

a remarkable political machine, that was far more successful than anything the left was able to create. The limited successes of a working class for itself are then analysed in two chronologically distinct chapters. “The classes and the masses” explores labourism up to the revolt of 1919, while “unassailable rights” discusses the qualitatively different politics at the heart of working-class alternative visions of post-war reconstruction and socialism in the 1920s and 1930s. In his concluding chapter, Heron offers a chronology to these “lunch bucket politics.” If the world of the first industrial revolution continued to shape the working class in the early years of his study, by 1920 a new qualitatively different class in itself created a different and more sharply gendered class for itself, which shaped the remaking of their city.

The great strength of this book is its scope. It offers a complex and compelling account that makes sense of working-class life in North America from 1890 to 1940. In so doing it shows how far social history has progressed since the pioneering work of the 1960s to 1980s. This would be a wonderful textbook for undergraduate courses in social, labour or gender history, and that combination is a truly remarkable achievement. Heron describes a world that no longer exists, and he is particularly adept at describing its nuances and novelties. These aspects will capture the imagination of many an undergraduate, while providing plenty of material for substantive classroom discussions. Furthermore, the extensive footnotes provide students with an excellent introduction to the relevant secondary literature for their term papers.

The great weakness of this book is its scope. To make sense of their world for us, Craig Heron has understandably laid stress on the constraints people faced. He has also done a remarkable job of integrating feminist scholarship and sensibilities into what has for far too long been an unnecessarily masculinist labour historiography. The result is a coherent meta-narrative, but people do not live in meta-narratives, and the exploitation and oppression of working people ensure that their lives are anything but coherent. Personally, I think we need a qualitatively different historical theory and method than the one Craig Heron has so clearly mastered, but that debate is for another day. Read this book; you will be richly rewarded.

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HUNT, Nancy Rose – *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. 353, xviii.

*A Nervous State* is certainly one of the most elegant books I have seen over the last years and an impressive attempt at entangling, and at discussing entangled, narratives. It follows the continuities of coerced labour and the fact of segregation through the Belgian colonial state in the Congo after the classical (and all too real)

horror story of violent Congo Free-State practices had subsided. In its second half, the book engages with the “developmentalist machine” that meant improving local welfare, but also installing (from the colonizers’ point of view) efficient techniques of health control and securitization in the 1940s and 1950s (p. 10). Nancy Rose Hunt takes various rural regions adjacent to one another and east of Equateur’s principal city, Coquilhatville (current-day Mbandaka), as field of her study. She strives to show local reactions on colonial experiences, including brutal violence (for example, p. 28), the intensified tensions during the First World War (p. 82), the experience of childlessness caused in part by imported sexual diseases (pp. 97-101), and increasing administrative control over the colonial subjects’ health and political behaviour (pp. 25, 168). Reactions were expressed through the spiritual in its widest sense, in particular, according to Hunt, in the form of healing procedures and through a “syncretistic” reshaping of local religion (pp. 18-19). Such processes were connected to increasing “nervousness” of the administration: it included panic over possible rebellions led by powerful sorcerers in regions where the colonial presence was weak (p. 68); an ever-growing wish to check childlessness—and, at the same time, to prove that it was linked to the decline of particular Congolese “races” such as the Mongo (p. 140); and the hope to respond to “subversion” and “fertility problems” through what Hunt seems to suggest as two variants of a carceral archipelago, the fertility clinic and the prison (pp. 203-204).

To build her argument, the author relies on groundbreaking fieldwork in the region in the form of group interviews carried out in Ikanga and Besele, which are especially at the heart of one of her paradigmatic episodes: that of the healer Maria Nkoi’s, arrest and removal (pp. 239-240). I would have hoped to see Nancy Rose Hunt as one of the first scholars lately to point to new archival documentation, especially regional documents, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She does not do so, but one has to say that the Belgian archives she interprets still needed much work, and the analysis is excellent for the interpreted case studies.

Hunt builds on episodes. That of her first chapter is probably the most dispersed one, as she discusses images of brutality from the Congo Free State period, showing how these conditions were eventually remembered (or nervously hidden) in the following colonial years and decades. References to the sound of laughter in reports, as “chuckling, snickering, and cackles” might point to the trauma of brutalities under the Free State (pp. 39-40). The reference to such memories in a 1954 mission-sponsored writing contest shows more clearly their constant place in memory (pp. 48-49). The second chapter engages with Maria Nkoi, feared by the Belgian colonial authorities as possible instigator of revolt in the Ikanga region. Maria Nkoi is an ambiguous figure: she denied the implication in anticolonial activities when caught (p. 66); she might nevertheless be representative of “reveries” of eviction against the colonizers and of mobilization against colonial taxation (p. 68); she appears as a gifted healer with power over trees (p. 90); and she becomes the object of local memory, the place of her activity even transforming into a *lieu de mémoire* (p. 85), not mentioning Belgian travellers recounting her case in an exotified and eroticized fashion (pp. 78-79).

A third chapter entangles the experience of low fertility in the region east of Coquilhatville with other trends, such as the freer environment and less bridled sexual life governing female life-cycles (pp. 119-121, 125-126). Discouraging fertility rates were interpreted by the colonial administration and the Christian missions as a consequence of sexual diseases such as gonorrhoea (p. 101). These explanations were certainly factors, but the excesses of forced labour demands leading to physical and psychic exhaustion probably constituted a more important issue (p. 113). The fascinating approach taken by Nancy Rose Hunt is to link these observations with the more complex range of possible reactions that women could show, eventually as compensation (p. 130).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to healing practices such as Likili, a charm mobilized against raging infertility in the region that was used to discipline women into rigidly controlled marital life. At the same time, Likili led to hostility against colonial health missions. The movement, which involved “reconciliation” and a “clean slate,” was incompatible with colonial medicalization in the region: the two “nervous and biopolitical states clashed” (p. 161). The fifth chapter discusses the creation of the prison camp of Ekafera from 1937, continued in an intensified way after the Second World War, as part of a colonial strategy of containment against individuals regarded as religious agitators; the Belgian colonizers especially targeted those linked to Kitawala and to the local branches of Kimbanguism (pp. 169-170). At the same time, the colonial state organized a fertility clinic at Befale. Nancy Rose Hunt describes the two processes—a paternalistic-repressive style of health control and political repression—as parallel and related (pp. 194-195). Within chapter 6, the author subsumes different kinds of “motions” in the late colonial period: she discusses the experience of being moved to the Ekafera camp for a Kimbanguist prisoner (p. 226) and for a male nurse (p. 228) confronted with the shock of violence at the site. Much of this chapter, however, is dedicated to new cultural and material tendencies and to “Equateur’s hedonistic 1950s” (p. 233, see also pp. 216-220). A convincing conclusion comes back to many of the themes and insists on the “afterlives” (p. 242) of experiences of violence and of physical and psychic consequences of the colonial presence (for example, regarding infertility).

This book is certainly “a must” for everyone engaging with the history of communities under colonial rule, especially for Central Africa, but also beyond. It is nevertheless important that the reader be aware of the limits of this compelling work. First, Nancy Rose Hunt’s study lives without much contextualization. Through the strands of the narrative, the author sheds some light on structures existing in the Equateur Province. However, many details about local life and colonial rule that might be important for a better understanding remain unmentioned. Second, while the cases presented are remarkable and brilliant, readers should question in some episodes the rationale of the links that are woven through the narrative. For example, Swiss administrator for the Congo Free State, Charles Liwenthal, locally called Ekumfi, notorious for his brutality expressed through killings and mutilations, committed suicide on his post. Later reports state that the reason was his fanfare having been confiscated by his superior, an

explanation that is supposed to create a link to the “festive life” important for Equateur’s local society in the 1950s (pp. 231-233). Is this link convincing? Some other entanglements also seem to have been created without a compelling logic.

Finally, beyond these questionable connections, it might also be worthwhile to address the broader conceptualization of “nervousness” in the context of European colonialism in the African continent. It would make sense to regard many other practices within colonial rule, such as taxation and forced labour for instance, as loaded with obsessive behaviour. The hysteria around security in late colonial states and the wish for omnipresent health control are rightly mentioned in this book as important fields of colonial “nervousness”—but they are far from being the only ones, and the picture could be completed.

It is a bit regrettable that *A Nervous State* does frequently not explain why the episodes chosen are representative beyond the regions of fieldwork in Equateur; future works would need to deliver this broadening of the perspective. Nancy Rose Hunt’s book is extremely stimulating, however, and a model case for bringing together the entangled perspectives of (different groups of) the colonized and the colonizers in a compelling panorama. It is an immense success.

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KLEIN, Alexandre, et Séverine PARAYRE (dir.) – *Histoire de la santé, XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles : Nouvelles recherches francophones*. Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2015, xiv, 230 p.

S’inscrivant dans l’effort soutenu du réseau Historiens de la santé pour promouvoir le développement d’une histoire de la santé en français depuis 2012, ce collectif dirigé par Alexandre Klein et Séverine Parayre est de ce seul fait bienvenu. Il est vrai que la production dans le domaine reste étonnamment mince, desservie par une absence persistante d’institutionnalisation du champ, ce que rappelle l’introduction avec une belle citation du pionnier que fut Jacques Léonard : «Peut-être parce qu’elle touche à l’essentiel la santé n’occupe pas dans les livres d’histoire la place qu’elle tient dans les préoccupations des gens» (*Archives du corps. La santé au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Rennes, Ouest-France/Université, 1986, p. 7). L’ouvrage veut défricher un territoire étendu et, en premier lieu, poser des jalons pour une histoire «globale et inclusive». Objet du quotidien multiforme, la santé devrait permettre une «mutualisation des approches» et une «complémentarité des regards» (p. 3), miser à la fois sur la souplesse disciplinaire, une curiosité pour des objets a priori périphériques et l’exploration de matériaux inusités.

Un chapitre d’ouverture, signé François Guérard, fait le point sur les tendances de l’historiographie québécoise dans les quinze dernières années à partir de 147 textes : moins de dix publications par an, c’est manifestement peu. Le livre se décline ensuite en quatre parties thématiques, de deux à trois chapitres