

## **Governing Gifts**

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# Governing Gifts

FAITH, CHARITY, AND  
THE SECURITY STATE

*Edited by Erica Caple James*

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*Introduction*

## The Varieties of Religious Governance

ERICA CAPLE JAMES

**Introduction**

In spring 1999, during fieldwork in Haiti to document postconflict rehabilitation interventions extended to survivors of torture from the 1991–1994 coup period, I interviewed a director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID/Haiti), Justice and Democratic Governance (JDG) sector. I hoped to understand better the strategies the agency had implemented to “rehabilitate” Haiti and its people in the aftermath of political conflict and natural disaster. “Judith Gray,” a senior foreign service officer, expressed unease with USAID’s provision of social and therapeutic rehabilitation services to survivors of human-rights abuses: “We are used to dealing with crops, not this kind of development. . . . It would be better for a charity to do this sort of work.” I was surprised at Gray’s frank statement. Perhaps she intended to suggest that postconflict rehabilitation work was qualitatively different from agricultural development, and also that such work should not fall under the relatively new USAID category of “Justice and Democratic Governance.” But by stating that a charity should provide humanitarian relief, she appeared to argue for greater separation of public interventions to transform the Haitian state and private social welfare for victims of politically motivated violence.

I had already observed the way rehabilitation assistance tended to depoliticize the status of victims of human rights abuses as activists and also to privatize the education, economic support, and medical care they received (see James 2010). But a reluctance to aid Haiti’s suffering citizens through direct services might also have stemmed from difficult ethical and pragmatic questions such as whom to help, for how long, and toward what end. Why should a charity, and presumably a private faith-based charity, be preferable to a public agency in

delivering humanitarian and development assistance? What politics and ethics govern gifts extended to others by means of religious charity?

*Governing Gifts* investigates the intersections between faith-based charity and secular statecraft, the arts of managing public and international affairs.<sup>1</sup> The authors in this collection trace the connections among piety and philanthropy, and policy and policing, especially as sovereign states grapple with the effects of globalization—the transnational circulation of people, culture, finance capital, and even political conflict. They show how faith-based interventions render the state visible in the spaces between modes of governance that may appear to be lacking and those conceptualized as normative. Ultimately, our purpose is not to delimit the boundaries of “faith-based” aid or institutions or to reify “the state.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, we seek to understand how faith and organized religious charity can be mobilized—at times on behalf of the state—to govern populations and their practices. In exploring the relationship between faith-based charity and the state, this volume contributes to contemporary interdisciplinary discussions of the so-called boundaries between public and private (and sacred and secular) realms and to studies of the resurgence of religion in politics and public policy (e.g., Asad 2003; Berger 1999; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011; Daly 2009; Norris and Inglehart 2004).<sup>3</sup> The chapters demonstrate empirically how the borders between faith-based and secular domains of governance cannot be clearly demarcated, if they ever existed at all.<sup>4</sup>

In thinking about “the state,” the normative actor in domestic and transnational governance (Scott 1999), we respond to what many characterize as a tension between two frameworks. The classic conception regards it as an institution that holds a “monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force” (Weber 1946, 78), regulates the domestic economy and its connection to the interstate system, and provides a geographical “container” for national identities and citizenship (Trouillot 2003, 84). A contrasting view argues that globalization has eroded the sovereignty of and weakened the nation-state, especially given the power of international corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements to act internationally and the power of technology and media to transform the conduct of everyday life (Trouillot 2003, 79–96).

The examples in this volume have arisen among states that have had varying degrees of power historically and geopolitically. The assemblage as a whole supports anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (2003, 83–84) contention that “though linked to a number of apparatuses, not all of which may be governmental, the state is not an apparatus but a set of processes. It is not necessarily bound

by any institution, nor can any institution fully encapsulate it. At that level, its materiality resides much less in institutions than in the reworking of processes and relations of power so as to create new spaces for the deployment of power.” We suggest that examining “the varieties of religious governance” emerging at the nexus of “church” and “state” action—especially in relation to international security, population management, banking, and industry—brings into relief the power of “the state” as a process. Our ultimate aim is to use historical and international case studies to expand the parameters of what has typically been a US-centric discussion of faith-based interventions in the contemporary world. We also recognize that it is critical to interrogate how additional concepts analyzed here—faith, charity, security, and governance—are globally relevant.

Religiously inspired benevolent action—whether arising from the individual or an institution—has been employed, deployed, and even repressed by the national security state, especially in response to the mobility of people and finance. *Religion* is defined loosely here as a collective organization and mobilization of belief within a system of sacred meanings.<sup>5</sup> The terms *faith*, *charity*, and *security* are, of course, multifaceted, especially when brought into conversation with conceptions of the nation-state and threats to its security. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s classic definition suggests, faith can be considered a practice and process arising from and inculcating in adherents, affective dispositions that confirm (or resist) that religious meaning system.<sup>6</sup> Religion and religious institutions, as well as individual and collective faith, are important components of the empirical accounts of organized charity examined here.

As the secular nation-state has evolved, civic projects arising from individual and collective faith have influenced public policy and economics, even as states have held the legal power to define and contain “religion” within the so-called private sphere of social life. Faith-based civil action ranges from an individual’s fulfillment of religious obligations by providing direct charity to compatriots in need to the compassionate care and humanitarian relief offered by religious nongovernmental organizations (RNGOs) to distant “others” across sovereign borders. The varieties of religious governance include a theocratic state’s use of private foundations to distribute charity domestically across class divides and a postauthoritarian government’s promotion of piety and charity in commerce and industry to inspire citizens to labor accountably and transparently. A common condition across our case studies is the integration of faith-based actors as “partners” of the state in implementing governmental policies and bureaucratic procedures and promoting and protecting national security. Concomitantly, the

degree to which gifts are governable, their recipient(s) worthy, and their uses transparent and accountable to the state is critical to the extension of effective charity. However, faith-based charity can also be a means of critiquing state policies and practices, as well as providing alternative models of citizenship to recipients, in an era when civil and human rights and entitlements are insecure. Charity can also be denied precisely because its offer can depoliticize structurally unjust conditions in everyday life.