

## Book Review

LeBlanc, M. H., & Audet Gosselin, L. (Eds.) (2016). *Faith and charity: Religion and humanitarian assistance in West Africa*. London, England: Pluto Press.

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From the Anthropology, Culture and Society book series, *Faith and Charity: Religion and Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa* is described by the series editors as scholarship “about large issues, set in a (relatively) small place, rather than detailed description of a small place for its own sake” (p. vii). With this objective in mind, the ethnographic case studies represented by the authors in this edited collection are representative of spaces and places within a specified area on the planet that illustrate the myriad nuances and potentialities of the evolving state of affairs of faith-based organizations doing charitable work in a globalized world.

The authors found in this volume are predominantly affiliated with Canadian universities as faculty, doctoral candidates, or researchers. A few selections included in the book are from members of university departments from Côte d’Ivoire. As an editor and contributing author to the text, LeBlanc brings substantial experience and knowledge with a breadth of publications and international research projects focused on religion, development, and social transformation in postcolonial African societies. Co-editor and contributing author Audet Gosselin also brings perspective from his background as a historian and sociologist concentrating on religion, development, and political culture in Burkina Faso.

This book is primarily focused on the efforts and evolution of religious organizations in social development and humanitarian aid in the current neoliberal economic and political environments of Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. The chapters

address faith-based nongovernmental organizational (fbNGO) activities of Catholic, Evangelical, and Islamic entities, with the latter highlighted in the majority of the case studies in the book. Organized in two parts, the discussions in the text are centered on a) the history and dimensions of faith-based social development especially in postcolonial settings and b) examples of the impacts of NGO-ization and professionalization on religious group identity and practices in the region.

The chapters are evenly divided between case studies of communities in Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, with NGOs in Senegal also included in one chapter. The editors explain that portraying the issues and experiences of fbNGOs in these countries provides a unique opportunity for study of two nations with an intertwined history and comparable trajectory of religious pluralism and its influences in their politics and social development over the past century. Many of the studies also consider the long-term and/or recent relationship of the different religious groups to each country’s government and political parties as well as to international organizations and private donors.

The introductory chapter describes how the shifting political landscape and structural adjustment programs of African countries led to varying degrees of austerity and privatization of state-owned industries in Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. In a response to how these measures created political instability, as well as a gap in financing for services such as social welfare and education, religious organizations were challenged to examine how

best to continue and/or be revitalized by charity work in light of the now under-resourced and often unserved needs of their communities. To maintain viability in a market economy and to respond to interest in membership seeking social change, faith-based groups have explored the benefits of how a nonprofit status can enhance investment in social assistance programming, networking for religious and social entrepreneurial initiatives, participation in the public arena for shaping socio-political agendas, and new venues for further establishing a presence in the community.

The NGO-ization of religious organizations brings attention to and re-evaluation of the identity, purpose, and agency of faith-based groups as they adapt to changing social, political, and economic realities identified in *Faith and Charity*. Does the transition of religious actors into fbNGOs require participation in previously secular and governmental activities in order to meet the needs of individuals and communities? How does this change in status impact the values and ethics of providing humanitarian assistance locally and globally? How do the motivations for civic engagement and volunteerism shift within a neoliberal market ideology? Does the status as an fbNGO yield untapped opportunities for recruitment to the faith? Where do the boundaries between religious activism (including proselytization), social action, and social development begin and

end in a nonprofit environment? How do gender, language, collectivist versus individualist cultures, etc., impact socioreligious dynamics of fbNGOs? These questions, ethical dilemmas, and more are probed and pondered in the variety of scenarios presented by the book's authors.

Social work practitioners and educators concerned with globalization, humanitarian aid, and community development would find the book replete with content that assists with understanding related issues and challenges within but also applicable beyond the borders of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Because of its unique focus, the material would be particularly useful for learning more about the impact and integration of faith-based organizations in social development in this region as well as the larger relationship between religion and civil societies across the globe.