

*Call for Papers*

**Weaponized Volunteering:  
New Configurations Between Civil Society and Armed  
Organizations**

International Academic Symposium

University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 21-22 February 2019

In recent years, ‘volunteering’ has been promoted as a popular route for civic participation and for demonstrating ethical conduct (Muehlebach 2012). Simultaneously, ‘the community’ has been increasingly presented as a central element of political reference and moral legitimacy (Parker and Debruyne 2011). Following this trend, state and non-state armed organizations and groups around the globe increasingly mobilize these notions to nurture new alignments and associations, or reframe existing configurations, between civic and militarized actors (Sørensen and Ben-Ari, In print).

A main example of such tendencies is the use of volunteers from the ‘community’ to support the operations of militaries, security and policing organizations, through community policing programs (Cattelino 2004), volunteer networks for homefront assignments in times of emergency (Kulik et al. 2016), or organized volunteering programs of army family members (mostly wives) to support military operations (Gassmann 2010). Under a similar logic, vigilant groups try to re-legitimize their operations by representing their work as a bottom-up, voluntary-based initiative (Kirsch 2010). Other types of civic-military entanglements involving volunteerism are created when militaries, police units and private security firms engage their personnel in volunteering activities beyond their regular security-related tasks. Such events often take place in cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations or with welfare and educational institutions and are often framed as ‘volunteering’ or ‘community engagement’. They may range from facilitating activities for children, the elderly, or people with disabilities to delivering food and other services to the needy.

These examples indicate an increasing mobility between the civil society and armed forces, which conjoins militaristic ethos with a glorification of ‘volunteering’ and ‘community engagement’; enabling carriers of weapons and (potential) violence to appear as ‘doing good’. Thus, they seem to require an alternative framework to traditional distinctions between the military and civic spheres (Lutz 2002); challenge classical perceptions of civil society as a non-violent terrain or as autonomous from

state intervention (Kaldor 2003); and disentangle the identification of volunteering with morality (Muehlebach 2012). These new configurations may reflect changing social hierarchies, institutional arrangements or power relations in the contexts where they take place.

We invite papers that reflect on these themes by researchers from a broad range of backgrounds in the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, (critical) military and security studies, international relations, volunteering and civil society research). We welcome both theoretical and empirical papers that engage in exploring some of the various forms of ‘weaponized volunteering’. Through this discussion, the symposium seeks to bring refreshing and critical perspectives on this theme to the fields of sociology and anthropology of militaries and armed forces, and volunteering and civil society research.

#### *Submissions:*

The symposium is aimed to lead to a special issue in a peer-reviewed academic journal. The symposium will be structured in a way that allows ample time for peer feedback on the papers. Contributors will be expected to submit the full manuscripts approximately three months after the symposium.

Please submit abstracts of up to 500 words by 27 October 2018 to [weaponized.volunteering@gmail.com](mailto:weaponized.volunteering@gmail.com) ; feel free to email us with any inquiries.

#### *Symposium organizers:*

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#### *References:*

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