

BOOK REVIEW

Humphrey Asamoah Agyekum. *From Bullies to Officers and Gentlemen: How Notions of Professionalism and Civility Transformed the Ghana Armed Forces.*

New York: Berghahn Books, 2019. 252 pp. List of Figures. List of Abbreviations. References. Index. \$135.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1789202946.

From Bullies to Officers and Gentlemen: How Notions of Professionalism and Civility Transformed the Ghana Armed Forces by Humphrey Asamoah Agyekum presents an interesting analysis of the transformative process undertaken by the Ghanaian Armed Forces since the last military coups in 1979 and 1981. Agyekum offers an ethnographic investigation into the Ghanaian barracks to examine the everyday practices of soldiering and how these practices have evolved, in an effort to transform the armed forces from promoters of coups into disciplined subjects, respectful of soldierly values and moved by a sense of “doing the right thing.” The book comprises six main chapters, which begin with a discussion of how the last military coups temporarily eroded the military order, affecting its hierarchy and discipline, and breaking down the trust among soldiers. Indeed, these most recent coups, unlike the former coups provoked by higher ranks, were led by junior officers and other ranks of the Ghanaian military, which caused serious implications for the continuity of the military as an institution.

The first chapter offers a historical perspective of the transformative process initiated in the 1980s to promote a return of the barracks’ “everydayness,” which is defined as a specific way of operating, based on the daily repetition of innumerable practices, both of thinking and acting, which trigger a predictability of responses, action, and reaction. This concept of everydayness emphasizes the importance of discipline and continuity which is essential for good military order.

In the two following chapters, concepts such as hierarchy and trust, and their co-constitutive relations, are introduced as seminal to maintaining the military as a social organization. If hierarchy generates trust by triggering expected behaviors, then trust strengthens the hierarchy by repeating these behaviors, thereby helping to hold societal relations together. Furthermore, by addressing the role of discipline (both externally imposed and self-imposed) and the sense of righteousness, the author argues that the lost

professionalism of the military was reintroduced by subjecting the soldiers to disciplined behaviors. This contributed to the emergence of new archetypes in the Ghanaian barracks, distinguished from the previous ones in terms of age, social connection, and education.

By adopting the analytical framework of Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Routledge 1997) and Michel Foucault in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977* (Pantheon 1980), the fifth chapter highlights the relevance of repetitive subjection of the (self) disciplined soldier, seeking self-improvement both within and outside the barracks to further the transformative process. Although a more detailed theoretical analysis of this concept as a dynamic of transformation is lacking, the role of education and the consequences of participation in international peacekeeping are introduced. As education takes place outside military institutions, members of the military interact and cross-fertilize their perceptions with civilians; these civil-military interactions help to establish both trust within the civil society and the reinsertion of military personnel into it, once the personnel have retired from service. Moreover, by engaging in peacekeeping operations, Ghanaian soldiers face the atrocities of global war, which reinforce their commitment to civility and distances them from violent attitudes.

The sixth chapter examines civil-military relations by highlighting the role of civility and professionalism in the transformation process. However, notwithstanding the military engagement in healthcare provision or communal labors, the civil-military relationship remains structured upon mistrust, a result of distancing the military from civil institutions. Meanwhile, although the transformation process brings more humanity to the barracks, suspicion and criticism among different generations of soldiers continue, as well as old abusive practices and hierarchies. Therefore, the objective of the author to demonstrate how the Ghanaian military is evolving into a human institution with human relationships remains weak, mainly because what persists is a strong disappointment and disrespect among the rank and file. The analysis of civil-military relations lacks a major civilian perspective, with the focus always on the military perception.

In conclusion, the book contributes to an analysis of the armed forces' participation within societies and the human experience of soldiers in reforming the country's security sector; it questions the role covered by the military's human-centered approach, civility, and professionalism. The author argues that these notions are not enough for the transformation process to be considered complete or successful. This contention is supported by extensive field work, numerous interviews, and accurate descriptions of the author's observations, making for an extremely detailed analysis. The author's rich assembly of data, collected in adverse, rigid, and hierarchic contexts, results in an engaging reading experience, which overcomes some theoretical difficulties, but without compromising the level of detail. The methodological section could serve as a guidebook for scholars working on similar topics, and the book overall could inspire more analysis in countries

that have also experienced similar violent military pasts. Furthermore, as the process remains incomplete, more questions could be addressed in order to facilitate an understanding of the transformation toward military civility and professionalism, as well as to analyze civil society's perception of the military.

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