

**Michael Amoah. *Reconstructing the Nation in Africa: The Politics of Nationalism in Ghana*.** International Library of Africa Studies 19. London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. vii + 248 pp. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$74.95. Cloth.

Based on the title, I expected this book to be a study of the institutions and politics through which Ghana's successive governments since independence built the nation and helped create the sense of "Ghanaianess" so pervasive to many observers, particularly as the nation celebrates the Jubilee of its independence. However, Amoah offers neither an analysis of "top-down" nation-building nor of "bottom-up" nationalism, nor does he discuss how colonial policies intertwined with precolonial state-making and shaped the independent state. Instead, the reader is presented a decidedly anticonstructivist account of theories on nation and nationalism, including essentialist definitions of "tribe," "ethnic group" and "ethnonationalism" as "natural" (50) and "organic" (29) identities that ignore the past twenty years of scholarly discussion on ethnicity; a lengthy treatise on the supposed origins of most present-day Ghanaians in "Ancient Ghana"; a brief discussion of the "rationalization of ethnonationalism" (114ff); the results of a survey on political attitudes, home ties, and "ethnonationalism" that the author conducted among five hundred Tema urbanites in 1999; and, finally, a rather cursory analysis of the results of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

The author's verdict on the current state of the Ghanaian nation is contradictory. On the one hand, he acknowledges that "a single Ghanaian national identity has [developed] despite ethnonational heterogeneity" (187). On the other hand, he laments that in the post-Nkrumah era, the "national construct [is] dissipating" (3) because genuine leadership is lacking, economic resources are not equitably distributed, and politics, including voting behavior, are dominated by the "politics-of-the-belly" syndrome—a concept borrowed from Bayart's work on Cameroon and assumed to be relevant to Ghana even in the absence of actual empirical analysis. However, to "bring back lost national feeling" (3), so Amoah believes, requires "passion"; economic development and good governance alone will not suffice. The necessary "psychological ammunition" derives from the "common past glory" (3) that Ghanaians supposedly share—a notion that takes up primordialist theories of the premodern roots of nationalism and the ethnic origins of nations. Thus Amoah emphasizes "the timelessness of nations" (43) and regards modern Ghana as having been built on the traditions of the powerful Fanti and Ashanti "nation-states" (35–50) which came into existence long before the "modernist threshold" (31).

Amoah fiercely defends Eva Meyerowitz's 1950s speculative and empirically problematic account of Ashanti origins in "Ancient Ghana" and adds his own notion of "a wider, more ancient, inclusive and latent Guan ancestry" (61) supposedly embracing all Akan groups and the northern

Ghanaian population. The latter are incorporated into the precolonial proto-Ghanaian Guan nation by equating "Gonja" with "Guan" and asserting that all northerners are somehow part of the Gonja-Guan congeries. These "Ancient Ghana" and "greater Guan" identity theories are wild constructions not only with respect to the facts (which Amoah treats generously), but also with respect to recent scholarship by Izard, Wilks, McCaskie, and many others on the problems of extrapolating history from competing origin and migration narratives. That the "relative stability of the Ghanaian state" (108) is due "mainly to the presence of a demographically dominant *ethnie*—the wider Guan ancestry" (109) is asserted, but unfortunately not supported; nowhere does Amoah provide empirical material to show how beliefs about origins influence people's behavior vis-à-vis the nation and the state.

Furthermore, the "greater Guan" theory ultimately provides no significant insights into current political attitudes and voting behavior, the focus of the second part of the book. To explain the current "enmity between Ewes and Ashantis" (155) Amoah points not to supposed deep historical roots, but rather to recent political developments and party loyalties. Yet the analysis of the role played by ethnic identifications in contemporary politics remains superficial, not least because the data collected via the questionnaire (292–93) are inadequate indicators of the multilayered nature of local, regional, and national identifications and of the complex relationships between discourses and actual political action.

The politics of nationalism in Ghana thus remains a topic awaiting further scholarly study.

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