

**Volunteer Economies: The Politics and Ethics of Voluntary Labour in Africa**

edited by RUTH PRINCE and HANNAH BROWN

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*Volunteer Economies* provides a critical perspective on volunteering in Africa. It is a decidedly novel perspective, predominantly because the literature on volunteering tends to be dominated by Northern experiences and is often dissociated from the political and economic contexts that shape it. While many have interrogated the ways in which politics and economics shape volunteering and volunteers (Schneider *et al.* 2008, Redfield 2012; Muehlebach 2012; Perold *et al.* 2014), this book provides the space to thoroughly analyse how embedded volunteering is in these aspects of society.

The most commonly used definition of volunteering is: an activity, done of one's own free will, for the public good and without any expectation of financial return (Leigh *et al.* 2011). Yet in Africa (and in other contexts) this definition does not always hold true. Drawing predominantly on ethnographic studies, the stories of volunteers discussed in each chapter illustrate the ways in which volunteering in Africa complicates our standard definition. Relations of obligation – traditional and social, expectations of financial gain in contexts of poverty and unemployment, and political interests that inform development practice – all shape the agency and actions of volunteers. This is the overarching message of the book.

In this text a range of key themes build towards that message. First, there is a complicated relationship between volunteering and the fact that many volunteers rely on the stipends, food and transport allowances they receive for livelihoods. This is well illustrated in the chapter by Colvin on volunteers in community-based healthcare programmes in South Africa. The story of Nolwazi – a volunteer herself – who pays 'small but significant' (p. 32) stipends to her network of community-based volunteers and has her funding cut – illustrates the vulnerability of volunteers in contexts of poverty. Bruun's chapter on volunteering in medical research in Zambia, tells the story of Rose – a regular volunteer at the clinic who engages in these activities as 'precarious piecework' (p. 106). Emerging from this theme of livelihoods and volunteering are two related issues. First, the precariousness of volunteering as a livelihood strategy is evident. Second, volunteerism can perpetuate race and socio-economic inequalities. Wig discusses how, in Lesotho, international volunteers are paid stipends far exceeding the monthly salaries of local employees, let alone the stipends for local volunteers – a fact not missed by local employees. Kelly and Chaki also reveal how volunteers working on malaria control in Tanzania are critical of the fact that they are paid minimal stipends to do labour intensive work, while their employed supervisors, who they perceive to do far less, receive stable salaries. Both chapters make evident the inequalities and conflicts, as well as the high potential for exploitation of vulnerable volunteers in development contexts.

A second theme relates to identity – the identities that are claimed through the act of volunteering, as well as the identities that are moulded in interactions

with others. This theme again challenges the commonly accepted notion of volunteers having altruistic motivations. Various chapters illustrate how volunteering gives individuals an opportunity for claiming a moral identity such as being recognised as ‘having a heart for the community’ (p. 109), challenging stigma (Chapter 1), and repenting for wrongs of the past (Chapter 9). Identities are also moulded in relation to others and attention has been paid to the ways in which volunteering allows individuals to cross boundaries of geography, race and class and potentially challenge individuals’ identities; but also to the ways in which volunteering serves to ‘reinforce the hierarchy between ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’” (p. 23).

The contributions interrogate the ways in which political and social agendas shape motivations for volunteering and complicate the practice of volunteering – challenging the common assumption that volunteering is ‘agenda-free’. The historical chapter by Jennings on international development volunteers in newly independent Tanzania (Chapter 5) clearly reflects how volunteer relationships with local and national political elites serve either to reinforce or undermine the activities of development agencies. These illustrations demonstrate how embedded volunteering is in politics – a theme that is often overlooked by many researchers in the field of volunteering.

It is notable that the editors did include amongst the contributors, authors from the continent – an important action that aligns with the critical messages of the book. However it is unfortunate that much of the literature written by African authors about volunteering, some of which is unpublished but openly accessible, is to a large extent overlooked by the contributors. Such literature has highlighted many of the themes that are raised in this book (e.g. van Blerk 2011; van Blerk & Whande 2011; Perold et al. 2014; Mati 2014; Perold & Graham 2017).

In sum, by drawing on ethnographies the contributions provide a great deal of nuance, allowing the reader to explore the emerging themes through the stories of individual volunteers in their organisational, cultural, social, economic and political contexts. While the nuance provided by each contribution is refreshing, it does leave the reader having to draw their own conclusions. The text as a whole presents potentially important claims that offer a critical lens on the dominant volunteering ‘canon’. These claims could have been developed further in a concluding chapter that draws the emerging themes of each chapter together. Nevertheless this remains a text that provides a significant contribution to the field of volunteering and which lays bare the ways in which the experiences of volunteers in Africa challenge dominant conceptions of volunteering.

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LAUREN GRAHAM  
*University of Johannesburg*

**Security in Africa: A Critical Approach to Western Indicators of Threat**  
 by CLAIRE METELITIS

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Claire Metelits' book is an important contribution to the study of security in Africa. It proposes a new approach, Critical Security Study, to correct the weaknesses of Traditional Security Study. The book is well organised, well written and reader-friendly.

Politicians, military analysts and scholars have been debating and reflecting on the nature of the new world order since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences for global and regional security. The security implications of this evolving new world order have been previously analysed in Martin van Creveld's 1991 book *The Transformation of War*, in which he predicted that state-led wars will be replaced by wars fought by non-state actors. Metelits' book is in the same tradition of the search for meaning in the evolving world order and greatly contributes to the reflection on the complexities of international security and its implications for the continent of Africa.

For scholars, military analysts and policymakers, this book presents many advantages. It explains the need to evolve from Traditional Security Study to Critical Security Study: a move from excessive focus on the Westphalian state in order to take into account local conditions. Metelits suggests two important ideas: a process of resolving conflict that ceases to ignore conflict legacies within given states and a method to avoid escalation by recognising that the nature and praxis of statecraft in Africa could be, itself, a source of instability. In this regard, the author emphasises that the political institution doesn't enjoy an equal level of legitimacy throughout the governed space.

Another major contribution of Metelits' book is her assertion that 'securitization' of Africa is based on western perception and perspective. Because there is