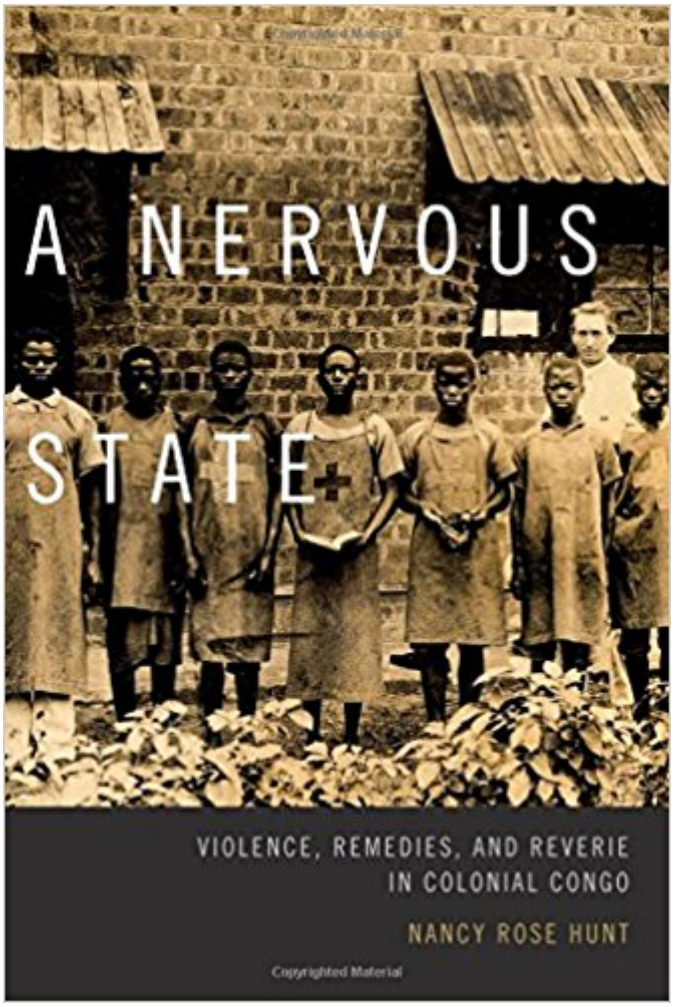
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A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, And Reverie In Colonial Congo



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Synopsis

In A Nervous State, Nancy Rose Hunt considers the afterlives of violence and harm in King LeopoldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Congo Free State. Discarding catastrophe as narrative form, she instead brings alive a history of colonial nervousness. This mood suffused medical investigations, security operations, and vernacular healing movements. With a heuristic of two colonial statesÃ¢â ¬â •one "nervous," one biopoliticalÃ¢â ¬â •the analysis alternates between medical research into birthrates, gonorrhea, and childlessness and the securitization of subaltern "therapeutic insurgencies." By the time of Belgian CongoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s famed postwar developmentalist schemes, a shining infertility clinic stood near a bleak penal colony, both sited where a notorious Leopoldian rubber company once enabled rape and mutilation. HuntÃ¢â ¬â„¢s history bursts with layers of perceptibility and song, conveying everyday surfaces and daydreams of subalterns and colonials alike. Congolese endured and evaded forced labor and medical and security screening. Quick-witted, they stirred unease through healing, wonder, memory, and dance. This capacious medical history sheds light on Congolese sexual and musical economies, on practices of distraction, urbanity, and hedonism. Drawing on theoretical concepts from Georges Canguilhem, Georges Balandier, and Gaston Bachelard, Hunt provides a bold new framework for teasing out the complexities of colonial history.Ã Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"With stunning insight, Nancy Rose Hunt makes a distinguished contribution to African history that goes a long way toward generating a critical understanding of colonial projects, their alignment with forms of early capitalism, and the brutal practices of extraction industries. By braiding these issues

with the emergence of new healing cults, Hunt helps us to better understand the complex social process of colonialism. A Nervous State will greatly impact African studies, colonial history, and the anthropology of medicine and violence."Ã Â (Veena Das, coeditor of The Ground Between: Anthropologists Engage Philosophy)"In this compelling account, Nancy Rose Hunt draws on an astonishing range of archival sources and her own interviews to move the history of the Belgian Congo beyond the externally driven 'catastrophe' narrative to something far more complex. Violence and death are still at the core here, but so are birth and healing and nervous laughter."Ã Â (Megan Vaughan)"Hunt demonstrates how her use of interdisciplinary methodsÃ¢â ¬â •archival, oral historical, literary, and ethnographicÃ¢â ¬â •and unconventional materials provides provocative insights into the colonial history of the Congo." (Elisha P. Renne Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2016-11-17)"The bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s synthetic range, historical detail, and conceptual density...make it highly appropriate for graduate work, and essential in equatorial African studies....an exemplary venture in medical anthropology and a truly rich set of resources for those of us engaging such questions in our own thought and research." (David Eaton Medical Anthropology Quarterly 2016-12-13)"This is a book that is brimming with tensions: historiographical, epistemological, sensorial, emotional. It is alive with them, both in the material that Nancy Rose Hunt uncovers and in her manner of relaying her subject to the reader." (Richard C. Keller and Emer Lucey Somatosphere 2016-12-18)"A Nervous State is an extraordinary book. Its empirical richness is obviousÃ¢â ¬â •the number and variety of different sources that Hunt has drawn upon, and the attention that she has paid to all these sources. Diaries and colonial archives,Ã Â LomongoÃ Â language pamphlets and school essays, photographs, epic poems and dancesÃ¢â ¬â •all of them receive the same, patient, highly sympathetic, but also questioning, persistent, and often quietly skeptical, scrutiny. Versions of events are presented, and new vistas open up, yet this is also a judicious book where the conclusions never push beyond what the evidence will support." (Joe Trapido Somatosphere 2016-12-18)"Nancy Rose HuntÃ¢â ¬â„¢s latest book beats, breathes, quivers and unsettles. Her writing brims with the curiosity and rigour that evidently fuels her meticulous tracing of neglected archival materials. Also palpable are the insight and sensitivity that enable her to encapsulate both the changing machinations of a biopolitical state, and the Ã¢â ¬Ëœtherapeutic insurgenciesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ of ordinary Congolese. However, it is HuntÃ¢â ¬â„¢s attention to sensation and to perception, what one might call her scholarly synaesthesiaÃ¢â ¬â •her ability to read the archives with an attentive ear, to read Ã¢â ¬Ëœdynamics of combat throughÃ Â acousticsÃ Â of hushed silence and sadistic laughter,' for exampleÃ¢â ¬â •that renders her work so compelling for an anthropologist of

Equateur and of the senses." (Lys Alcayna-Stevens Somatosphere 2016-12-18)"The interpretation in this splendid work is a decisive contribution to understanding the jumble of desires, interests, discourses and images in the colonial and post-colonial history of this country, as well as the psychic life of its history." (Roberto Beneduce Journal of Asian and African Studies)"A Nervous State provides a complex history of Colonial Congo; it is a huge contribution to African StudiesÃ Â and anthropology." (Charles Tshimanga International Journal of African Historical Studies 2017-06-01)"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. . . . This book is certainly 'a must' for everyone engaging with the history of communities under colonial rule, especially for Central Africa, but also beyond." (Alexander Keese Histoire Sociale 2017-07-01)

Nancy Rose Hunt is Professor of History at the University of Michigan, and the author of the prizewinning A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo, also published by Duke University Press.Ã Â

NANCY ROSE HUNT. A NERVOUS STATE: VIOLENCE, REMEDIES, AND REVERIE IN COLONIAL CONGO. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.With this book one receives two values for the price of one: a presentation of new historical information of events during the Congo Free State 1885-1908 and especially the Belgian Congo 1908-1960, but also an analysis of those events through the lens of recent sociological, anthropological, philosophical and especially medical insights. The emphasis is in fact on medical history. Her purview is southern Equateur Province--below the bend in the Congo River.Concerning the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“nervousÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• of the title, the author states: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“nervousnessÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|suggests being on edge... [it] yields disorderly, jittery states.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (5) As to the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“reverieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the appreciative wandering of the imaginationÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|Two concepts, nervousness and reverie, anchor this [HuntÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s] historical interpretationÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|the aim is a new way of writing a subaltern history of health [her emphasis]ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (18)And in her approach, she reveals that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“this book began as a contribution to the recent spate of literature on biopolitical states, imagining it would be fruitful to marry South Asianist (Foucauldian, state-focused) and Africanist (vernacular, subaltern) approaches to medicine and empire. But the project morphed into something quite different as not only security and the carceral but also nervousness came to

the fore.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (7)In her area of study, lower Equateur Province, the Free State atrocities of the concessionary companies like ABIR and SAB led to notorious declines in population, so fertility became a major concern of the Belgian Congo era. Various theories were explored to explain it, including spurious ones like race suicide, and more serious ones in addition to the atrocities, including venereal diseases. So there was a heavy input by the colonial government in creating higher birth rates. After all, more workers were needed to produce the tropical products desired by Belgium.Chapter 1 covers the Congo Free State years 1885-1908. HuntÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s approach to this era is more nuanced than the widely read King LeopoldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Ghost of Hochschild, and other sources. After briefly presenting some of those well known atrocitiesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the impositions of the gathering of rubber and ivory, the killing, maiming, whipping, imprisoning, raping, hostage-taking, and burning of villagesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •she indicates that some of that was done by ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“big-man networks or gangsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• not under the control of King LeopoldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s regime, and also that there were antecedents to the violence of the colonial regime. She states ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“A Nervous State aims for no heroes, no villains, and little haunting.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (3)It was revealing to see for the first time the story of how Boali lost her foot, seen in that famous photograph taken by the missionary Alice Harris and shown widely in the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“magic lanternÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• shows in the U.S. and Great Britain during the Congo Reform AssociationÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s campaign to end the violence. But her statement that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“It is time for a fresh reading of LeopoldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Congo that moves beyond humanitarian earnestness and does not blame, publicize, or shock.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•(28) is perhaps a bit too generous. The blaming should continue, but more nuance shown in exploring all the data, including new data. She brings new perspectives from early, solid sources such as Roger Casement and FranÃƒÆ'Ã Â§is Dhanis (of all people!)The chapter ends with the coming of Belgian territorial agents, trying to get the administration running on a more bureaucratic basis, with ID books, and demands that taxes be paid in coin, not rubber. People were labeled with various ethnic labels. A new product was now being demanded, copal, a raw, resinous substance used to make lacquers and paints in Europe. The following chapters concern the Belgian Congo era 1908-1960. Chapter 2 emphasizes the case of Maria NÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢koi, a healer who was arrested and exiled (Hunt uses the term ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“relegatedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• of the French ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“relÃƒÂ©guÃƒÂ©e) far to the east in Uele District for inspiring an armed insurrection. It will be remembered that during World War One the Belgians and the Germans (using African troops) were fighting next door to Congo in German East Africa (Tanzania today) and in

German Kamerun even closer to Equateur. Maria spoke of the Germans as ancestral spirits who would drive the Belgians out of Congo. Belgian authorities didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t take kindly to this message. This chapter also gives insights into traditional medicine, dance, and music, and colonial literatureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •a novel about MariaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life. Her relatives were also interviewed.Chapter 3 covers the 1920s and more thoroughly the era of the depression in the 1930s. There were fears in the colonial state about Communism, African-Americans, and the Garvey, Mpadist and Kimbanguist movements. The low birth rate in Equateur concerned the Belgian authorities, and causes are detailed in this medical history. Medical touring began. CorvÃƒÂ©es of food, copal, and rubber continued, as did forced portage and work on roads, bridges and other public projects. The Bushira rebellion took place. The depression hit hardÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •both Congolese and foreigners, including the HCB palm oil company and the Portuguese traders. The traditional healing method of Yebola, popular music, and the womenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s association, Amicale, are described.Chapter 4 of the same era centers on concerns of the regime about the low birth rates, Belgian efforts to understand and deal with them, and Congolese healing movements and charms, including Likili. The detailed debates by doctors (both church and state), missionaries and administrators on the various supposed causes of the low birth rates make for fascinating reading. Hunts concludes later ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I have placed the burden for frailty rather with overwork, malnutrition, poor health, disease, and perhaps sorrow.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (250) The famous Governor General Ryckmans was by this time in charge of the colony.Chapter 5 highlights two institutions: an infertility clinic at Befale and a penal colony for Kimbanguist and Kitawala exiles in Ekafera in the post World War II era. The Belgian state spent considerably funding ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“aimed at securing allegiance, cooperation, and smiling mothers, babies, and families.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•(167) The government began encouraging crop development, stock raising, village reconstruction, and expanded medical service. Penicillin arrived in 1943.Members of the Kitawala religious movement coming primarily from Katanga, and of the Kimbanguism religious movement coming primarily from Bas Congo, were considered dangerous subversives intent on the overthrow of colonial power, and exiled (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“relegatedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•) to the Ekafera prison camp in southern Equateur, where presumably they would be neutralized and kept from influencing their regions (which turned out to be untrue).Chapter 6 covers the last decade of colonial rule, bringing urbanization, pop music, libraries, foyers sociaux, soccer leagues, bars, higher living and standards of dress and transportation (bicycles, etc). Hunt focused on three figures: a detainee in EkaferaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s prison camp, a nurse at BefaleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s FBEI hospital, and a

traveling musician. In addition there is the fascinating tale of the Congo Free State officer who committed suicide in 1902, but whose memory was fresh among Congolese. This chapter for the first time includes the large town of Coquilhatville (Mbandaka today). Familiar figures such as Justin Bomboko and Graham Greene appear.The concluding chapter wraps things up of course, and the themes of this book are succinctly written in the introduction: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“On the eve of CongoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s chaotic decolonization, therefore, deep in its rustic interior [i.e. her southern Equateur], the two colonial modes of presenceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the securitizing [by the administration, police and army] and the medicalizingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •became not only deeply knotted, but profoundly vernacularized.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (25)The author covers several of the ethnic groups of southern Equateur, including the Nkundo, Elinga, Ngombe, Boyela and Ikonda. Hunt has explored many interesting sources: interviews with Congolese following long canoe rides up rivers, plus by bicycle and foot in 2002 and 2007 (62, 239), archives in Congo, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., and novels written during the colonial period, among others. The bibliography is a formidable 33 pages, each with about twenty entries, so approximately 660 overall.Her eight pages of acknowledgements show a researcher having contacted many, many knowledgeable people across the world, especially in Congo itself. One major source was Fathers Boelaert and Hulstaert, of whom she states ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“these Flemish priests were linguists, anthropologists, and folklorists, with passions for history and conservation.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•(21) And these in turn asked the Congolese to write down their memories, of which 170 were produced in the Lomongo language in 1954. The book also contains voluminous notes, and an index. There is no listing of the 33 figures, nor of the six maps, which are on pp. 29, 33, 37, 64, 168, and 170.The author summarizes cogently: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Belgian Africa, from the 1920s, had the most impressive, systematic, natalist, family health programs and epidemiological routines in colonial AfricaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦the relative prosperity of the colonized during the postwar years went with rigid racial logics and deeply hated inequalities and segregationÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦As Belgian Congo publicized itself as a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœmodel colony,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ its glossy semiotics effaced forced labor, chains, the chicotte (whip), the color bar. This [her] analysis grapples with the efficient, machine-like ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœsmoothness ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœhappy engineering ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ of colonial CongoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s middle and late years. Partly from the 1920s, forcefully from 1945, a developmentalist machine worked with sophistication to create the unique Belgian imperial model: a skilled, stabilized labor force, the highest standard of living in sub-Saharan Africa; early, extraordinarily intense welfare capitalism fueled by pronatalism; ubiquitous clinics and maternity wards; and gestures of urbanity from modernist, high-rise buildings

and air conditioning in big Kinshasa to copious bicycles almost everywhere.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (10)

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Some historical key points miss in the analysis of the book to understand the problems of Congo and mainly the jealousy of the European great powers. The book answers ambient criticism without taking into account certain positive aspects brought by colonization.

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