

**INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY
AND THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIETY (CIRDIS) PRESENT**

Charity, ONG-ization and Emergent Ethics of Voluntarism: The Case of Islamic Humanitarianism in Côte d'Ivoire

with

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**Tuesday, January 16, 2:30 pm
Paterson 433 (the History Lounge)
Carleton University***

Marie Nathalie is an Anthropologist and Professor in the Department of Sociology at UQAM, Marie Nathalie LeBlanc completed her PhD in the Department of Anthropology at University College London (United Kingdom). Her main publications deal with religious transformations in West Africa, civil society, youth and women. She recently published *Faith and Charity: Religion and Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa* (Pluto Press 2016, starring Louis Audet-Gosselin) that stems from a research program on the roles of faith-based NGOs in civil society in Africa (SSHRC). She is currently leading a research project (SSHRC) entitled: *What have become of the marabouts? Occult trajectories and social changes in West Africa*. Professor LeBlanc has participated in several international research programs, notably on Islam and the public sphere in West Africa with a team of researchers in France and Africa. Her recent research interests focus on esoteric knowledge and the question of the occult in Islam in West Africa, the feminization of Islam in Côte d'Ivoire and religious centers of healing. Professor LeBlanc is currently Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on International Development and Society (CIRDIS), coordinator of the Laboratory on Innovative Africa and holder of the UQAM Strategic Chair, entitled: *Contemporary Islam in West Africa: Dynamics collective mobilization*.

Abstract:

Drawing on ethnographic field research conducted in the cities of Bouaké and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire between 2011 and 2017, this paper examines the recent growth and institutionalization of Islamic voluntary, humanitarian and charity actions. The past two decades have been marked by the multiplication of formal and legally recognized Islamic NGOs in the country; a significant number of them stemmed out of local initiatives. In this paper, I propose to centre the discussion on two aspects of the transformation of Islamic charity work into formal Muslim NGOs, namely processes of ONG-ization and their impact on Islamic charity work and the emergent ethics of voluntarism that stems out of the institutionalization of Islamic charity work. First, the recent multiplication of Islamic NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire fits with global processes relating to the ONG-ization of civil society actors and social movements (Freeman 2012; Giovannoni *et al* 2004; Hearn 1998); such neoliberal processes include the professionalization of associative milieus and the appropriation of technical know-hows developed in the context of international development and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the activities and orientations of Islamic NGOs tend to converge with neoliberal development logics that prioritize private entrepreneurship and transfer responsibilities for humanitarian assistance to communities and individuals. Nonetheless, while local Islamic NGOs attempt to fit with professionalizing criteria required to have access to development programs' funds and policy planning (at the national and international levels), their actions are framed within local notions of piety and reflect how religious actors have gained significant influence on the logics of development. In the second place, I will show how the interspersing of neoliberal logics of ONG-ization and religious worldview has set the scene for the construction of an emerging ethic of voluntarism (LeBlanc & Audet Gosselin, 2016). Such an ethics can be thought about in parallel to Didier Fassin's notion of a 'humanitarian reason' (2010). Contemporary Ivorian Islamic NGOs adhere to an ethic of voluntarism that build on older-standing Islamic charitable actions based on personal *zakat* and *sadaqa* donations and institution-regulated charity such as *waqfs*. The emergent ethics of voluntarism emphasizes values of self-responsabilization, individual accountability, and long-term development. The paper will also raise that fact that, while the actions of Islamic NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire remain relatively conventional in terms of fields of activities (mother-child well-being, health and education) and in terms of fund raising means (individual donations, sponsorship programs), their actions step out of established paths when examining the roles of women and the institutionalization of Islamic healing practices. Finally, while the empirical data discussed in the paper focus on Islamic NGOs, the discussion highlights the need to analyse the actions and positioning of Islamic NGOs in parallel to other religious NGOs, especially Catholic and Evangelical ones, to the same extent that local and transnational NGOs cannot be examined separately.

For more information, please contact african.studies@carleton.ca

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