

BOOK REVIEWS

Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies. Tristan Anne Borer, ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. 328 pp.

Telling the Truths is a collection of essays developed out of a conference at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies of the University of Notre Dame. The book provides a novel and welcome comparative examination of truth-telling processes. The introduction by Tristan Anne Borer provides a careful and thorough overview of terms and concepts and is therefore a useful resource for students and neophytes. Borer also addresses some of the big questions such as the politics of historical memory; who defines truth and delineates who the victims are (and are not) and what are the ramifications as hegemonic narratives emerge, potentially marginalizing other discourses, views, and experiences?

The volume essentially examines the relationship between truth-telling and peacebuilding from a variety of perspectives. Most chapters are overviews without in-depth case studies, and the lack of these is surprising. Although she correctly points out that her case is somewhat unorthodox, Shari Eppel's chapter on Zimbabwe is a welcome exception. The other chapters consist of thematic discussions such as Pable De Grieff's "Truth-telling and the Rule of Law" and Debra DeLaet's "Gender Justice." While these two topics in particular are of great interest, this reader was disappointed by the general nature of the text; the chapters generally offer more of a philosophical reflection on the subject than a hard-nosed empirical review of past and current truth-telling efforts.

The TRC of South Africa has attracted the most attention, and it is also heavily referenced in this volume. As it is a relatively well-known case, more details of other truth-telling initiatives would be desirable (a TRC has even been established in Greensboro, North Carolina to deal with violence during the civil rights movement). Juan Mendez's "The Human Right to Truth" chapter is helpful in this regard as he provides an overview of truth-telling initiatives in Latin America, bookended by a brief comparative discussion. (Readers may also wish to consult Rosalind Shaw's work on Sierra Leone and other recent publications).

While arguably a necessary feature of the academic marketplace, most edited volumes are weakened by a lack of integration. Like the vast majority of others, this volume would have been greatly strengthened by a concluding chapter drawing out some lessons from the assembled chapters. The introduction somewhat addresses this task, but a more thorough discussion would have been an excellent addition.

In summation, truth-telling will likely remain an area of great interest to both Africanist and other scholars and practitioners for some time to come. As this review was being written, the media are reporting calls for a TRC in Kenya to address the post-election violence of 2008. *Telling the Truths* is a worthy or even, given the embryonic state of this literature, necessary

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v10/v10i1reviews.pdf>

addition to the collections of scholars specializing in peacebuilding, truth-telling, and reconciliation. The introduction would be invaluable for advanced classes on the latter two subjects. As the introduction of *Telling the Truths* underlines, much work must still be done on these topics, and one hopes that further works will soon appear. In the meantime, this volume provides an important contribution, and it may have a significant impact on the evolution of this literature.

Mark Davidheiser

Nova Southeastern University

Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide. Gérard Prunier. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007. 236 pp.

Gérard Prunier is a research professor at the Centre National des Recherches Scientifiques at the University of Paris and Director of the Centre français des études éthiopiennes in Addis Ababa. The first edition of his *Darfur, the ambiguous genocide* was published by Cornell University Press in 2005. Unfortunately, the Darfur deadlock remains. Two years after the initial publishing of the book, millions of Darfurians continue to live in a precarious situation, threat of famine still lurks behind each corner and the quasi genocidal violence continues, allowing Prunier to publish a revised and updated edition of his book. It is a valuable account of history that places the situation in Darfur in a broader economical and political, African context.

As written on its first page, this book aims at describing and understanding the massive political, security and humanitarian crisis which has enveloped Darfur since February 2003.

The introductory chapter does not intend to give a detailed description of the region's geography, history or ethnography, but wants to provide us with a welcome overview to enable the non-specialist reader to grasp the context in which the crisis has developed. Only those elements necessary to announce and explain later developments, were singled out. Prunier succeeds in unravelling the complex mosaic of tribes and clears up the fog while correcting existing inaccuracies with regard to the fragile situation and complex economical and political influences are at the heart of the atrocities in Darfur. Therefore he provides a long-awaited, eye-opening work. The smart use of references to and comparisons with known European history, lighten the text. Nevertheless, this chapter requires the undivided attention and concentration from the reader, due to the complex terminology and the use of Arabic wording. Fear of oversimplification sometimes leads the author into a detailed narrative. It might make this book an unexpectedly difficult work, which possibly discourages the audience.

The introduction lays the vital foundations. In the build up to the start of the 2003 atrocities, attention is drawn to the socio-political climate at the time. The young democracy never was of the best health, stirring up feelings of deprivation, frustration caused by benign neglect externalised through for instance a lack of education and to little medical facilities. The socio-economic underdevelopment was and still is the seed for further conflict. The pressure of demographic growth due to the degrading ecological situation and the starting desertification worked as an extra fertiliser.

The following Libyan presence in the area, acted like acid on the open socio-economic wounds which started to be reinterpreted in increasingly ethnic and racial terms. It acted as the real trigger for the conflict and it did not take long before the situation reached the point of utter confusion. In the meantime, the international community stayed willfully blind. Even though Darfur was sinking to a point of no return, it never succeeded in grasping the international attention. The situation got unbearable for humanitarian aid organisations. "African solutions to African problems" is indeed a polite way to say that we aren't interested.

In this revised and updated edition, the 2005-conclusion is replaced by a new chapter, entitled "Darfur agonists," written during the summer of 2006, eighteen months after the research and writing for the first edition was completed. Starting with the United Nations Security Council resolutions as a turning point in the position of the international community, Prunier discusses their political implications, and the complex relationship between the referral to the ICC and the idea of setting up a Special Tribunal on Darfur. In the mean time, the African Union Mission in Sudan was faced with a harrowing situation on the ground, there being no "peace to keep," on top of a lack of cash, men, equipment and a clear mandate. Different political ambitions, expanding political hurdles and conflicting geopolitical agendas combined with the worsening situation in Chad and the collapse of agricultural production in Sudan, made the road to peace even more bumpy than it already was. The bitter and cynical narrative makes no attempt in hiding Prunier's anger and disappointment. At times he is a little too harsh and portrays the international community as naïve and incompetent even though there is a lot more to it. Statements are not always finely tuned.

It must be said that the book loses some of its power due to a number of flaws and inaccuracies. Even though most of the grammatical and spelling mistakes in the first edition have been corrected, some still remain. Additionally, the word divisions at the end of the line are often incorrect. Hyphenations are placed in the most bizarre places. Funny in the beginning, distracting after a while. Unfortunately the sentence that 'Even the usually well-informed advocacy NGO Justice Africa not mention Darfur in its October 2003 Monthly brief' is still there, even though reviewers of the first edition already noticed its incorrectness. The indignation caused by that sentence makes interested readers turn to Google to double check. The [brief](#) does in fact – though very briefly and maybe a bit disrespectfully – state that "The Darfur conflict continues to cause ripples more widely." The situation is dealt with in four rather short paragraphs. Whereas some sources are treated inaccurately, an impressively large number and wide variety of sources are brought together in this short book. Interviews and field information have a strong added value and give a crucial insight, complementing the literature overview.

Prunier provides us with a lot of food for reflection, certainly a contribution to the field and a practical source of reference for students interested in the historical, socio-economic and political roots of the ambiguous genocide in Darfur.

Wendy De Bondt
Ghent University, Belgium

Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid. Belinda Bozzoli. Athens, OH : Ohio University Press, 2004. 208 pp.

Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid depicts the Alexandra Rebellion of 1986 as analyzed through various themes from literature on collective action and social movements, as well as those on identity and space. With these, Bozzoli frames the rebellion and its aftermath as a drama played out in the township, and although she uses just one case study, it is general enough to represent what was occurring in many of the townships during that time. She draws upon thousands of archived interviews with the actors involved to create a rich and cohesive story that one cannot help but think sets the stage for the horrendously high rate of violence experienced in the country today.

It is the youth who are the crux of this story, as they fight against the complacency of previous generations to overthrow apartheid in any way possible, and in the case of Alex, it is often a violent one. Ironically, these youth were educated enough under apartheid to know just how bad it was, and decided to follow in the steps of such fighters as Mandela, Tambo, Slovo, Mbeki, to get out of it. Some of the more important tactics depicted here include the almost impenetrable male social networks of bonding on the streets, 'comrade' activities of boycotts and strikes to render the township ungovernable, and the sheer violence in acts such as torture, public brutality and necklacing against *impipis* (informers). At one point the youth rival the police in dishing out punishments and organizing people's courts, which draw on the historicity of *kgotlas*, albeit led not by elders but by increasingly hostile youth themselves.

For Bozzoli's script, space is a key issue. The township represents the setting from which individuals need liberation, and how it is theirs to transform; they — the 'conveyors of a just cause' — are to free the adults from their own oppression. Audiences and actors play out scripts of revolution, justice, and transformation that pit nationalistic comrades against the immoral evils of apartheid. For many perpetrators, it matters not that there are times when the innocent inadvertently become entangled in the violence, for the importance lies in the evolving identity of the township and its inhabitants as 'free' in what is to become the new and improved South Africa.

'Nationalism' overtakes violence as the master frame, as is evidenced in the post-rebellion years as memories are re-constructed. The recollections of the most heinous of actions evolve into those by some 'other,' thus romanticizing the nationalist movement by spotlighting the repression and casting the brutal acts to the wings. In the TRC stories to emerge, Alex plays the role of victim and the stories of individual struggles transform into meanings that go beyond the private sphere. Thus, a new public sphere has been constructed that allows township residents to share in each other's stories and create a collective township mentality.

Bozzoli fully fleshes out the theatre theme in Chapter 9 (*Nationalism and Theatricality*), and she does a good job of portraying funerals as political street theatre, defining the framing as that of group suffering and persecution, and illustrating the rules of the game regarding discipline and interpretation of events. Yet the careful reader may find herself wishing these themes had emerged earlier in the book with as much depth as they do here.

Perhaps the greatest question the book raises, and leaves inadequately answered, is how these events have shaped the current extreme rates of violence in South Africa today. To the

author's credit, she acknowledges that this is not the aim of the book, as it is historical rather than predictive, but with the brief references she makes at various points, she cannot help but leave the reader wanting more. The youth and their activities are discussed in the final chapter as a source of great pride as well as great shame for the township regarding "our heritage to our children: The knowledge of how to die, and how to kill" (p. 276). This statement is chillingly prescient given that it was made by an interviewee over twenty years ago. Disaffection and displacement continued past the rebellions and bubbled to the surface in violent acts by the late 1990s: "A culture of criminality, rooted in the very shattering of bonds that took place under high apartheid, emerged" and is currently sustained much of the time through peer pressure (p. 281).

Thus the book shows us in part *how* township rebellions have set the precedent for violence today, but we don't fully understand *why* this has carried over and remained so strongly embedded. This is not the goal of the book, however, and thus it has no option but to leave this theme until the last chapter, even if it comes across as too little too late. *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* does, however, successfully accomplish its goal of depicting the Alexandra Rebellion of 1986 as a type of political theatre in the streets, and it also accomplishes the task of raising questions quite relevant today to the region concerning relationships between nationalism and civic-ness, space and struggle, violence and crime, and elder and youth identities.

Kenly Greer Fenio
University of Florida

Reconstructing the Nation in Africa: The Politics of Nationalism in Ghana. Michael Amoah. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. 248 pp.

In *Reconstructing the Nation in Africa*, author Michael Amoah examines the extent to which theories and debates on nationalism formed in eighteenth-century Europe and America are relevant to present day Africa. Amoah challenges the Eurocentric use of the late 18th century France as the threshold for the emergence of nationalism. He proposes that the term nation as defined by modernists could be applied to African entities which pre-date the French Revolution. The Ashante nation emerged in 1701 and the Fante nation even earlier.

Amoah argues that existing theoretical constructs are relatively successful in categorizing macro, but not micro expressions of nationalism as is generally the case in Africa's multinational states. He is critical of ethno-nationalism being presented as irrational or counter to patriotism except in nation-states. The book's brief introduction posits that a sense of nationhood can deteriorate or be lost over time and that in many African states nationhood was based on anti-colonialism and was strongest just after independence. Due to poor economic conditions, ethno-nationalism and "politics of the belly" have characterized much of post-independence Africa (p. 6). People quite rationally vote along ethnic lines (what Amoah terms rationalization of ethno-nationalism) or for ethnic groups viewed as good for the entire country (what Amoah terms figuration or civic nationalism). Whereas ethno-nationalism enhances

patriotism in nation-states, it undermines it in multi-ethnic states, if ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism are not aligned.

To learn whether civic nationalism or patriotism among urbanites is separate from ethno-nationalism Amoah carries his laptop to markets, factories, malls, schools, and restaurants to log survey responses and undertake unstructured interviews. He examines voting in Ghana's 2000 presidential elections as a form of nationalism; one which is particularly complex in urban areas and uses Tema as his study site because it is the most ethnically diverse of Ghana's larger cities.

Somewhat unconventionally, Amoah's methodological approach and field research are described quite late in his book, much of which is devoted to a review of the literature on Ghana in support of the author's theory that Ghana's origin derives from a federation of native states rather than being rooted in modernity. Amoah uses place names in multiple languages as evidence of place of origin or ancestry and argues that in virtually all but portions of the Volta region, modern Ghanaians trace their origins to Guan people who migrated from the old Ghana Empire, which had its capital, Ghannah, near present-day Timbuktu in Mali. Amoah maintains that people of common ancestry, but with somewhat different ethnic identities (Ashanti, Bono, Gonja) would have emerged as a nation "had there not been colonial intervention" (p. 70).

Amoah also believes that the Ewe of the Volta region would have emerged as a nation had it not been for colonial intervention and the partition of Ewe lands between the British and French. The emergence of an Ewe nation pre-partition is not difficult to imagine. The Ewe retain relatively strong ties even across international boundaries as evinced by the rapid absorption of Ewe Togolese refugees into Ewe homes in Ghana in recent decades.

Amoah's case for the emergence of a Ghanaian nation based on common heritage across Guan ancestry lines relies heavily on the work of Eva Meyerowitz. Meyerowitz's work, as Amoah admits, has been criticized by leading Africanists, including Jan Vansina, who described Meyerowitz as displaying a "'lack of critical judgment' in the 'handling of her sources'" (p. 93). Amoah is so convinced by the accuracy of Meyerowitz's work that he details potential inaccuracies in the works of her critics and positively presents authors who agree with her. Whereas Amoah's research does unearth some intricacies related to Ghana's electoral process, such as the role of ethnicity not only in who people vote for, but also who they would refuse to support, and that women are more likely to disclose political preferences to friends rather than spouses, he seems too willing to present only those facts which support his Guan ancestry hypothesis. Thus, his belief that his "book successfully traces the ethno-geographic origins of all nationalities in modern Ghana, fills the gaps, completes the jigsaw and explains the evolution of the phenomena" is a bit difficult to believe (p. 5). He dismisses Ashante-Ewe rivalries as post-colonial in origin and asserts that Ghana's relative political and economic stability can be attributed to its Guan ancestry and emergence of an Akan identity for much of its population.

Amoah finds that urbanites in Ghana do not lose their ethno-nationalism and tend to vote along ethnic lines even though they simultaneously recognize that tribalism undermines the state. He suggests that urbanites are only "partially detribalized" and that groups which believe they have been discriminated against, such as the Ewe and the Asante, are most likely to vote along ethnic lines or refuse to vote for a candidate based on the candidate's ethnicity (p. 132). The author notes Northerners have come to "see themselves as belonging to a common identity

or ‘brotherhood’” due to their common Islamic traditions and relative economic and educational depravity and that this regional identity further impacts voting patterns in Ghana (p. 70). Specifically, that the vice presidential position is typically slotted for Northern candidates in order to get ethno-nationalist based votes — which Amoah presents as another example of tribalism. He continues to argue that Northerners are well aware of this fact and “manipulate their ethnonational identity to their political advantage” in order to remain in the political sphere (p. 120). Amoah believes that Ghana will remain a democracy, but questions whether a revitalization of nationalism and patriotism is possible in modern African states and suggests that multinational states may not be viable in Africa.

Restructuring the Nation in Africa has several tables, but no maps, which could make it somewhat difficult to follow for general readers or even Africanists unfamiliar with Ghana. The two-page conclusion makes for a rather abrupt ending in which a more detailed recap of his philosophies could have helped the reader make sense of his arguments, and help transition more smoothly into his cursory introduction to global warming, Ghana’s diaspora, the African Union and other topics tangentially related to book’s main themes.

Amoah presents the politics behind the concept of nationalism akin to Dava Sobel’s *Longitude* which exposes the politics behind the placement of the Prime Meridian. *Restructuring the Nation in Africa* should make for interesting debates in upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in International Studies, African history and politics.

Heidi G. Frontani and Kristine Silvestri
Elon University

Gallery Bundu: A Story about an African Past. Paul Stoller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 176 pp.

The Peace Corps, I was once told, has a matrimonial agency quality to it. It is about helping, and occasionally, espousing third-worlders. It is about roughing it up and sowing one’s wild oats. David Lyons, a rather self-absorbed, inconsequential type, does just that (besides dodging conscription to Vietnam, this being 1969): no marriage, however, comes from his encounters with Nigerien women, but a child, whose elusive quest makes up the main drive of an otherwise spectacularly bland story. Paul Stoller’s *Gallery Bundu* is a confessional novel that never lives up to the demanding criteria of that sub-genre, and, more sadly, fails to build on other possible strengths – like the exoticness of the setting (for Western readers) or the potentials for making a political point under the pretext of telling a story.

The novel takes place mostly in Niger, at various points in time between 1971 and today, following the comings and goings of Lyons between New York, Niamey (Niger’s capital) and Tillaberi (the small town north of Niamey where he serves as a Peace Corps volunteer). This has a slightly perverse tantalizing dimension: Lyons, himself as uninteresting as an un-carved piece of wood (the *bundu* in the title means, in Songhay, “wood”, as in carved wood art work), meets at several junctures fascinating characters, whom one would rather follow instead of sticking

with him, and he chances upon fascinating possibilities – for instance learning the art of seeing in the future, for which a Tillaberi elder told him he has a gift – which are not further pursued.

Nor does one feel that these threads could have been powered by Stoller's writing style. Supposedly, this is Lyons telling his story over tea to West African business partners in the African art shop he runs with his wife in New York, and although the style is written, not oral, it certainly has the endearing but thoroughly bleached quality of a fireside chat conducted by a scrupulously liberal American academic. This, of course, reminds us that Stoller himself is an anthropologist who lived as a Peace Corps in Niger, in the same locales visited by Lyons (some of the people portrayed here are adapted from his real life account of his experience in Niger's Songhay country, *In Sorcery's Shadow*.) Although Stoller's own story is very different from Lyons', and distinctively more interesting, he certainly endows him with his anthropological concern for minutely describing objects, events and scenes, in extensive passages whose only discernible relevance is to showcase and display expertise and attitudes.

To my surprise, Stoller does not eschew the trap of making of Africa and Africans a backdrop to the lives of a circle of Western agents – mostly French and American – although this is not done in a demeaning way. In fact, it is precisely the sense of respect with which the Nigeriens – and a family of Senegalese traders – are depicted that greatly participates in a stylization which, ultimately, makes them lifeless. The backdrop is usually steeped in misery and hospitality, the two flashing points of decent Africa nowadays: dazed donkeys and maimed beggars abound, as well as folks who force on you endless meals and welcome you with ecstatic clamors. It is marred by a few inaccuracies and anachronisms that would strike the admittedly few potential readers of this novel with knowledge of this area of West Africa, as definite blots: I doubt that children in Abidjan would run up to White men, crying "Toubab! Toubab!" This is more likely to happen in Senegal (where "Toubab" means White person). Describing the past of Zainabou, the beautiful woman with whom Lyons will have a son, Stoller shows her, in the 1960s, dreaming of becoming a student at the University of Niamey which was not founded until 1971.

Descriptions of life in Niamey in general are impervious to the many political and economic changes that transformed the place and its inhabitants over thirty years: but there is in fact no real sense of what is happening in the country outside of Lyons' small circle and his modest problems of growing up awkwardly and belatedly. Even this is not taken up as substantially as might lead us to think of Lyons' story as a kind of Bildungsroman. He doesn't have the internal meat and flesh that would make of his confrontations with the intense issues making up his story – his consorting as a White Westerner with a struggling Black African woman, his sexual escapades in Tillaberi, the racism of the French development workers or, for that matter, that of Nigerien society against half-breed children – life-shaping experience. Lyons, of course, meets his child at the end of the book – when, at least Nigerien readers, would read with a mix of embarrassment and incredulity the rage directed at him by the boy for having left him, a half-breed, in a society which allegedly hates half-breed. This part of the encounter has two conspicuous flaws: no Nigerien, or African-educated child would speak in such a direct, blaming manner to a parent; and inasmuch as it is true that Nigeriens would hate half-breed children (which I find by experience an extreme conception of the author), it is surprising that race-conscious France would fare better on this account: "You have no idea what

it's like to grow up a bastard *baturé* in Niger. You never fit in. The kids call you a half-breed, and the adults keep you away from their children [that is simply not true: to wit, there is not even a word for "half-breed" in Niger, apart from the French "*métis*", which is in fact indicative of an ambiguously superior social position inherited from colonial times]... In France I'm free." Whatever his individual experience of such matters, Stoller cannot be actually thinking that.

What Stoller really likes is the Songhay country, and Tillabéri. The scenes set in that area are the most captivating. Even the unbearable heat is conveyed to the reader with a sense of utter discomfort that is not without poetic intensity. Stoller reaches a calm lyricism as he describes the mesas of the Songhay country, quiet contemplative hours at dusk, or meaningful relations with local folks. We acknowledge here that we are no longer with Lyons, we are with his carver. The *bundu* comes alive. Otherwise the novel is quite wooden. It is an effortless read, this said, and I'd recommend it for exposing readers to a world so generally absent from the English language.

Abdourahmane Idrissa
University of Florida

Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions. Polycarp Ikuenobe. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006. 329 pp.

The text is "a logical, systematic, and normative interpretation or analysis of the idea of communalism in African cultures" (p. 2). This, according to the author, is necessitated by the dilettante attitude and misunderstanding of the communal spirit in Africa with the result that at a metaphilosophical level it is criticized as harboring pervasive religious supernaturalism, reckless anachronism, and irrational authoritarianism. The text is therefore an effort to offer a critique of such criticisms, especially the last one, though the three are closely interrelated.

According to the author, moral thought and epistemology in African cultures are, contrary to what some scholars have suggested, not innocent of the critical and analytical mode of inquiry. Though the notion of community and its relationship to individuals in African cultures differ from those in Western worldview, this does not warrant the conclusion that the community in African cultures hinders individuals from independent thinking. The author notes that in African cultures a community is not simply the aggregate sum of individuals (as is the case in the West), but where the aggregated sum is fused. However, for him, the critical point which others have failed to take cognizance of is that the African view of communalism is not one-way, but a two-way affair between community and the individual. It still gives room for individual rationality, creativity, imagination, and inventiveness to adapt various situations. "What the community does as a normative structure, epistemic context, and conceptual scheme is to circumscribe the context of relevant alternatives and counter-evidence, and to provide some basis for one's rationality, imagination, and creativity" (p. 84).

In the Western world, because of its universalist metaphilosophical view of philosophy, ethics is basically conceptualized as systematic, rigorous, and critical theories of right and wrong. The author argues that this is not accurate. According to him, some of the ideas of the

past Western thinkers that have today been reconstituted do not in themselves display the so-called essential critical, systematic, and rigorous features of philosophy. On the contrary, it is the process of reconstitution that has infused rigor and systematization to such ideas. He argues that similar reconstitution and analysis of African traditional ideas such as communalism should pass as contemporary Analytic Philosophy. The author sees his text as a contribution in this regard.

In comparing and contrasting moral education in African (traditional) communities and Western (modern) world, the author argues that the informal (communal) methods and processes of moral education in the form of narratives, folklore, proverbs, and oral tradition in African communities are superior to the Western formal, individualistic, and cognitive view or model of moral education and development. "The relevant factors in African communal culture seem to have enhanced efficacy in moral education, while their absence seems to have hindered the efficacy of moral education in modern Western culture and in African cosmopolitan cities where people have adopted the Western ethos and individualistic attitudes" (p. 162).

On the controversial issue of whether the communal structures and informal processes in African traditions necessarily lead to authoritarianism, the author distinguishes between rational and irrational forms of authoritarianism and then argues in favor of a rational form of authoritarianism in African cultures. The error made by critics, in the author's view, is that they fail to see the rational form. The basis of the rational form of authoritarianism is, according to the author, the principle of epistemic deference, and the social, contextual, and pragmatic nature of knowledge and justification. Hence epistemic or rational authoritarianism in African cultures is not something insidious or bad. In fact, "it is pertinent to note that an element of epistemic authoritarianism is accepted in science as a legitimate principle" (p. 210).

The author also challenges the view that epistemic authoritarianism in African cultures leads to indoctrination rather than education. He postulates that indoctrination is not necessarily bad unless the process is extreme enough to involve brainwashing. At the same time, he argues that epistemic authoritarianism in African cultures does not involve brainwashing hence there is nothing bad about it. The author also argues that indoctrination, contrary to popular belief, is a necessary part of or a precondition for any meaningful education and that it does not vitiate rational autonomy. Ironically, the author proceeds on to argue that in all honesty and fairness, it is the Western emphasis on "thinking for oneself" that would actually in some instances constitute extreme indoctrination (brainwashing).

On some libertarian criticisms on communalism in African cultures, the author believes that they are misguided. Such criticisms, he is convinced, emphasize too much on individual autonomy to the extent that they either ignore the limits or exaggerate the power of individual rationality, as well as the value of individual autonomy and freedom. And this is a weakness that communalism in traditional African cultures does not suffer from.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with some of the views expressed by the author, one aspect of the text stands tall: the author has ably and meticulously fulfilled his primary objective of giving a logical, systematic, and normative interpretation and analysis of communalism in African cultures. In this respect he has made reasonable reference to works of some notable West African philosophers namely Wiredu, Gbadegesin, Gyekye, Appiah, Menkiti, Bodunrin, and Nzegwu. However, for the sake of balance, it would have been better had the author

included references from works of some renowned scholars from Eastern and Southern Africa besides Nyerere. There are some glaring typographical errors in the text though bearing in mind its voluminous nature some may turn a blind eye. All said and done, given the conscientious and detailed manner in which the text treats the topic of communalism in African cultures, the text should be resourceful and of interest to scholars in African studies regardless of their areas of specialization.

F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo
University of the West Indies

History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa. Hans Erik Stolten, ed. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. 2007. 376 pp.

This work is an important contribution both to the recent historiography of South Africa and to analysis of the post-apartheid era. It also provides interesting discussions of such practical matters as teaching, designing curricula in a challenging policy environment, and applied history in efforts towards the rectification of social injustices. For these reasons, plus the fact that it is well-written and edited, the volume should appeal to a wide audience of teachers, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists.

The book grew out of a 2002 conference sponsored by the Nordic Africa Institute and the Center for African Studies at the University of Copenhagen. This brought to Denmark more than fifty historians and historically oriented scholars, most of them from South Africa and northern Europe. Students of South African history over the past several decades will recognize many of the names of the scholars present.

The editor, Danish historian Hans Erik Stolten, has divided the volume into three sections. Part I consists of six essays that focus on the "role of history in the creation of a new South Africa." These include an account of the history of South Africa as a concept (Saul DuBow); an analysis of the concepts used in the description of the democratic "transition" (Thiven Reddy); a discussion of how history is taught in the post-apartheid era (Colin Bundy); a critique of two prominent narratives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Elaine Unterhalter); and descriptions of the role of the researcher in land restitution cases (Anna Bohlin, Martin Legassick). Part II consists of five papers on the theme of "heritage and the popularizing of memory." Topics covered here include public history and "heritage" in the post-apartheid era (Gary Baines, Christopher Saunders); the centenary commemoration of the South African War (Albert Grundlingh); how apartheid is depicted in the museum at Gold Reef City (Georgi Verbeeck); and the restructuring of key South African spaces to conform to global consumerism (Martin J. Murray). Part III consists of six papers that deal with South African historiography. The first three (respectively by Bernhard Makhosezwe Magubane, Christopher Saunders, and Merle Lipton) pay special attention to the debate between "liberal" and "radical" South African historians and its legacy. The fourth paper by Wessel Visser and the fifth by Allison Drew both concern representations of communism. The former is about the production of anti-communist history in Afrikaans and the latter about the role of racism in the Communist Party in the 1920s.

The sixth paper by Catherine Burns is rather unique in offering a new vision of the relevance of history for the South Africa of today. The editor has also made available on his [website](#) unpublished conference papers.

Due to space limitations, I can mention only a few things about the papers and the issues they bring up for debate. First, Catherine Burns' paper provides a fresh vision of history's relevance. It describes how she and her colleagues at the University of Natal, Durban are bringing history to life for a new generation by focusing on health and legal issues. History has a "thirsty audience," she suggests, but only when it is dressed up in such disguises. Martin Legassick's essay is particularly interesting for its personal insights on the role of an academic historian working to identify and foster legitimate land restitution claims in the Northern and Western Cape. This description is nicely supplemented by Bohlin's paper on land restitution and memory in the small Western Cape community of Kalk Bay. Murray's paper will be of interest to those concerned with the post-modern simulacra of global capitalism. Here Murray discusses the pseudo-gold mine at Gold Reef City, the pseudo-maritime ambience of Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, and the ostentatious fantasy of the entertainment facility known as "Lost City."

As mentioned above, the split between so-called liberal and radical South African historians is explicitly addressed by three essays in part III, but it is also an issue that is implicit in a number of others. This debate has essentially been about the relationship between capitalism and apartheid. Debate continues over the causal roles of culture, race, and class. That there are still tender emotions here is revealed Merle Lipton's paper as she describes the hostile reception her work has faced because it argues that segments of business were in fact instrumental in ending apartheid. From a quite different perspective, Magubane is scathing in his judgment that white South African historians, whether liberal or radical, "never confronted what it meant for black folks to be treated as non-persons in the country of their birth. Or indeed, what it meant to be white and be proclaimed a member of the superior race!" (p. 252).

Even if unduly harsh, Magubane's critique leaves one wondering how white historians investigating black history under apartheid could overcome the institutional racism of their segregated and economically privileged upbringings. Psychologically, how did they deal with the fact that many could jet off to study in England or the U.S.A. while at the same time research grave issues of poverty and injustice at home? Did they have life changing experiences that led them to history or did history lead to those experiences?

At least in their contributions for this volume, white South African scholars do appear reticent to reflect on the role of race in their work lives. While Saunders provides a nice paper on his four decades of work, he does so in a purely intellectual fashion, not really addressing psychological or identity issues. Furthermore, neither he nor anyone else in the volume brings up such issues as translation complexities and the use of research assistants. Why has translation or the use of European languages with non-native speaking informants been such a non-issue for scholars in a country where there are so many languages and dialects? And, if white scholars used black research assistants as translators and collectors of oral history why do they now seem invisible? Unfortunately, there is nothing here to compare with the fascinating account [published recently](#) in *ASQ* by historian Robert Edgar about his research life, the long-

term impacts his work has had on the peoples he studied, and the way that he has become personally intertwined in locally produced religious worldviews (Edgar 2007).

Robert Shanafelt
Georgia Southern University

Reference:

Robert Edgar. "The Ash Heap of History: Reflections on Historical Research in Southern Africa." *African Studies Quarterly* 9, no.4: [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v9/v9i4a4.htm>

Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies. Sylviane A. Diouf, ed. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003. 242 pp.

Sylviane A. Diouf has assembled a collection of provocative essays by scholars of African history that challenges the idea of West Africans' complicity with the transatlantic slave trade by examining various strategies of resistance. Through the use of oral histories, ship logs and records, as well as archaeological findings, these scholars unveil a resistance to slavery that occurred in West Africa primarily before slaves were boarded and transported to the New World. The collection is divided into three parts, examining of different strategies of resistance: defensive, protective, and offensive.

The scholars in this collection overwhelmingly argue that certain populations of West Africans were keenly aware of the devastating impact of the transatlantic slave trade on their societies, and these populations sought to mitigate the damages as best they could. One method used was to develop defensive strategies, such as the environment, for protection. Elisée Soumonni and Thierno Mouctar Bah in their essays "Lacustrine Villages in South Benin as Refuges from the Slave Trade" and "Slave-Raiding and Defensive Systems South of Lake Chad from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," respectively, examine the relations between the movement of refugee populations to the lake area and the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on these populations. They contend that as the market for human cargo increased, some West African communities relocated to environments that less accessible to slave raiders.

In addition to the use of environmental features as a defensive strategy, architectural features were also used as a means to protect against slave raiders. Homes and villages were often designed with labyrinths, high walls, and various points of ingress and egress to impede easy access by slave raiders. While West Africa and the transatlantic slave trade are the primary foci of this book, Dennis D. Cordell's essay "The Myth of Inevitability and Invincibility: Resistance to Slavers and the Slave Trade in Central Africa, 1850-1910" focuses on resistance to the Muslim slave raiding and slave trade in north-central Africa. This also involved peoples relocating, abandoning their villages and taking refuge in caves and tunnels, and banding together in large settlements to ward off slave raiders.

While defensive strategies were used, protective strategies also proved to be compelling response to the slave trade. Part two, "Protective Strategies" is highlighted by an essay by Diouf, "The Last Resort: Redeeming Family and Friends." In this essay, Diouf explores the practice of captive redemption. One example Diouf vividly resurrects is the fascinating story of Ibrahima abd al-Rahman Barry who spent 40 years in bondage in Mississippi, and how he returns to Liberia in 1829 to gather money from his wealthy family to purchase his five children and eight grand children from slavery. Unfortunately, Ibrahima dies before the caravan arrives in Monrovia carrying \$6,000 to \$7,000 in gold (p. 81).

If captive redemption was a viable protective strategy against the slave trade, the rise in secret societies and alliances amongst various groups helped to protect some West Africans from enslavement. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson's essay "Anglo-Efik Relations and Protection against Illegal Enslavement at Old Calabar, 1740-1807" explores such arrangements, and specifically how the Arotraders were able to travel with security throughout Old Calabar, "which supplied over a quarter of a million persons for export to the Americas between 1740 and 1807", with the use of oracles, chalk markings, and kinship ties (p. 102). A rise in secret societies amongst the Efik and in the Ekpe society also helped to protect African slave raiders and traders against enslavement.

The offensive strategies examined in part three range from training children to act as scouts for detecting the encroachment of slave raiders, to revealing a continuum of resistance that culminated in the Mandingo Rebellion, 1785-1796; the Hubbu Rebellion against the Futa Jallon state in the 1850s; and the Bilali Rebellion, 1838-1872. John N. Oriji in "Igboland, Slavery and the Drums of War and Heroism" also uses oral traditions and other sources to examine offensive strategies that involved such practices as communities forming alliances and pacts to protect themselves against Abam slave raiders; people dropping poisoned food, water, and wine along strategic slave raiding routes; and young men receiving military training to protect their communities. Ismail Rashid's examines the importance of slave rebellions as an offensive strategy in "A Devotion to the Idea of Liberty." Rashid refutes the pervasive belief that "antislavery [...] emanated solely from religious, economic, and philosophical ideas of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment" (p. 132). He argues that "the Mandingo Rebellion in the eighteenth century and the Bilali Rebellion in the nineteenth century — attest to the tenacity of the enslaved in resisting slavery and asserting their freedom" (p. 133). But even asserting freedom came with a price, such as adapting practices that challenged tradition and created dubious roles for some West Africans, particularly those communities that were decentralized.

Walter Hawthorne challenges Joseph Miller's notion that "those persons who were not sold or traded into the transatlantic slave trade or enslaved in Africa were 'human flotsam'" (p. 153) in his essay, "Strategies of the Decentralized." Hawthorne asserts that for decentralized communities often the best strategy to protect themselves against the slave trade was to become slavers (p. 154). In "The Struggle Against the Transatlantic Slave Trade: The Role of the State," Joseph E. Inikori seeks to answer the question, "what factors explain state involvement in the export trade in captives?" (p. 171). In Inikori's concise historical overview, he asserts "the slave trade was dependent on transportation and weak or non-existent centralized government" (p. 172), ultimately concluding that those West African communities that did not centralize their

governments fell prey to the transatlantic slave trade.

Although the implicit thesis of the collection is to examine strategies of resistance other than mutinies, David Richardson's essay expands the research on shipboard revolts and their impact on slavery. Richardson uses European shipping records to identify no less than 483 cases of violent actions taken by Africans to resist being enslaved and transported across the Atlantic Ocean. Richardson concludes that such revolts had a far-reaching and negative impact on the slave trade, helping not only to decrease economic profits but also to foster an increasing anti-slavery sentiment.

The collection concludes with "Epilogue: Memory as Resistance" by Carolyn A. Brown. Brown reiterates the necessity for and importance of oral history as a research mechanism by describing a pilot oral history project aimed at documenting the experiences of those Africans who were enslaved but not transported outside of Africa, and the impact of these slaves on communities along the West coast of Africa. Like other scholars, Brown argues for the efficacy of oral history projects.

The use of oral tradition and history may have some inherent pitfalls, nonetheless, absent written historical records, oral traditions and histories coupled with archaeological excavations can yield useful and uncanny information that continues to balance the contemporary record on the transatlantic slave trade. This collection is particularly useful in teaching undergraduate and graduate students about the transatlantic slave trade to counter and balance the pervasive belief that Africans were either passive victims or active participants in slavery.

Michele L. Simms-Burton
Prince George's Community College

West African Literatures: Ways of Reading. Stephanie Newell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 288 pp.

In *West African literatures*, Stephanie Newell examines, in thirteen chapters, crucial questions and debates, which are central in the commentaries of Francophone and Anglophone West African letters. The book begins with a particularly relevant introduction, which provides a very good survey of the topics, concepts and terminologies that have animated and stimulated the studies of the African literary production, and that will inform her own intervention: language, orality, postcolonialism, Bhabha's "hybridity," Appiah's "cosmopolitanism," Appadurai's concept of "–scapes," Marxism, feminism, queer literature and negritude. By circumscribing her study to West Africa, Newell's aim is to emphasize the diversity within the region, and its implications for the description and study of the literary production. By rethinking the "elastic categorizations" she aims to "highlight the enormous literary dynamism within West Africa" and to draw attention to a "seminal aspect of West Africa's postcolonial identity, or its postcoloniality: the heterogeneity of cultures and literatures within each West African nation means that the term 'postcolonial' must account for the diversity of literary currents within each country, as well as the shared historical

experiences of slavery and colonial rule in the region" (p. 7). In doing so, she also insists on the implications of the authors' predilection for "European and American publishing houses," at the expense of "their own national publishers," for the forms and aesthetics of the texts. Newell can then draw attention to the tensions between "local production" and "elite production."

The chapters in *West African literatures* are of different lengths (ranging from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 20 pages) and cover topics as varied as "Oral literatures" (chap. 4), "Negritude" (chap. 2), "Islam and identity in African literatures" (chap. 3), "Feminism and the complex space of Women's Writing" (chap. 9), "Queering West African literatures" (chap. 13), "Experimental writing by the third generation" (chap. 12), "Marxism and West African literature" (chap. 10) and "The three 'Posts': Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Poscolonialism" (chap. 11). The chapters are not all equal and some of them elliptic. For instance, the chapter on Islam is relatively short for what is an important and yet neglected aspect of West African literatures. Though Newell's intention is not to be "encyclopedic" as stated in her introduction, the absence of figures such as Amadou Hampâté Bâ, whose work has been literally shaped by Islam, or Yambo Ouologuem, with his devastating response to Islamic values in *Le devoir de violence* is questionable. References at least cursory to such works would have certainly helped to strengthen the author's demonstration of "the diversity of literary currents." Also, Newell's very appealing label of "Islamic fiction" deserved further developments: What does it take to identify a text as an Islamic fiction? Is the religious consciousness of the text a determining element?

This observation is rapidly compensated by what remains a very solid work. Its strength lies in its important insights into existing interpretations and readings of canonical texts, or debates, as well as in its innovative and persuasive arguments. Newell's careful discussion of "Popular literatures" gives a much-needed illustration of how the literary dynamism is ensured by local productions that "generate new types of selfhood" and activate new modes of reception. In the same vein, her chapter on the new feminism, which focuses on Werewere Liking, Calixthe Beyala, and Véronique Tadjo, explores the rejection by the three writers of outdated linguistic and normative codes to open to new expressions of "the new subjectivities of African women." Furthermore, Newell's discussion includes neglected problematics in the commentary of African letters, such as translation (chap. 5). She also revisits and rejects old paradigms, such as the exclusionary relationship between "written and oral genres," which has been contradicted, as Newell demonstrates, by the works of the vibrant Nigerian "AlterNative poets" (chap. 8). Her chapter on "Marxism and literature" opens a crucial domain in the study of the history of African literatures by focusing on the dynamic debates about the affinities and divergences that make the ideologies of African literatures (chap. 10).

In conclusion, the breadth and the diversity of the key issues and debates covered by Newell, and the simultaneous reference to canonical figures and emergent writers, make *West African Literatures* an invaluable tool for scholars and students of African literatures.

Alioune Sow
University of Florida

