

scholars with her support of criminal prosecutions, including under international institutions, for former child soldiers. Hence, Fisher at times interchangeably discusses culpability and responsibility. She does not see such prosecutions as appropriate for the majority of child soldiers, but wishes for this option to be added to the table in certain limited cases where the youthful fighters have engaged in systematic human rights abuses. In this regard, Fisher has the grit to challenge one of the central goals of many child rights' activists, namely, to categorically preclude the possibility of such trials. For Fisher, such trials serve retributive and expressive goals. Herein lies her justification for retaining them as a policy option.

Fisher's proposal for criminal trials is well-delivered. Ultimately, however, she may not persuade. It remains very debatable that criminal trials can attain her goals of resocialisation; they may, in fact, impede this objective by stigmatising the child. Fischer would fetter these trials with so much procedural protection for the juvenile defendants (and so many defences) that, for all intents and purposes, the retributive/expressive aspects of the process—her very justification—would evaporate. So, why bother? Why not simply proceed with alternative methods of justice that are not retributive in nature? The focus on exogenous international institutions, moreover, might come to supplant the development of the local bottom-up approaches—customary ceremonies, for example, and reciprocity oriented service projects—that research indicates offer the kinds of reintegration, rehabilitation and restoration measures that best promote justice and citizenship for former child soldiers.

Fisher's book is a valuable contribution to the discourse. She gracefully connects debates over child soldiers with very wide-ranging discussions as to the merits of international criminal prosecutions. Her writing is rigorous and accessible to a broad audience. Fisher makes a bold argument; she challenges orthodoxies and reveals many of them to be shibboleths. Her book is essential reading for anyone, regardless of discipline, concerned about coming to terms with and preventing child soldiering.

MARK A. DRUMBL

Washington and Lee University

Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda by SUSAN THOMPSON

Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. Pp. 288. US\$27.95 (pbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X14000573

For twenty years the government of Rwanda, led by the ruling party the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), has embarked on an ambitious modernisation programme to refashion Rwandan politics, society and economy. The vision to transform the small African state into a middle-income country by 2020 follows years of elite-dominated divisive politics that culminated in economic collapse, extreme poverty and the 1994 genocide and civil war. Although the RPF has been praised and criticised for its choice of development interventions in almost equal measure, little is known about how Rwandan citizens respond

to national policies on reconciliation and unity, and how these policies shape their daily lives. Susan Thompson's *Whispering Truth to Power* is therefore an important attempt to uncover the attitudes of the rural population to the government's remodelling of Rwanda. The study aims to 'write the voices of peasant Rwandans into academic knowledge' and 'analyse the post-genocide political order from their perspective' (p. xvi). In doing so, Thompson assesses how the 'practices and mechanisms of national unity and reconciliation affect people's relations to the state and its agents' (p. 28) and explores broader questions around agency and power in an authoritarian and/or post-conflict state.

The book draws on ethnographical field research conducted within South province (which includes part of the old Butare prefecture) in 2006. Thirty-seven 'ordinary' or 'peasant' Rwandans of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa ethnicity from the lower strata of Rwandan society are interviewed and their 'life histories' gathered. Thompson argues that 'the welfare of ordinary Rwandans is not a priority for the RPF' who, like Hutu elites previously, have 'manipulated ethnic identities for their own political and economic gain' (p. xiv). In response to this oppression, Thompson seeks to uncover her interviewees' everyday acts of resistance.

The first part of the book presents a historical and methodological context to Thompson's study. Chapter 1 details Thompson's research process and her approach to conducting a political ethnography (p. 36). Chapter 2 discusses the role of the state in Rwanda and situates the current government's 'official version of history' in a broader historical context to show that the RPF presents to Rwandan citizens an inaccurate account 'designed to allow [them] to maintain control' (p. 53). Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive analysis of the cycles of violence in Rwanda between 1990 and 2000. Thompson argues that the RPF government depicts all Hutus as perpetrators – though a more nuanced analysis might reflect on why Hutus, including ex-combatants, are drafted into state institutions such as Rwanda's security organs. All 'ordinary' Rwandan perpetrators of the genocide are described as being 'pressured to [kill] by Hutu Power militias between April and July 1994' and are therefore presented as victims (p. 81). This obscures the many motives for engaging in genocide and the complexity of power relations during the genocide and civil war. Chapter 4 analyses the instruments of national unity and reconciliation developed by the state. In Chapters 5 and 6, Thompson explains how policies of national unity and reconciliation 'place the burden of Rwanda's postgenocide reconstruction and reconciliation' on 'Rwanda's poor and largely rural population' (p. 24). The chapters discuss how Rwandans resist national policies in their interactions with local officials, when they feel forced to partake in state-led activities such as the annual week of mourning and the local *gacaca* courts, or when they distrust their leaders.

The potential of this book lies in Thompson's aim to give voice to citizens who are silenced and marginalised by an official discourse that presents a polished image of post-conflict Rwanda. Overall, this potential is not fully reached. Such a research project was never going to be easy in Rwanda: Thompson experienced challenges in gaining access to Rwandans and encountered bureaucratic barriers during her research trip. However, out of

348 hours of recorded interviews, few Rwandan life histories are presented, though many short comments made by the research participants (and other anonymous sources) are inserted into Thompson's critique of the Rwandan government's state building enterprise. Thus, it is difficult to grasp fully the specific ways in which the state-led policies of national unity and reconciliation directly affect the daily lives of each of the 37 research participants. Some of the more nuanced observations on the contradictions and complexities of Rwandan society from the perspective of the interviewees are found in the profiles of the research participants listed in the appendix of the book.

It is also unclear what the terms unity and reconciliation mean for the 37 Rwandans participating in the study. These terms are described by Thompson through her analysis of academic literature on Rwanda. The assumption seems to be that the research participants view Rwanda's government policies in the same way as Thompson. Whether research participants misinterpret policies or are confused by them is not considered, though such a focus could have presented some interesting research findings. In the book, Rwandan citizens are divided between those that have power (political elite) and those that do not (peasants). The political elite constitute state agents, including local officials who deliver national policies locally. Here again, the book omits much of the complexity of Rwandan society. For example, local officials are classed by Thompson as elites and members of the RPF ruling party, but many of them are also peasants. The study could have examined how local officials engage in small acts of resistance in opposition to state-centric directives or be required to negotiate between central and local demands. Perhaps this would have added another dimension to Rwanda's post-genocide political order as outlined by Thompson and provided a broader understanding of Rwandan society.

Thompson does not attempt to mask her contempt for the RPF which, she writes in the preface, is informed by her experiences of working in Rwanda, as well as in Madagascar in the early 1990s where she witnessed brutal violence. Yet her overarching critique of postgenocide Rwanda could have reflected on the challenges the RPF government faces, in spite of their public success stories, even if Thompson does not agree with the approach they take. Ironically, many of these challenges are articulated by her research participants. Indeed, a book properly addressing these issues has yet to be written.

GEORGINA HOLMES
University of Portsmouth

Things Fall Apart? The Political Ecology of Forest Governance in Southern Nigeria by PAULINE VON HELLERMANN

New York: Berghahn, 2013. Pp. 206. US\$70.00 (hbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X14000585

'Past grandeur and present decline' is a robust template of common sense, not least when it comes to 'the environment'. A growing body of literature mixes perspectives from political economy, environmental history, science studies and ethnography to understand and situate the role of past and current