



# Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières

By Renée C. Fox

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## Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières By Renée C. Fox

This study of Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders (MSF) casts new light on the organization's founding principles, distinctive culture, and inner struggles to realize more fully its "without borders" transnational vision.

Pioneering medical sociologist Renée C. Fox spent nearly twenty years conducting extensive ethnographic research within MSF, a private international medical humanitarian organization that was created in 1971 and awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1999.

With unprecedented access, Fox attended MSF meetings and observed doctors and other workers in the field. She interviewed MSF members and participants and analyzed the content of such documents as communications between MSF staff members within the offices of its various headquarters, communications between headquarters and the field, and transcripts of internal group discussions and meetings. Fox weaves these threads of information into a rich tapestry of the MSF experience that reveals the dual perspectives of an insider and an observer.

The book begins with moving, detailed accounts from the blogs of women and men working for MSF in the field. From there, Fox chronicles the organization's early history and development, paying special attention to its struggles during the first decades of its existence to clarify and implement its principles. The core of the book is centered on her observations in the field of MSF's efforts to combat a rampant epidemic of HIV/AIDS in postapartheid South Africa and the organization's response to two challenges in postsocialist Russia: an enormous surge in homelessness on the streets of Moscow and a massive epidemic of tuberculosis in the penal colonies of Siberia. Fox's accounts of these crises exemplify MSF's struggles to provide for thousands of people in need when both the populations and the aid workers are in danger.

Enriched by vivid photographs of MSF operations and by ironic, self-critical cartoons drawn by a member of the Communications Department of MSF France, *Doctors Without Borders* highlights the bold mission of the renowned

international humanitarian organization even as it demonstrates the intrinsic dilemmas of humanitarian action.

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