

Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid in Myanmar: An Analysis from Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

The humanitarian aid given to Myanmar in this conflict situation has often perpetuated global power disparities, Eurocentric methodologies, technical compliance mandates, and donor-centric priorities. Donors and international NGOs in the Global North often control key decisions, funding, and definitions of gender equality. Local actors such as Myanmar civil society organizations, ethnic community-based organizations, and women's organizations are often considered subcontractors or downstream implementing partners for international NGOs instead of being treated as strategic partners or key players in aid systems that have roots in colonial history and neoliberal ideas. This study employs an argumentative literature review on research articles and NGO reports in the post-2021 situation within the Myanmar's humanitarian context. Drawing on the postcolonial feminist critiques of Chandra Mohanty and Kimberle Crenshaw, the study utilizes a 'decolonialist' framework that incorporates the notion of 'intersectionality.' The study analyzes how humanitarian aid localizes to address and challenge the foundational epistemological, intersectional, and power dynamics in conflict contexts. The study findings appear in two dimensions: the strategic dimension and the practical dimension. From an epistemological perspective, the localization aid process and practices are risky and reproduce colonial logic and power hierarchies, creating a hierarchy of knowledge and practices linked to 'local' versus 'international' actors and their essentialization. From a practical perspective, the Western feminist narratives can overlook the lived experiences of women in Myanmar's humanitarian context, particularly those facing systemic abuse, power imbalances, inequitable partnerships, and donor-centric development. It calls for systemic change, which includes a redistribution of power and resources under the gender lens. Development practices should go beyond technocratic solutions and instead focus on decolonial feminist solidarities, epistemic justice, and a dedication to structural change instead of just symbolic involvement or instrumental engagement.