

text), the Sikasso court often read elements of local or customary practices ‘through the lens of Maliki law’ (p. 61, 64, 80) and applied Maliki precepts even when non-Muslims were involved. Yet this line of argument risks minimizing the historical significance of the Maliki legal tradition in West African communities and the fact that many litigants and African court personnel would have brought their own understandings of Maliki jurisprudence to court.

States of Marriage is well written and persuasively argued. Burrill adeptly navigates the multiple levels of her study, employing an impressive range of sources while consistently grounding colony-level developments within the context of Sikasso. Extensive interviews with people in Sikasso provide context for the court cases, which, read in isolation, can be problematic sources that over-privilege conflict and the importance of formal or state institutions in resolving it. Indeed, this work sets a new standard for the use of colonial court records as historical sources. In addition to contributing significantly to the fields of African history and gender studies, the book provides useful background for understanding contemporary debates around the Family Code in Mali. Finally, the consequences of the colonial administration’s view of marriage practices and women’s status as ‘static ethnographic curiosities’ (p. 107) – rather than as integrally connected to economics, power and work – are instructive for contemporary development interventions aimed at women.

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doi:10.1017/S0001972017000833

Susanne Epple, *The Bashada of Southern Ethiopia: a study of age, gender and social discourse*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag (pb €39.80 – 978 3 89645 825 4). 2010, 291 pp.

This monograph on a southern Ethiopian people appeared a few years ago but may not have received the attention it deserves. German anthropologist Susanne Epple has written a remarkable ethnography of the approximately 2,600-strong Bashada people, an agro-pastoralist group in the south-west Ethiopian plains east of the Omo River, which she has studied on and off since 1994. Culturally akin to the Hamar and Banna peoples and speaking virtually the same South Omotic language, the Bashada are a more or less independent society that distinguishes itself from its neighbours and survives through a combination of livestock herding (mainly goats), shifting cultivation, pottery production and hunting and gathering. While many ethnographic studies on this now rather well-documented part of Ethiopia have focused on politics, conflict, violence and livelihood changes, this study takes a different approach, offering a sustained analysis of the Bashada’s social organization and social and gender relations through the spectrum of their age organization. The result is a very rich and detailed study that evokes admiration for this society, and shows the author’s fieldwork skills. Age organization (age-sets, age-grades, generation-sets) having been a favourite theme of earlier generations of East African ethnological studies, it contributes by focusing on the conflict-mitigating and social equilibrium-enhancing role of the prevailing age system.

The book has five chapters: a brief introduction on age organization, age-sets and their definition; one on methodology; a third on the Bashada way of life, economy, family and local history; and the core Chapter 4 on ‘age differentiation

in everyday and ritual life'. Chapter 5 is the conclusion. The book also has a helpful glossary and an excellent index.

In the methodology chapter, the author explains with admirable frankness her positioning in the field. Her rapport with the host population is shown to have been exceptional. The gallery of Epple's interlocutors, with their photographs, is quite valuable (pp. 35–9), and an attention on personal detail recurs throughout. But I think this chapter could have been shorter, as it rehearses all the details of her entry into the field and the most well-known anthropological methods in exhaustive fashion. The book thus retains much of the PhD thesis format.

Chapter 3 describes the features of the Bashada age system and places them in their wider regional and ethnic context (i.e. their relations and origins in Nyangatom and Kara). Also, the kin terminology used in age organization is well explained; this section and its corresponding parts in Chapter 4 are a major ethnographic contribution. The Bashada have named and delineated age-sets for men (with the women taking over or reflecting the husband's age-set membership) that express group solidarity, identity and generational relations (seniority is key) and 'obligations': for example, those regarding ritual duties and labour relations. They are formally initiated. The author has focused on their role and effects in everyday Bashada life, or, as she describes it, 'how ... social relations between male and female, and between young and old are influenced by the prevailing age-organisation' (p. 13). Relatively few authors have done this – usually preferring the political-ritual aspect, or the abstract rule system – and they have not paid much attention to how the age system permeates daily social and family life. The role of peer groups in particular is highlighted as 'taking over' the social role of families in several contexts.

The author appears to see the age organization as a more or less stable organizing principle among the Bashada, having a structuring and socially 'disciplining' role, one to which people – adult men but also women and children – try to adhere. It is thus more than a rhetorical-discursive construct, but essentially a 'fixed' template of cultural rules. The author has specifically looked into the effects of age-set membership on the social relations of women, children and adolescents and on socialization of individuals within the community, but an in-depth discussion of women and gender in relation to the age system – as the book's title suggests – is not really elaborated. The author notes that 'a woman's age-set affiliation does not play a major role in her day-to-day life' (p. 85), thus seemingly defeating one stated purpose of the book. Much of Chapter 4, with its very large number of local discourse fragments, is about Bashada society age differentiation in general rather than about the age system and its impact, except where one would see the social control, sanctioning and solidarity effects of peer groups of any kind as the 'age system'. The second part then addresses the processes of men's (and later women's derived) affiliation to the age-sets.

This study is well-framed in the tradition of southern Ethiopian ethnography, in particular the 'Mainz school' of German ethnology, which together with the earlier Frobenius Institute tradition has contributed enormously to understandings of the region and its people. But despite its thematic approach and many fascinating case studies and dialogues from the field, it is nevertheless heavy going due to the great amount of detail and specific ethnographic descriptions. There is little comparison with related, neighbouring societies (Hamar, Kara and Banna, among others), making it difficult to see how 'unique' the Bashada are; apart from the emphasis on the role of peer group membership as a means of social control, the dominance of seniority, and the role of age organization as 'identity-construction', theoretical conclusions are absent in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, this book is a great study and invaluable contribution to the

documentation and understanding of Bashada society, with its viability, its integrity and its fascinating people.

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Ruth Prince and Hannah Brown (editors), *Volunteer Economies: the politics and ethics of voluntary labour in Africa*. Woodbridge: James Currey (hb £60 – 978 1 84701 140 4; pb £19.99 – 978 1 84701 139 8). 2016, 280 pp.

This volume takes the moral economy of volunteering in Africa as its central focus. Drawing from ethnographic and historical case studies in a variety of African contexts, the authors explore the relationship between labour in the ‘voluntary sector’ and notions of citizenship, identity and value. In doing so, the chapters in this volume provide valuable insights into the role of power and inequality in reshaping labour markets and determining what constitutes a ‘good’ volunteer.

It is commonly cited that volunteering and the reliance on voluntary labour as a tool of development stem from the neoliberal thinking of the late twentieth century. Although acknowledging the prominent place of this form of engagement within post-welfare societies, this volume also challenges these beliefs by expanding our historical view of volunteerism. It does so by placing contemporary patterns of voluntary labour within a deeper historical trajectory that extends back at least to the colonial period, if not before.

Subdivided into four sections, the book focuses on the practice of volunteering, broadly understood. Relayed through rich ethnographic detail, the authors present diverse case studies, including European youth on gap year excursions, elite African boarding school students volunteering through their Bible Club, low-income African participants in medical trials, and doctors working with Médecins Sans Frontières, among others. Rather than feeling disjointed, however, the volume’s diverse depictions of voluntary labour is one of its greatest strengths. Asking the reader to consider ‘voluntourists’ alongside low-income individuals who rely on clinical trials to access healthcare challenges the reader’s own conceptions of moral economic activity as well as the basic definition of the word ‘volunteer’.

The case studies in this volume add complexity to the landscape of participation by mapping the many intersections of moral and economic activity in African volunteering. Again, the diversity of perspectives portrayed in the case studies makes the examination of how moral and economic interests interact in African volunteering a particularly fruitful exercise. The ethical question of ‘who can afford to volunteer’ has previously been raised by scholars debating the role of volunteering in reinforcing social inequality. However, by considering this question alongside its companion, posed by Bruun (Chapter 4), Colvin (Chapter 1) and Kelly and Chaki (Chapter 2), of *who cannot afford not to volunteer*, the volume raises new questions about the ethics of the increasing professionalization of volunteering in Africa.

The debate over how labour relates to the public good is clearly visible throughout the volume, no more so than in Ståle Wig’s chapter (Chapter 3) on volunteering in Lesotho. Wig uses the case study of several expatriate volunteers at a local NGO to reveal the discourses of morality that often accompany requests for compensation from local volunteers. These tensions reach their apex during an event