind. Consequently, it is natural for the community to prioritize the most vulnerable individuals and pets, recognizing them as integral parts of their extended bodies.

The individuals and animals given priority during evacuation represent vulnerable segments in the nomadic unit. Disabled individuals and older adult individuals are particularly vulnerable populations within the nomadic unit, thus posing a challenge during any migration. In turn, divorced or unmarried daughters, while not physically vulnerable, are socially vulnerable in the patrilineal kinship system that exists in the Samburu, Tugen and Ilchamus communities. Those daughters who are not part of the patrilineal kin groups are at risk of being left behind, as they are marginalized members within the nomadic unit's social structure. Consequently, nomadic people take special care not to leave those who are marginalized in the patrilineal kinship systems behind.

Pets also constitute a marginalized segment of the nomadic unit, as they are between humans and animals (see Leach, 1964). However, interlocutors expressed ethical compassion towards pets during emergencies. Like a mother-child relationship, the strong bond between humans and their pets discouraged people from leaving their pets behind during an evacuation. Notably, the Ilchamus recognize dogs as part of the human eye and body (Konaka, 2022). In summary, the evacuation process prioritizes the most vulnerable segments of the nomadic unit, whether due to physical or sociocultural vulnerability. Nomads exhibit special consideration for vulnerable persons within the context of their nomadic livelihood and nomadic body.

The illustrated case exemplifies the 'ethics of uncertainty' among nomadic peoples. It is right to say that these cases represent the ethics of uncertainty because all those ethics would have never happened without the uncertain conditions of nomadic peoples. No-

madic pastoralists in Northern Kenya have developed their principle of 'leaving no one behind' within the context of their nomadic lifestyle, characterized by unpredictability and daily challenges such as droughts and conflicts. Moreover, it is deeply rooted in the nomadic body.

These cases illustrate an undescribed aspect of 'emergency ethics' embedded in the body and nomadism, apart from the socially structured aspects of virtues represented by such classical terms as 'egalitarianism' and 'gerontocracy'. Thus, nomadic ethics should be reconsidered in terms of the nomadic body unit, as inseparable from vulnerable persons and animals rather than as a social entity viewed as a distribution of legal egalitarian or gerontocratic rights within the community.

Returning to the ethical turn, the ordinary ethics perspective focuses on how ethical decisions are woven into everyday life, rather than brought out in highly visible moments or acts (Das, 2012, p. 134). The cases discussed above, which involve decisions about moving during a moment of crisis fall in the domain not of ordinary ethics but of 'emergency ethics'. Similarly, while the virtue ethics of Laidlaw (2013) and others highlights the virtuous qualities of the individual subject over-generalized rules, these cases above also involve a form of duty articulation rather than virtue articulation, although several exceptional cases are seen as in the case of dogs. What does it mean? At the least, it does not necessarily mean 'emergency ethics' and 'duties articulation' are less important in ethics. Even if those cases are out of the scope of ethical turn, for that reason these cases shed light on the unconsidered realm of ethics of uncertainty comprising the social duties of 'leaving no one behind' in times of emergency.

While the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is often associated with the West and Western-influenced countries (as seen in the preamble to the United Nations Agenda 2030 which forms the basis for the SDGs; see UN, 2015), nomadic pastoralists have uniquely shaped their principle based on their experiences of nomadism under uncertainty. Notably, the ethical mindset explored in this study originated within the nomadic community, predating colonial rule and Western influences. While Western ethics may have been introduced through Christianity and formal education, the nomadic ethics discussed here are deeply rooted in their beliefs and cultural contexts before colonization, distinct from Western ethical frameworks in religious texts or textbooks. Although the outward manifestations of ethics may appear similar, the underlying foundations diverge

significantly between nomadic livelihood and Western ideologies. Therefore, it is incorrect to ascribe ethical superiority to the West while deeming nomadic ethics inferior. Nomadic peoples have cultivated their ethical principles within their distinct cultural and contextual framework.

Finally, based on the case illustration and conclusion above, a few remarks are mentioned about the potential of the extension of the arguments in terms of African ethics led by African scholars and care ethics led by feminist scholars. Although this study does not intend to generalize what is mentioned on ethics above to whole African continents, the arguments on African ethics (Hallen, 2005; Metz, 2021; Mrove, 2020) provide several interesting points in common with this case study. For instance, the insights below by the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (2011) make important suggestions on African ethics:

> African ethics is a humanitarian ethics, the kind of ethics that places a great deal of emphasis on human welfare. The concern for human welfare may be said to constitute the hub of the African axiological wheel. This orientation of African ethics takes its impulse, undoubtedly, from the humanistic outlook that characterizes traditional African life and thought. Humanism—the doctrine that sees human needs and interests as fundamental—thus constitutes the foundation of African ethics.

> …Thus, African ethics—an ethics that is weighted on duty, not on rights—would, in principle, not consider a moral duty of any kind as extraordinary, optional, or supererogatory. The African humanitarian ethic makes all people objects of moral concern, implying that our moral sensitivities should be extended to all people, irrespective of their cultures or societies. (section 9, edited by the author)

What Gyekye mentioned above sounds like a clue to the answer to the question of why pastoralists do not leave the vulnerable behind. He sees African ethics as an emphasis on welfare and humanism, which echoes the pastoralist mindset of prioritizing the welfare of the vulnerable. Additionally, African ethics can be expressed as communal duties without discrimination, which is reflected by pastoralists who were obligated not to leave

the vulnerable behind despite an emergency. Moreover, Gyekye's suggestion of shift from right to duty also echoes our shift of focus from 'egalitarian' or 'gerontocratic' distribution of rights to duties of care for vulnerable people. Specifically in the case of nomadic communities, the communal ties and duties are so enhanced as a nomadic unit of movement as to unify as a nomadic body.

Additionally, what this study illustrated as the 'ethics of uncertainty' comprises several elements of what we normally refer to as 'care' or 'care ethics'. Vulnerable persons crucially needed special care during the evacuation process. In this respect, the framing that Scoones (2023) recently developed in pastoral areas is noteworthy as a clue to the implications of this paper. He understands care 'as a way of locating responses to uncertainty within egalitarian, social, and political practices, always located in situated contexts' (p. 5).

Reviewing development studies of pastoralists, Scoones places the debate about 'care' as an alternative to modernizing 'control', referring to feminist thinkers (Arora et al., 2020; de la Bellacasa, 2012, 2017; Haraway, 1991; Mol et al. 2010; Wilmer et al., 2020) as below.

This article contrasts two approaches to confronting uncertainties. One attempts to suppress uncertainties by exerting control via plans, regulations and the ordering of the world through development interventions, imposed through the power of the state, science, political and business elites and development agencies. The other takes a more open, caring approach, navigating through and productively making use of variability and volatility, embracing uncertainties and so being more attuned to the complexities of a turbulent world. Such a caring approach, where uncertainties become central to ways of life, suggests a more flexible, agentive, responsive stance, opening up possibilities and grounds for hopefulness (Scoones, 2023, pp. 1–2).

When encountering fatal conflicts, pastoralists in this case study could not and did not want to 'control' all the conflict and post-conflict situations. Instead, what they elaborated as measures during evacuations was the special mindsets they have undertaken as a social duty as well as 'care' for the most vulnerable persons and animals. While nothing was controlled, planned, regulated or ordered by the states or external agencies, numerous vulnerable lives have been saved because of their care practice. This implicates the

potential of nomadic ethics rooted in indigenous bases even in reconfiguring development and humanitarian schemes.

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