

Beasley as well as the laryngoscope, Nina d'Aubigny - a female author of a manual for the musical education of girls - and 'simian sounds' receive attention in the four 'intermezzos', containing four extensive case studies. These spruce up the main text consisting of five erudite, if at times somewhat dense, chapters. All in all, this book provides an important, thoroughly researched study of the historically changing corporeality of the voice which was lacking in much historiography, often limited to aesthetic performance or reception of sound. Thus, the book on the one hand is more than a social history of the modern voice, since it devotes much attention to cultural representation and history of knowledge, and on the other hand makes the reader long for an even broader social history of speech in daily life. Fortunately, Hoegaerts suggests a number of ideas for further research in the field of the history of sound, speech, emotions, and human rights.

Willemijn Ruberg, Utrecht University

Giacomo Macola, *A Violent History. Power and Conflict in the Congo Basin from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2025). 244 pp. ISBN 9789462704510.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52024/j551k922>

A Violent History uses a *longue durée* approach to help readers understand how violence has been at the center of power dynamics and social relations since the nineteenth century. This violence has always had clear motives. While motivations for using violence were often very different, they nevertheless forge connections between the different actors and periods. The author, Giacomo Macola, traces a history of communities and their social and political transformations. Macola highlights the maneuvers, trajectories, and paths of the actors who marked different eras and parts of the Congo Basin, the geographical area on which this book is focused. He does not forget to emphasize the impact all this has had on populations over the years: abuses, torture, mutilations – in short, chronic suffering.

Monographs focusing on Congo and adopting a *longue durée* perspective are not very numerous, especially when dealing with this particular subject matter. However, adopting a *longue durée* perspective allows for a more refined understanding of the historical complexity

of this vast country of the continent. By sketching transformations within the use of violence across different periods, the book shows that instead of colonialism suppressing 'African violence' – often a stated objective for the colonial project in colonial propaganda – instead seized this violence, capitalized on it, and further perpetuated it, as well as extended its consequences. This longer chronology also helps the reader to connect the distant past of these eras with global history, as Macola shows in the final chapters.

In the first chapter, in what he calls the 'Ancien Régime' to mean before the Congo Free state, the author questions the centrality of the State through the stratification of society into 'small political entities' which were more or less autonomous. In doing so, he also seeks to break with a more presentist focus on violence. Macola focuses on how the leaders of these entities created their spaces, on one hand, and how they resisted, negotiated, and cooperated with the new conquerors, on the other. The author illustrates the concept of *warlordism* by the emergence and expansion of new forms of politico-military governance resulting from the new dynamics of Congo's integration into global trade particularly the slave trade, the trafficking of ivory, and firearms (in the second half of the nineteenth century). Doing so, he shows that the arrival of new external actors such as Msiri (first in what is now Upper Katanga), Tippu Tip, and the Arab-Swahili traders introduced a new era of warlords. These warlords, equipped with modern weapons, placed armed force at the center of conquest, negotiation, territorial exploitation, and the recruitment of enslaved people. When the latter arrive in the territories, he describes a more complex and more violent evolution, always articulating resistance and negotiation, which he details in chapters two, three, and four.

With chapter five, he highlights how violence seemingly comes to an end with the takeover of Congo by the Belgian Congo. In reality, however, we see the emergence of other forms of violence inherent to colonial authority, now disguised respectively in "philanthropy", notably through agricultural and health policies undertaken in the name of Congolese populations and in "modern" bureaucratic reforms materialized through administrative reforms and the repression of practices deemed archaic or magical. This change within continuity also manifests itself in the perpetuation of collaboration between the colonial State of the Belgian Congo and private actors, as was already the case under the EIC ("Etat Indépendant du Congo").

Through the concept of warlordism and its evolution, Macola shows how violence has always been used by different actors to divide communities and exploit the wealth with which this vast Central African country abounds. Over the centuries, this concept has taken on varied forms and uses, mobilizing politico-military dynamics, yet always within the same logic: extracting profit from natural resources without concern for the harmful consequences of a system founded on force and terror.

In the following chapters – chapter six on decolonization and secession, seven about the rebellion of 1963-1965, eight about Mobutu's kleptocracy, and nine about Congo and the wars of the 1990s – Macola further illustrates this continuity in the Belgian Congo and beyond, specifically through the atrocities committed in mining exploitation, where ten percent of workers died in certain operations. He also demonstrates how the Belgian Congo system, through the political system of paternalism, far from eliminating violence, reinforced and “humidified” it (in the sense of making it more diffuse, more insidious). As such, this paternalism continues to shape the postcolonial violence in Congo. By creating chieftaincies and subchieftaincies articulated through various administrative reforms, this State produced tribalism, leading to the dislocation of communities and the tribal fragmentation of the social fabric.

As the author shows, the paternalist system, coupled with tribalism, would continue to shape the history of Congo both before and after independence. Giacomo thus highlights how ethnopolitical conflicts and rebellions of an ethnic nature traversed the postcolonial period, prolonged themselves, and then took on a regional dimension with the First Congo War, through to the present day. Macola illustrates well, and in detail, Nancy Rose Hunt's idea of a scenario of continuum and repetition, according to which history advances from one act of violence to another, from one wrongdoing to the next.⁶

The book is written in a highly comprehensible and synthetic style. Another element that makes the work distinctive is the author's skill in structuring the nine chapters. Each chapter begins with an introduction that prepares the reader to approach subsequent developments while remaining connected to the previous chapter. Each section ends with a conclusion that serves as a bridge between what precedes and what follows, creating a coherent narrative and analytical continuity.

6 Nancy Rose Hunt, *A nervous state. Violence, remedies, and reverie in colonial Congo* (Durham, NC 2016) 18.

Finally, Macola insists on the complexity of the origins of violent conflicts in Congo. According to him, these sources must be sought not only in macro-political tensions but also in even more complex local micro-rivalries: land distribution, exploitation of mineral resources at the local level, tax collection, the role of traditional authority in territorial management, and so on, thus facilitating the understanding and explanation of these conflicts.

For those interested in the history of Congo, the book is compelling because it retraces the long historical evolution of violence, helping to understand how the arrival of 'foreigners' and the pursuit of interests in the territories would not have been possible without negotiation and active collaboration with warlords or, more broadly, with local collaborators. This complementarity of actors sheds light on how structures of domination were adapted and transformed, though rarely interrupted.

In sum, by retracing these continuities, Macola offers an essential interpretive framework for understanding not only the precolonial and colonial past but also the contemporary forms of violence and fragmentation that still characterize Congo. His approach thus contributes to renewing the understanding of the country's historical trajectories and to nuancing simplistic interpretations of its current crises. Nevertheless, the reader remains somewhat unsatisfied regarding the qualification of the violence in question, its limits, and its metamorphoses throughout this long history, in order to have an idea capable of illuminating the lingering shadow zone around the boundary between African violence and colonial violence.

It is worth mentioning that for readers not familiar with Congo's history, the book arouses a certain degree of anxiety. Beneath the surface, one feels the chronic suffering of the Congolese people, witnessing how their natural wealth has often been the very engine of the violence that consumes them.

Lambert Hakuziyaremye, Ghent University