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## Conflict in the Congo: Historical and Regional Perspectives

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# REVIEW ESSAYS

## CONFLICT IN THE CONGO: HISTORICAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

**Ch. Didier Gondola.** *The History of Congo*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002. xxviii + 181 pp. Notable People in the History of Congo. Selected Bibliography. Index. \$39.95. Cloth.

**Kevin C. Dunn.** *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. xi + 196 pp. Works Cited. Index. \$79.95. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper.

**Colette Braeckman.** *Lumumba, un Crime d'État*. Bruxelles: Les Éditions Aden, 2002. 99 pp. €8.50. Paper.

**Colette Braeckman.** *Les Nouveaux Prédateurs: Politique des puissances en Afrique centrale*. Paris: Fayard, 2003. 301 pp. Chronology. Bibliography. €19. Paper.

**Ludo Martens.** *Kabila et la Révolution congolaise: Panafricanisme ou néo-colonialisme*. Antwerp: Éditions EPO, Tome 1, 2002. 692 pp. Maps. Index. €38. Paper.

**Howard Adelman and Govind C. Rao, eds.** *War and Peace in Zaire/Congo: Analyzing and Evaluating Intervention: 1996–1997*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004. x + 344 pp. Index. \$29.95. Paper.

The Congo (formerly Zaire) is a metaphor for the plight of the whole African continent. Although it is a country richly endowed with natural resources and minerals, its population remains one of the poorest and most conflict-ridden in the world. Sadly, from the first incursions of Portuguese explorers in the Kongo Kingdom in 1482 to the present, the country has constantly been plagued by political strife and ethnic and regional conflict. Currently a war goes on that has claimed about four million lives since August 1998. As some of the works reviewed here show, the Congo's predicament may best be explained in terms of its historical relationship with the West, based on political domination and economic exploitation and the pursuit by the West of a consistent and systematic policy of "balkanization" or "divide-and-rule." In the wake of a recent revival of interest in

this country following the publication of books by Adam Hochschild (*King Leopold's Ghost* [Houghton Mifflin, 1998]) and Ludo De Witte (*The Assassination of Lumumba* [Verso, 2001]), and of the subsequent report of the Belgian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the tragic circumstances of Patrice Lumumba's death, six authors—Congolese, Belgian, and North American—have taken a fresh look at the burdened history of the Congo from both regional and international perspectives.

In *The History of Congo*, Ch. Didier Gondola, a Congolese scholar at Indiana University, makes use of a multidisciplinary and long-term perspective on the history of the Congo, starting with the indigenous kingdoms and empires (Kongo and Luba/Lunda). He surveys in turn the colonial conquest, the brutal rule of King Léopold II's Congo Free State, Belgian paternalistic colonialism, the painful birth of independent Congo, and its uneven development through three republics, including Mobutu's long dictatorial and predatory rule (1965–97), the failed transition to democracy (1990–97), the short and ill-fated tenure of Laurent-Désiré Kabila (1997–2001), and finally the ongoing continental war. Besides looking at government and politics, Gondola looks at economy and society, as well as health, education, and culture. He concludes that any Congolese leader who comes between the West and its access to Congo's strategic mineral resources will be eliminated, as the tragic fate of Lumumba and Kabila clearly demonstrates: "Lumumba became the last obstacle preventing Western governments and companies from making Congo their own neocolonial state.... It seems... that Kabila's death was part of a large, well-orchestrated plan. This plan was probably masterminded by one or more of the foreign governments that still control Congo in a bid to replace him with a more amenable figurehead" (123,173).

Gondola's broad, wide-ranging, and well-documented volume, written clearly and from the perspective of the Congolese people, includes many useful features: current and former names of places, a time line of historical events, biographical notes on Congo's most notable leaders, and a chapter-by-chapter annotated bibliography. These features make it, alongside Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja's *The Congo from Léopold to Kabila* (Zed Books, 2002), an ideal introduction to the study of Congo and an extremely valuable research instrument for anyone interested in the tragic history of this country.

In *Imagining the Congo*, Kevin Dunn employs a postmodernist analytical framework to try to make sense of the current war and political crisis in the Congo: "Understanding the events in the Congo today requires an examination of how the Congo has been imagined over time: exploring how the Congo has been defined, by whom, and to what ends." And he adds: "In this project, I am interested in historicizing and contextualizing the construction of the Congo's identity in order to analyze its political implica-

tions" (7). Dunn argues that these "imaginings" of the Congo have important political implications and "have directly influenced political policies toward the Congo" (11, 5). Significantly, "the history of the 'Congo' in international relations is largely the history of the struggles over the discursive narratives and representations of identity" offered by external actors and indigenous Congolese" (10).

Central to Dunn's thesis is the argument that Western views and understandings of the Congo remain firmly rooted in colonially scripted images of African backwardness, primitivism, and irrationality derived from Enlightenment and Social Darwinist racist theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "Many Western observers in the twenty-first century," he observes, "still conceptualize events in the Congo by employing colonial images and hundred-year-old racial stereotypes and by privileging Western definitions of the state, sovereignty, and security" (5). Dunn shows how the Congo was "invented," defined, and delineated through various imperial and colonial discourses, most notably those of King Léopold II of Belgium and of the British-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley, whom he hired to carve out a huge empire in the heart of Africa, the Congo Free State: "Stanley was instrumental in portraying the Congo as a resource-rich space waiting for European cultivation and exploitation [*mise-en-valeur*]." The Congo was presented as an empty space, unpeopled (except for the "savages"), undeveloped, "and thus at the disposal of the European" (38). King Léopold's ruthless system of forced labor for the collection of ivory and natural rubber exacted a horrendous human toll on the Congolese people, resulting in the death of at least ten million Congolese between 1891 and 1911. As Dunn rightly observes, "A central aspect of the colonial project involved the silencing of African identity discourses, or the closing off of discursive spaces for indigenous voices" (49). The "colonial trinity" of the Belgian state, the Church, and commercial/industrial firms continued to employ the tropes of the Congolese as cannibals, savages, or children.

In the chapter entitled "Congo as Chaos, Lumumba as *Diable*," Dunn notes that "in keeping with the Paternal discourse, independence and freedom were presented as being 'gifts' bestowed upon the Congolese 'children' by the benevolent parent." However, many Belgian officials felt that colonialism "had not yet adequately raised these 'children' to 'adulthood' and that the Congolese 'children' would be easy prey to Communism" (74). In the troubled years immediately preceding and following independence in 1960, "the Congo became synonymous with savagery, primitivism, chaos, barbarism, cannibalism, and unchecked nature" (87). Patrice Lumumba, in contrast, offered "a narrative of the colonial project based on shared memories of exploitation and brutalization" and "sought to Africanize the colonial state institutions" (77, 78). Having established that Lumumba's political agenda was at odds with their economic interests, the Belgian (and Western) media proceeded to demonize him, portraying him

as “emotional,” “irrational” and “immature,” and as a “subversive, communist, troublemaker” (91, 92), leading to the logical conclusion that he had to be politically neutralized, and failing that, physically eliminated. Thus Lumumba’s fate was sealed, and he was brutally murdered on January 17, 1961, by his Katangese archenemies, assisted by Belgian officers while American and United Nations diplomats looked the other way (De Witte 2001).

During the thirty-two-year dictatorial, patrimonial, and predatory rule of Mobutu Sese Seko (1965–97), the scholarly literature focused exclusively on the Zairian state, variously characterized as “patrimonial-bureaucratic authoritarian, absolutist, lame Leviathan, fictitious, or failed” (136). In this literature, the failure of the Zairian state was seen as further evidence of Africa’s inability to master modernity: “Instead of using African experiences to critically interrogate the conception of the ‘state,’ much of this literature reified Western notions of the state and constructed African states, particularly Zaïre, as an example of a failed Other” (137). Similarly, the “new barbarism” that informed reporting on the Congo by the Western media throughout the 1990s employed the rhetoric of chaos, tribalism, and irrational African violence, the image of an Africa too inherently “savage” and “backward” to progress toward “modernity.” At the same time, the familiar vision of the Congo as an untapped source of wealth gained renewed currency. Thus it soon became obvious that the “new barbarism” discourses were merely a convenient excuse for the widespread and systematic exploitation of Congo’s vast mineral resources by a score of Western firms. Furthermore, “these discourses remove[d] any notions of Western responsibility while allowing Western business interests to continue to exploit the Congo’s promised ‘potential’ through economic extraction in the name of ‘development’” (170). Noting “a shift to the ‘privatization’ of Western policies toward Africa, in which intervention is now being left (or subcontracted) to private sector agencies such as mining interests, ‘security’ providers and consultants, [and] NGOs,” Dunn sadly (but rightly) concludes that “currently countless Africans fall victim to violence inflicted in the name of maintaining and protecting these myths, particularly the sovereignty and security of ideas such as the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda” (167, 176).

Dunn’s perceptive, sensitive, and richly textured analysis provides a convincing explanation for the persistence of war and ethnoregional conflict in Congo. A survey of the major daily newspapers, television networks, or Internet sites would immediately confirm the enduring prevalence of the “heart of darkness” or “new barbarism” tropes in reports on Africa in general and on the Congo and Great Lakes region in particular. Dunn is right again when he analyzes the political implications of the “imaginings” and establishes a correlation between discourse and politics/public policy. Indeed, the author strikes at the heart of the matter when he observes that these discourses, along with the privatization of Western intervention,

merely obfuscate the real objective, namely, the Western firms' wanton exploitation of Congo's mineral resources. And since "war made good business sense for the mining corporations" (167), one may safely predict that the current war in the Congo will continue unabated, in spite of—or because of—such diplomatic theatrics as the Lusaka Agreement of July 1999 and the Sun City Peace Accord of April 2002 .

A respected Belgian journalist-reporter with the Brussels-based daily *Le Soir*, Colette Braeckman has, since 1992, published three books on the Congo, Rwanda, and the Great Lakes region, earning herself a well-deserved reputation as one of the most knowledgeable and astute observers of this troubled region. In *Lumumba, un Crime d'Etat*, she undertakes a critical reading of the report of the 2001 Belgian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the death of Patrice Lumumba, whose conclusions are presented as an appendix to this short volume.

The commission concluded that "it has been established with a high degree of certainty that on 17 January 1961, between 9:40 and 9:43 P.M., Lumumba was assassinated in the bush, execution-style, within five hours of his arrival in Katanga" (90, translation mine). As to who precisely was to blame for this dastardly act, however, the report is somewhat vague: "Regarding the responsibilities of Belgian officials in this affair, it has been ascertained that they assisted in the transfer of Lumumba from Léopoldville [Kinshasa] to Katanga; that either the Belgian government or a member of that government issued the order of physically eliminating Lumumba; and that some members of the Belgian Government and other Belgian actors have a moral responsibility in the circumstances that led to the death of Lumumba" (90–91). An earlier sentence in the report is more specific: "The term 'final elimination' [*élimination définitive*, i.e., of Lumumba] was actually used by [Belgian] Minister [of African Affairs] d'Aspremont Lynden in a telex message addressed to Ambassador Rothchild in Elisabethville [Lumumbashi] dated 6 October 1960" (84). The report also reveals the extent of the "secret funding" managed by the Belgian Ministry of African Affairs and earmarked to finance opposition newspapers and radio, politicians, and undercover operations: at least fifty million Belgian francs (equivalent to 270 million BF of 2001). The diplomatic isolation of the Congolese prime minister, exemplified by the breakdown in communications between Lumumba and the U.N. secretary general, the severance of diplomatic relations with Belgium, and anti-Lumumbist activism by the United States all contributed to Lumumba's eventual demise.

Most illuminating in terms of colonial "divide-and-rule" tactics is the way in which the Belgians drew a wedge between President Joseph Kasavubu and Lumumba, which led to a severe (and ultimately fatal) constitutional crisis. Acting through Kasavubu's adviser, Van Bilsen, Belgian Prime Minister Eyskens pointedly asked the president to dismiss Lumumba, while Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Wigny actually drafted

the destitution notice; the official gazette (*Moniteur congolais*) in which the notice was published was printed in Belgium.

In her contextual analysis of the report, Braeckman notes that by agreeing to a premature and ill-prepared independence, Belgium made sure that both Congo and Rwanda would continue to need Belgian expertise and assistance and thus would be only nominally independent. She also reveals that Lumumba got off on the wrong foot with the United States when he refused to allow U.S. firms to replace Belgian firms in the Congo. As a result, President Eisenhower agreed, during a National Security Council meeting of August 1960, that Lumumba should be eliminated, whereupon CIA Director Allen Dulles, who referred to Lumumba as a “mad dog,” dispatched several agents to central Africa (27).

According to Braeckman, what most disturbed the Belgians about Lumumba was his fierce personal and intellectual independence and the fact that he did not fit the colonial image of the obedient, submissive, dependent, and helpless Congolese so well captured by Kevin Dunn. She also notes that the operation to destabilize Lumumba was undertaken with the official approval of the Belgian government, while the Parliament voted the secret funding. Under cover of the Kasai-based Belgian diamond corporation Forminière, a Belgian agent was sent to Congo to contact Mobutu, Iléo, Bolikango, and Kasavubu in order to “sensitize them to the communist threat, personified by Lumumba” (31–32). The operation started with placing Lumumba in a constitutional straitjacket: conceived on the Belgian model, the *Loi Fondamentale* created a deliberate ambiguity with regard to the respective powers of the president and the prime minister, to the detriment of the latter. As the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs revealed, the Belgian government deliberately sought to engineer a federal or confederal restructuring of the Congo: “These rebellions [in Katanga and Kasai] were not designed to create autonomous or independent entities, but were rather meant to undermine the political and economic bases of Lumumba’s power” (61).

Braeckman’s overall assessment confirms the conclusions reached by Gondola and Dunn. Specifically, she views the current Congo war as a modernized version of the old federal/confederal institutional restructuring project. The current Western strategy, in which the “rebellions” replace the “secession” of the 1960s, aims at using liberalization, privatization, and structural adjustment to create a weak and powerless central government, making it easier for Western (rather than Belgian) multinational firms to freely and cheaply exploit the Congo’s vast mineral wealth.

Colette Braeckman expounds a similar argument in much greater detail in *Les Nouveaux Prédateurs*. In August 1998, Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s former allies, Rwanda and Uganda, who had helped him overthrow Mobutu and seize power in May 1997, turned against him and started the second Congo war, which still goes on in spite of two peace accords. Almost forty years to

the day after Lumumba's death, Kabila was assassinated and succeeded by his son Joseph, who proved to be much more amenable to Western interests than his father had been. It is this war, which has resulted in the death of some four million Congolese but which has somehow been neglected by the international media, that Braeckman, using extensive on-the-ground investigations and interviews, documents from the perspective of the Congolese people. She chronicles the rise and fall of Laurent Kabila as he attempted unsuccessfully to implement a populist development agenda. Analyzing the war in its subregional and international contexts, Braeckman argues that this war is essentially about access to, and exploitation of, Congo's mineral resources by a score of Western companies and by the African states involved, specifically Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. The Kivu region alone (including Ituri and Maniema) is a treasure trove of rare strategic minerals essential to Western advanced-technology industries: cadmium, cassiterite, cobalt, columbo-tantalite (col-tan), niobium, tin, uranium, and wolfram. In addition, huge oil deposits have recently been identified in Lake Albert, a few miles from Bunia (Ituri).

Braeckman's analysis confirms Dunn's observations about the "privatization" of Western policy toward Africa. "We can easily imagine," she writes, "that ethnic conflict in Ituri will be resolved by private foreign militias who will ensure the maintenance of law and order around the oil fields" (176). The author documents in painstaking detail the fleecing of the mineral resources of Kivu by the Rwandese and Ugandan military. While the Rwandese and their RCD allies (*Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie*), working through the *Congo Bureau* in Kigali, have focused on cassiterite and coltan from Ituri and Kivu, the Ugandan military took over the rich Kilo-Moto gold mine in Ituri, producing on average an annual revenue of \$100 million. Braeckman also exposes a new development in Congo's mining sector in 1996–97, namely the emergence of minor (Australian, Canadian, or South African) firms acting as fronts for the majors, such as American Mineral Fields (AMF) of Hope (Arkansas), Ashanti Goldfields, Barrick Gold Corporation, Consolidated Eurocan Ventures, and Heritage Oil.

Ominously, endemic ethnic conflict persists in North Kivu (Ituri) and South Kivu between the Hima, Lendu, and Nande. Observing that ethnic fighting between the sedentary Lendu peasants and the nomadic Hima pastoralists occurs in an area extremely rich in minerals and agricultural potential, Braeckman suggests that this conflict eventually aims at depopulating Ituri so that multinational oil (Heritage Oil) and gold (Ashanti Goldfields, Barrick Gold) companies may operate freely and so that peasants from Uganda and Rwanda, or even white farmers from Southern Africa, may settle there in the future.

Braeckman (like Martens, discussed below) also shows how the moment Kabila started to exhibit signs of independence and attempted to initiate a populist development project based on self-sufficiency (including a greater control of the Congo's natural resources), he, like Lumumba



before him, became a marked man. It seems that as early as the summer of 2000, the United States had decided to “get rid” of him and that the operation, executed by the Defense Intelligence Agency/DIA through selected Congolese agents, had to be concluded before George W. Bush’s assumption of office on January 18, 2001. Kabila eventually met his tragic fate at the hands of one of his bodyguards on January 16, 2001.

In summary, *Les Nouveaux Prédateurs* is an exhaustive, perceptive, and well-documented analysis of the Congo war, its background, origins, stakes, and main actors. Braeckman provides a cogent and convincing explanation for the war’s rationale in terms of the widespread and systematic exploitation of the Congo’s—specifically, Kivu’s—strategic mineral resources by a score of state (Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) and nonstate (multinational mineral firms) actors. These are the “new predators” appropriately singled out in the book’s title. Finally, Braeckman’s research clearly indicates that any resolution to this intractable conflict will necessarily have to be a regional one involving *all* the main states: not only the key ones, such as Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, but also all nine states that border the Congo, including Tanzania, Sudan, and Congo-Brazzaville.

In a sense, Ludo Martens’s *Kabila et la Révolution congolaise* complements Braeckman’s chronicle of the rise and fall of Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his populist project. Martens is a rare breed in this post-Cold War world: a Belgian orthodox Marxist journalist-activist, author of books on Pierre Mulele (a companion of Lumumba killed by Mobutu) and Thomas Sankara *inter alia*. In close to seven hundred dense pages he provides a first-hand, blow-by-blow account of the trials and tribulations of the Kabila I regime from May 1997 through January 2001. He chronicles Kabila’s beginnings as leader of a Marxist revolutionary movement, *le Parti de la Révolution Populaire* (PRP), which survived for twenty-five years in the bush living off the land. Martens also shows how Kabila, after assuming power, tried to transform the ADFL (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo*), a motley assemblage of various anti-Mobutu groups, into a broad-based, people-centered political structure, the Committees for People’s Power (*Comités du Pouvoir Populaire/CPP*). The attempt failed, he suggests, because the provisional CPPs were quickly infiltrated by the better-organized Mobutu loyalists, but also because, as in the case of Lumumba’s *Mouvement National Congolais*, Kabila did not have sufficient time to put the structure in place.

At a donors conference in Brussels in December 1997, Kabila and his team presented a minimal three-year development and reconstruction plan designed to establish a “social market economy” (*économie sociale de marché*). An uneasy mixture of populism and liberalism, the plan, which required a capital outlay of \$3 billion, was rejected by the “Friends of Congo.” But as Martens rightly notes, “The Plan had great political signifi-

cance: it was the first time in Congo that the government had conceived a plan on its own, based on the most urgent needs of the rural and urban masses” (245). Having learned from experience that he should rely essentially on his own capabilities, Kabila then initiated a state-based policy of economic independence, including the successful launching of the Congolese franc in June 1998, and he proceeded to take a series of measures designed to tighten the state’s control over the economy, which included the exclusion of foreigners from the diamond sector. Other populist measures—for example, the creation of “popular stores” (*magasins du peuple*) designed to provide the ordinary people with affordable goods—were adopted but also failed. However, the Kabila regime did achieve a measure of economic success in 1997; the price of basic foodstuffs stabilized, inflation was reduced, and state customs and excise revenues increased.

Of greater concern to Western economic interests were Kabila’s attempts to achieve economic independence and to delink the Congo from the dominant North–South trading networks. In particular, Kabila’s policies were seen as going against the West’s efforts to better integrate Africa into the world economy and as providing a “bad example” to other African countries. The United States was especially upset by Kabila’s reneging on previously concluded agreements with minor mining companies, on his insistence that foreign firms pay taxes (tax evasion used to be the norm), and on the decidedly socialist-populist and pan-Africanist orientation of his regime. Martens’s analysis of the Lusaka Agreement of July 1999 is most perceptive. Actually drafted by South Africa, with Ugandan assistance and on U.S. instructions, this agreement was a legal trap that sealed the political fate of L.-D. Kabila and his regime.

By recognizing Rwanda’s right to pursue the *Interahamwe* (the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide) in eastern Congo (Kivu and Maniema), the agreement effectively enlisted the cooperation of a broad subregional and international coalition in support of Rwanda’s—and to a lesser extent, Uganda’s—*Lebensraum* policy, which views eastern Congo as their natural zone of influence and security buffer zone. Like Braeckman, Martens concludes that Rwanda and Uganda, taking advantage of the region’s endemic state of anarchy and the power vacuum supported by the U.S., have been encouraged to pursue their military occupation and economic exploitation of eastern Congo, a situation that eventually will lead to some form of partition of Congo and redrawing of the regional map to the benefit of the intervening powers and of the foreign multinational mining companies.

A synthesis of 120 public conferences given throughout the Congo and of seventy radio and television interviews, *Kabila et la Révolution congolaise* is truly a massive research work with more than fifteen hundred references, twelve maps, and a fourteen-page index. Except for Jean-Claude Willame’s *L’Odyssée Kabila* (Karthala, 1999), this is the only comprehensive study of Laurent Kabila’s regime available. But unlike Willame, whose work is a scathing critique of Kabila and his regime from a Western perspective,

Martens is unapologetically sympathetic to his subject. During his numerous and prolonged stays in the Congo, the author took pains to move out of the circles of the power elite and to live among the ordinary people in Kinshasa, thus gaining a unique “view from below.” His broad analysis also includes a detailed and perceptive examination of the role and responsibilities of the various subregional and international players in the Congo war. As such, this book constitutes an invaluable documentary resource on this underresearched period in Congo’s current history.

Howard Adelman and Govin Rao’s edited work, *War and Peace in Zaire/Congo*, differs from the preceding five books in terms of its format, its much narrower time frame (the two years 1996 and 1997), and its analytical focus on the immediate rather than the root causes of the first Congo war. While adopting a subregional perspective, like the other works, the book examines primarily the role of the external actors, specifically Rwanda, Uganda, Belgium, France, the U.S., the U.N., and humanitarian NGOs, in the refugee crisis in eastern Congo following the Rwandan genocide and in the peace process designed to resolve the Congo war, leading to the Lusaka Agreement of July 1999. In their introductory chapter, the editors state that, *pace* Martens, “the [Lusaka] Accord provides a realistic starting point for any regional process aimed at the resolution of the conflict in the DRC [Congo]” (1). They announce, further, that they intend to apply “the conclusions of Stephen J. Stedman’s recent research on spoilers in peace processes in order to examine the orientation and interests of the various actors from the perspective of Stedman’s ‘spoiler thesis’ as a way of managing such conflicts” (3). Such an approach necessarily places particular emphasis on “the role played by international actors as custodians of peace” (5) and argues that “the key to either the success or failure of spoilers is the action taken by outside actors—both patrons and custodians—to guide the parties to peace” (5–6).

Designed to verify the validity of this hypothesis, the nine case studies that follow deal with the role of the various external actors in the Rwanda refugee crisis and the Congo peace process. As is inevitable in a collective work of this kind, the quality of the various contributions is extremely uneven. The best chapters in terms of breadth and depth of coverage, quality, originality of research, and analytical insights are without doubt those of Ogenga Otunnu (Uganda), Roger Winter (Rwanda), and Fiona Terry (humanitarian NGOs). While generally well-researched and analytically sound, the contributions by Abbas Gnamo (the *Interahamwe*), Wm. Cyrus Reed (Congo/Zaire), and Kurt Mills (UNHCR) are not particularly insightful or original, and merely repackage earlier research on the topic. Although Adelman and Baxter’s essay offers useful perspectives on the Canadian role, it focuses excessively on policy. Similarly, the Belgian team of Verwimp and Vanheusden provides valuable observations on Belgian policy toward Congo, Rwanda, and the Great Lakes region, but its treat-

ment is overly descriptive, legalistic, and policy oriented, lacking in analytical depth. Most disappointing is Asteris Huliaras's contribution on the United States and France. Dealing with two key players in the Great Lakes region in one thin chapter, the author does justice to neither, and his superficial treatment hardly reflects the wealth of material on French or U.S. policy. Presenting the United States as unaware of the intentions of Rwanda and Uganda in eastern Congo flatly contradicts all available evidence (as indicated above).

Also unavoidable in a work of this type is a considerable degree of overlap and repetition; each of the chapters basically tackles the same issues. The editors fail to provide a general conclusion summarizing the main arguments and opening up new vistas for the future. Overall, the work opens a helpful, albeit narrow, window on the refugee crisis in eastern Congo and on the Congo war of 1996–97. Unlike the works reviewed above or the volume edited by John F. Clark (*The African Stakes of the Congo War* [Palgrave, 2002]), it does not, unfortunately, deal with the second Congo war (August 1998–present). More important, John Stedman's theoretical model, the “spoiler thesis,” selected by the editors, is seriously flawed. By focusing exclusively on the role of external actors, it absolves the African actors of any responsibility and reduces them to the typical colonial role of passive recipients (or helpless victims) and chronically dependent actors so well described by Kevin Dunn. Thus it comes as no surprise that beyond a cursory reference here and there, not a single one of the contributors has actually used the “spoiler thesis” in his or her analysis.

The overall image of the Congo that emerges from the works by Gondola, Dunn, Braeckman, Martens and, to a lesser extent, Adelman and Rao is bleak. Forty-four years after independence, Congo is still at war and is actually disintegrating under the combined forces of the external intervention of six African countries and of inter-Congolese factional rivalry. In spite of the 1999 Lusaka Agreement and the 2002 Sun City Peace Accord, the war in eastern Congo goes on, ethnic conflict persists, widespread human rights abuses continue, and a variety of interests, including Western firms, are pilfering the country's vast mineral resources. As the cases of Lumumba and Kabila clearly demonstrate, any Congolese leader who attempts to pursue a policy of populist, self-reliant development and economic independence is bound at best to fail and at worst to die a violent death. As the French saying goes, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!*

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