BOOK REVIEW

Abena Ampofoa Asare. *Truth without Reconciliation. A Human Rights History of Ghana*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. xi + 244 pp. 1 illustration. Bibliography. Index. $79.95. Cloth. ISBN: 9780812250398.

In *Truth without Reconciliation: A Human Rights History of Ghana*, Abena Ampofoa Asare anchors Ghana's postindependence political history in the literature and language of international human rights, targeting the records of Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission (NRC 2001–04) for what this "public archive" reveals about political violence and the NRC's participants. Asare argues, "Entering Ghanaian political history in this way… ushers us past 'big men' and political parties toward a meditation on the relationship between citizen and state in Ghana" (4). Viewed from this perspective, the NRC's testimonies and petitions formed a contested history-making project, wherein participants used the NRC as a "site for democratic expression" but where their sculpted representations of the past in the present moment were tethered to alternative futures (23). Asare treats these participants, alleged victims of state violence, as history writers and experts whose lived experiences are narrated in the book's seven chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion.

Asare draws from two human rights archives—primarily the NRC records at the University of Ghana—stories of human rights abuses that constitute the bulk of the book, analyzed against a large secondary literature. This book is not a history of Ghana, but rather a human rights approach to the history of postindependence Ghana. This approach shapes the major theme of the book, that of political violence, framed in the way the language of human rights was used to defend as well as critique Ghanaian governments and how all postindependence regimes have justified human rights abuses. And so, while Chapter Three explores gender and the language of human rights to talk about market women, Chapter Four interprets political violence as domestic violence, in that said human rights abuses destroyed blood and social bonds through politically motivated imprisonments and unemployment. By localizing international human rights discourse, Asare not only contributes to an underdeveloped aspect of Ghana's history but also problematizes the staple of global truth commissions, the human rights victim, through ambivalent soldier stories that defy the simplistic categorization of victim/perpetrator. She also pokes at historical time, a central

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premise of truth commissions and in history writing. For her, select petitions in the NRC archive disturb linear senses of time by insisting colonial violence did not end with political independence; indeed, that violence infringes on postcolonial politics and "continue(s) despite the return to electoral democracy" (147). The book concludes that Ghana's NRC has had "minimal impact" on national politics, conceding that the NRC should be viewed as "a collective history-making project" and its contents as "artful representations of the past" (156–57). For Asare, "the work of historical justice will inevitably require wrestling with cacophony" (165).

Truth without Reconciliation is a thoughtful, well-written meditation on global truth and reconciliation commissions through the optic of Ghana's postindependence politics. The book pushes us toward a fuller reconsideration of Ghanaian and African postindependence history. By turning our attention to the lived experiences of the multitudes who suffered and who survived state and corporate violence, human rights are less ethereal concepts than victim-filled faces and scarred bodies. But if perpetrators and victims alike of state violence can all claim to be victims and thus survivors, what exactly is "accountable justice," and who is there to be held accountable? These questions fall on the lap of power—powerful institutions, powerful individuals. That former president Rawlings and the corporations that engineered so much suffering went untouched during the NRC proceedings tells us all we need to know, and yet also points to an alternative case, quite different from Asare's account of political violence. Perhaps the principal source of state violence was not specific regimes or their agents, but rather the socialist and then (neo)liberal ideologies which guided each iteration of the Ghanaian state; in this manner, the violence becomes less a matter of human rights and even less a matter adjudicated by truth commissions.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Lawrance, Benjamin N. 2019. "The Projection and Performance of Ghanaian Nationhood...." *African Studies Review* 62 (4): 181–93. doi:10.1017/asr.2019.16.

Rettig, Max. 2008. "Gacaca: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?" *African Studies Review* 51 (3): 25–50. doi:10.1353/arw.0.0091.

Songolo, Aliko. 2005. "Marie Béatrice Umutesi's Truth: The Other Rwanda Genocide?" *African Studies Review* 48 (3): 107–19. doi:10.1353/arw.2006.0040.