



The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe

Erica Bornstein

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Religious NGOs are important sources of humanitarian aid in Africa, entering where the welfare programs of weakened states fail to provide basic services. As collaborators and critics of African states, religious NGOs occupy an important structural and ideological position. They also, however, illustrate a key irony—how economic development, a symbol of science, progress, and this-worldly material improvement, borrows heavily from other-worldly faith.

Through a study of two transnational NGOs in Zimbabwe, this book offers a nuanced depiction of development as both liberatory and limiting. Humanitarian effort is not a hopeless task, but behind the liberatory potential of Christian development lurks the sad irony that change can bring its own disappointments.

While rapt attention has been given to the supposed role of NGOs in democratizing Africa, few studies engage with the ground operations. Questioning the assumption that economic development is a move away from religious mysticism toward the scientific promise of progress, the author offers a remarkable account of development that is neither defeatist nor comforting.

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