

wine] signifies the blood and sacrifice of former generations' deaths at the hands of war or colonial or state-organized violence', while the *nipa* (which is brewed locally) represents the 'sweat of ancestors' bodies' (p. 144). An infusion is drunk akin to 'vaginal fluid' used 'for the cooling of sick children, the tempering of drunk husbands, or the cooling of corpses of husbands' (p. 133).

This book is a study in ethnography written by an ethnographer, for other ethnographers. There is an impressive bibliography, which makes it all the more surprising that no mention is made of the articles of Corrado Tornimbeni, who also carried out fieldwork in the region of Chimoio. However, those who are not skilled in the language of ethnography should approach this study with caution. The book gives the impression of being obscure, and it was sometimes incomprehensible to me, using words that do not exist in common dictionaries. It was the great virtue of the late Patrick Chabal, whose books are of such fundamental importance in understanding modern Africa, that he wrote simply and with absolute clarity. Anyone from any background could read his books and immediately understand what he was saying. Sadly, the same cannot be said about *Violent Becomings*, which for many people will prove largely inaccessible. The reader will have to cope with phrases such as: 'Frequently such valorization is actualized through deterritorializing and rhizomic processes that challenge the arborescent structures of state ordering' (p. 21). To write in this way is a pity, as the author has a great deal of value to say.

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Léon de Saint Moulin, *Kinshasa: enracinements historiques et horizons culturels*. Cahiers Africains 79. Tervuren and Paris: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale and L'Harmattan (pb €37.50 – 978 2 296 96924 7). 2012, 358 pp.

This work presents a precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history of the city of Kinshasa and an analysis of the social perceptions and values of its population. The aim is to provide an alternative history of Kinshasa, a history no longer emanating from the privileged view of foreigners and the documents they have produced about the country. On the contrary: the study aims to produce a history from inside, a history from the perspective of the Congolese population, which considers its opinions, perceptions and the subjects that matter to it, such as democracy, justice and education (p. 16).

The book is organized around three themes. The first part is concerned with the history and emergence of the city of Kinshasa. Based on research conducted from 1968 to 1972, de Saint Moulin provides insights into the precolonial villages that preceded modern Kinshasa, tracks the formation of its population and sheds light on the importance of cultural identity in the social relations of the city (pp. 19–21). He proposes revisiting the history of the city, not only through the accounts of the first foreign travellers (Stanley, missionaries and others) but also through the testimony of indigenous inhabitants, especially the traditional chiefs, to highlight their various reactions – alliance, negotiation, conflicts and resistance – to the reorganization of their space by colonial authority. A critical view of colonization emerges from these testimonies, emphasizing the restrictive character of the colonial order: in particular, the reorganization of traditional authorities and the delimitation of their lands.

The second part of the book focuses more precisely on the democratization process and how the population of Kinshasa has perceived it. The author

undertook social surveys (censuses and interviews) during 1992, 1995 and 2002 to capture diverse opinions. From these surveys, he stresses that democratization has transformed social life in Kinshasa. Even though the Congolese population has not experienced democracy in the contemporary or Western sense, it still experiences and participates frequently in forms of democracy, for example through families, through professional circles where colleagues are organized in assemblies to elect their leaders, or through churches, where communities reflect and undertake common actions. Only the political arena does not appear to be progressing in this way (p. 113). Finally, the third part analyses the social life and urban culture of the city. His analysis demonstrates that Kinshasa's urban culture reflects a variety of everyday issues such as justice, identity and social responsibilities, education, work income, the rise of independent churches, and the influence of Western ideas in Congolese culture. As in the previous section, de Saint Moulin uses data from surveys from 1988 to 2008.

De Saint Moulin points out that, while topics such as the social perceptions of justice, working conditions and the role of the state could not have been discussed freely before, due to the dictatorial context of the time, by the end of the 1990s, with the collapse of the Second Republic, these subjects were back on the agenda (p. 181). On the one hand, the surveys point out that people's perception of justice was dominated by its political dimension. It is in the exercise of political power that injustice persists, thus engendering social injustice. Further, de Saint Moulin argues that the population does not have a clear vision of the strategies it should adopt to achieve its objectives of justice and democratization. In the eyes of many, the state does not play its role as protector of citizens, nor does it vouch for the opportunities that everyone should have. On the other hand, the surveys highlight a specific social conscience of Kinshasa, marked by its history and African traditions. The Kinois takes a holistic view of life that allows him or her not to be shaken by problems. The values of life, peace and solidarity marked the opinions and attitudes of the population surveyed (p. 187).

This is an interesting and readable book that will help the reader to better understand Kinshasa as a city in perpetual construction, as well as the values that contribute to its dynamism. It gives us an interpretation from within rather than from without. Although the volume is based on previously published articles, bringing them together in conversation with one another is a valuable exercise in its own right. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches contributes to highlighting the cultural and spiritual depth of the population. Lastly, this study will also provide a much-needed counterbalance to stories of ethnic problems and the misleading impressions of the degradation of the city that all too often dominate discourses on Kinshasa.

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James Essegbey, Brent Henderson and Fiona McLaughlin (editors), *Language Documentation and Endangerment in Africa*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins (hb €105/US\$158 – 978 9 02724 452 9). 2015, 317 pp.

This is a significant addition to the literature on language documentation and endangerment. Among the valuable contributions are a series of African case studies challenging conclusions drawn from Australo-American perspectives;