

BOOK REVIEW

Lauren Carruth. *Love and Liberation: Humanitarian Work in Ethiopia's Somali Region*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. 240 pp. Illustrations. List of Abbreviations. Note on Transliteration and Somali Language Pronunciation. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781501759666.

Love and Liberation: Humanitarianism in Ethiopia's Somali Region is an intellectually stimulating exploration of the intricate web of humanitarianism and human experiences within the realm of aid work. Lauren Carruth—an anthropologist and experienced humanitarian practitioner within the Somali region of Ethiopia—examines the relationships between the ethics of care, culture, governmentality, politics, international dynamics, and aid work. The dichotomy between governmental and non-governmental employment is analyzed, along with impacts to the effectiveness and scope of aid projects. Using a multitude of examples, Carruth lists how bureaucracy can inhibit or catalyze the reach of aid, providing valuable insight for those working in the humanitarian sector. The political nature of aid work is also criticized, as it is used as a tool by wealthy donors and governmental bodies to intervene in intimate spaces within communities—along with the central principles of neutrality, independence, and volunteerism within humanitarian work. In addition to the political nature of humanitarian work, the book touches on discussions of need-based aid in comparison to per capita aid. This raises questions about the allotment of resources in aid projects, in addition to the economic impact of aid work.

Lauren Carruth courageously illuminates the “other side” of aid work by drawing on the firsthand experiences of those directly affected by humanitarian efforts. Here, the author engages with the hierarchies of aid work and the limitations imposed on individuals, prompting confrontation with presumptuous notions of the dynamics of humanitarianism. Carruth delves into the intricacies of mutual dependence and the blurred lines between beneficiaries, donors, and aid workers. The text centers around the notion that aid workers can act as both subjects and objects of global humanitarianism. While there is no denying the ambiguity within these domains, the lived experiences of local aid workers often involve exploitation, underappreciation, and being rendered invisible. As such, the conditions under which labor takes place and labor rights are called to question. Humanitarian assistance can also reinforce existing inequalities within communities. To effectively address these disparities, socio-economic and political/historical contexts need to be considered in addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations, along with a consideration of the intersectionality of vulnerabilities across populations. The book further sheds light on local efforts to recalibrate inequitable systems of governance and crisis

response that are integral to understanding the complexities of power in this region.

This theme resonates with dialogues on ethical considerations and power dynamics, while also highlighting cultural nuances that influence the efficiency and impact of humanitarian work within diverse local contexts. Within the context of humanitarianism in Ethiopia's Somali region exist cultural values that emphasize the ethics of care through a unique cultural approach to loving, caring for, and responding to the needs of others—which differs from conventional humanitarian practices in ways that are long-lasting and sustainable. The author highlights this repeatedly throughout the book, using the term '*samafal*,' which comes from the Somali language. Through examining the concept of *samafal*, we can understand first, how communities have unique ways of coping with crises and caring for each other through mutual assistance, and second, where aid work falls short—namely through unsustainable assistance, cheap labor, glass ceilings, hierarchies, dependency, and much more. The shortcomings of humanitarianism perpetuate neocolonial dynamics, where national and international organizations maintain control over recipient communities and create relationships of dependence rather than self-sufficiency. Diving into the “geographies of care” is especially captivating, as it sheds light on how the delivery of aid is often influenced by geographical, political, and social factors, and often focuses on the short-term relief of bodily suffering over lasting and sustainable reforms. The author underscores the need for localized, context-specific interventions, pushing back against the prevalent model of standardized assistance.

In conclusion, *Love and Liberation: Humanitarianism in Ethiopia's Somali Region* offers a deep understanding of humanitarianism as it intersects with multiple perspectives of local and global culture, politics, and governance. By questioning traditional narratives encompassing aid work, the book calls for a reconsideration of the roles of culture, governance, and power in shaping the complexities of humanitarian work. Through themes of interdependence, labor, sustainability, and ambiguous boundaries, aid work is contextualized with recognition of agency and reconstructed paradigms to better align with realities on the ground. The book serves as an equally essential guide for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars looking to understand the intricacies of humanitarian efforts and human experiences within Ethiopia's Somali region.

Sara Ghebremicael 

The University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

sghebremicael@unc.edu

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