

Preface

For their speech and writing, intellectuals develop and use inter-related lenses from specific, epistemically positioned, time-historical, socio-demographic points of view. This is especially true for the transatlantic Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa (CIHA) blog, and its contributors.

Affirming cultural identities as well as diversity, the CIHA blog has been a major source for critically engaging humanitarian projects in Africa since its inception in January 2009. It is a source and resource for both analytically and constructively focused contributions, which also provide opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration and networking. Analytically, contributors do not shy away from asking difficult questions concerning the power relations in humanitarian aid, especially as these articulate with governance for peace and socio-economic wellbeing, not only from outside the African continent, but also from inside Africa. This includes raising problematic questions in the present, on the continued legacy of colonialism and imperialism, but also with regard to constricting African cultural formations. Complex questions related to the continuation of systems that do not optimally serve and advance the aspirations of a new generation of young, energetic, pro-active and passionate thinkers and scholars are being asked, and constructive answers, strategies and tactics, sought and activated.

Resourceful home-grown African initiatives, projects and enterprises are given space for increased mobilization, activation and impact. Time-historically, authors and researchers seek to untangle complex historical developments, relations, systems and interactions. In view of visions and aspirations for a vibrant and prosperous African future, humanitarian engagements from within Africa are sought. If past-historical criticisms focused primarily on political formations, then present-future plans and projects need to fully affirm and enable the collective imaginative engagement of societies, inclusive of dynamic equal gender relations and socio-economic differences. Transformative societal engagements with, for and on behalf of the poor in our cities as well as in rural areas, need full consideration. This also triggers the recognition and affirmation and enabling of healthy, caring and helpful traditional cultural assumptions and practices. Viewed from a diversity of vantage points on the African continent, with the generation of the full complexities of associated data for humanitarian engagements for self-sufficient and sustainable occupations

and livelihoods, relevant capacity and capabilities are sought to serve the aspirations of the people.

The conferences CIHA have organized have been important platforms for developing helpful discourse and discursive formations for the improvement of the quality of life of the people of our continent. This is especially true of the conference organized by the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), in late 2016. This volume of the *Alternation African Scholarship Book Series* (AASBS) is a representative sample of papers read at the conference, the incisive questions raised and the perceptive insights and ideas from relevant studies shared. These have not only analysed and sought improved comprehension of the problematising of humanitarianism and religion in contemporary Africa. They have also charted trajectories for action that will enhance the people's quality of life.

I wish to endorse and recommend both the CIHA blog project, and this closely related book, *Critical Perspectives on Governance, Religion and Humanitarian Aid in Africa*. They are raising important questions on humanitarianism, both past and present, and seek to chart ways and means through which humanitarian agencies can affirm and enable indigenous initiatives of, for, by and with Africa. As said – and which I highly appreciate amongst ourselves as Africans – it is done with the full recognition and affirmation of the inter-related epistemic lenses intellectuals seek to construct and deploy from specific time-historical socio-demographic points of view. As such, this volume makes a significant contribution to African humanitarian scholarship, as well as enabling future world-historical humanitarian initiatives in global perspective. In this respect, there is much scope for gratitude and appreciation of the international incentives around this vital topic for Africa's upscaling of its efforts for fostering the optimal collective wellbeing of our people.

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