

Rachel Marie Niehuus. 2024. *An Archive of Possibilities: Healing and Repair in Democratic Republic of Congo*. Durham: Duke University Press. 201 pp.

Rachel Niehuus's *An Archive of Possibilities: Healing and Repair in Democratic Republic of Congo* is a fascinating work that highlights how the Eastern Congolese endure pain, uncertainty, and displacement amid protracted violence that spans from the precolonial period to the present. Building on critical race theory in anthropology and African studies scholarship, the author argues that, despite the recurrent pain, displacement, and death brought by war, Congolese have innovative ways of living their everyday lives. The book intervenes in the primary scholarship that frames Congo as a traumatic place and a ruin, showing that possibilities can emerge within fracture.

Niehuus, both an anthropologist and a surgeon, uses interviews and observations, coupled with theoretical frameworks. She skillfully integrates empirical data with the theoretical underpinnings of Achille Mbembe, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Christina Sharpe, Hortense Spillers, Frantz Fanon, and others to demonstrate the relation among people, land, violence, and public healing. These theoretical framings make the book's argument about violence, death, and healing in Eastern Congo sophisticated and engaging.

The book consists of five chapters, with five interludes serving as breaks between them. Chapter One explores the genesis of land issues in Eastern Congo, beginning with the colonial period. It examines how land possession has wrought violence, displacement, and death, yet Congolese return to it for farming, mining, and conservation efforts as a form of repair or healing. The following chapter investigates the environments the Congolese live in, which are affected by war and, to some extent, volcanoes. It shows how proximate people live with life and death, victims and perpetrators, bandits and soldiers, where they allow affects in the form of healing. Niehuus states that "the tension between victim and perpetrator, soldier and bandit, life and death, Congolese allow affect to be the healing force that re-pairs that which has been blown apart over centuries of violence" (p. 67). Chapter Three shows how Kishabe hospital became a site of healing and social care for the population, as well as a site of pain where women and children died; a place where people were taught to endure pain, reflecting the larger society—"the hospital harmed as much as it healed" (p. 78). The fourth chapter investigates how war can be both a form of poison and a cure when pain in life becomes chronically unbearable. Chapter Five highlights how the people of Eastern Congo do not live with pain or violence alone but also imagine a future. It shows how prophecies, art, play, and friendship constitute a crucial role in their dream of a future where black life thrives. Here, imagination becomes a form of healing or repair. In the Conclusion, Niehuus demonstrates how, despite loss and pain, people continue to live, care, build, and imagine forging a future of togetherness.

The primary strength of *An Archive of Possibilities* lies in Niehuus's combination of theoretical frameworks to tell a story of violence and hope for a better future. Theorizing the people's daily struggles, including women and children, and how they carry hope despite wartime conditions, is remarkable. It reframes the Congolese from victims of war to people of endurance and creativity. The book's limitation is its theoretical density; some parts, especially Chapter Four, are theoretically complex, which can occasionally overshadow the ethnographic

voice, the study's anchor. While the book's density will appeal to advanced readers well-versed in critical theory, its accessibility is limited for scholars and undergraduates who may not be trained in these theoretical traditions.

The book is a significant contribution to medical anthropology, African studies, and the history of medicine. Scholars interested in analyzing colonialism and violence through concepts such as necropolitics, antiblackness, and therapeutic violence will find *An Archive of Possibilities* compelling. It is an excellent fit for graduate seminars and scholars interested in learning about violence in times of war and how people envision their healing trajectories during such times in a postcolonial context.

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