

intellectual' and as the 'wartime propaganda and media warrior and ethno-national ideological zealot' (p. 247) that emerges in *There Was a Country*. This writerly degeneration, Jeyifo asserts, results from the omission or over-simplification of questions of class, ethnicity and regionalism that would have run counter to what Jeyifo calls Achebe's 'ethnic Igbo project'. The book's final part, devoted to gender issues in Nigeria-Biafra war literature, which includes just three chapters, will be of interest to newcomers to Nigerian civil war literature, but will feel somewhat repetitive in scope and over-emphatic of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*.

Bearing in mind the repetitive coverage of a number of civil war novels, there are some regrettable exclusions in the book, which would have benefited from a complex study of social media posts on the conflict, an analysis of idiosyncratic popular texts such as Ogali A. Ogali's post-war Onitsha Market pamphlet *No Heaven for the Priest* (1971) and other less well-known creative responses to the war. There are two lapses related to questions of genre: at some point Achebe's and Elechi Amadi's war memoirs are described as a novel and work of fiction respectively.

These minor issues, however, do not detract from the impressive accomplishment of *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, which does justice to its vast, yet nuanced, scope and remains forthright in its discussion of controversial issues. The book achieves its aim of exhaustively unravelling the historical, political, military and ideological synergies that go into the construction of the texts examined, while analysing the contemporary remembrance of the war and the current political situation. It is an excellent resource for Africanists in general and a crucial essay collection for students and scholars of Nigerian politics, history, literature and print cultures.

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Giacomo Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa: a history of technology and politics*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2211 3; pb US \$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2212 0). 2016, xv + 249 pp.

Did the African importation of guns contribute to a growth in wealth and political centralization or did it tie Africans to cycles of violence and debt? In *The Gun in Central Africa*, Giacomo Macola replaces the technological and economic determinism of the gun–slave cycle with careful historical investigation and analysis. Guns did not determine history, Macola argues. Political elites and their warrior followers used or resisted guns in different ways and with different outcomes.

The argument is developed in case studies of various South-Central African polities through the second half of the nineteenth century. For the Lozi of present-day north-western Zambia, Macola argues that guns helped to restore royal authority after the overthrow of the Kololo usurpers. Guns here became a means and a symbol of aristocratic political centralization. In the Yeke warlord state in the south of present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, where guns were essential for harvesting ivory, capturing slaves and subduing autochthonous people, Msiri became dependent on this exogenous technology. Increasingly illegitimate, his polity suffered from an internal rebellion, collapsing after his assassination by a Congo Free State officer, with his remaining fighters absorbed into a ruthless section of the colonial army, the Force Publique. The Ngoni of

present-day Malawi and north-eastern Zambia eschewed the gun, and instead stuck to their heroic martial traditions and weaponry, the spear; as a result, they suffered significant defeats at the hands of gun-wielding colonial armies. A few of their followers, however, came to replace the spear with the gun in the police forces of Northern Rhodesia.

The historical narrative weaves together different colonial encounters across Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and the Congo Free State (the Belgian Congo after 1908) with a fine command of the details of early colonial militaries and administrations. That the arguments are compelling and told with such lucidity is a result of careful examination of available documentary sources, in particular the published and unpublished accounts of missionaries, European explorers and early colonial officials written in Portuguese, French and English. Despite their colonial origins, Macola insists that there is much of value in such sources. Jan Vansina and others had previously employed them, but tended to highlight African oral traditions instead. Macola uses a few African-authored sources, such as praise poems, alongside a smattering of linguistic evidence. His focus on the documentary record enables a rich description of those histories not included in such sources. He finds much more in these sources than the colonial racism and folly emphasized by Johannes Fabian and others. This confirms what other Central African historians have found, such as Nancy Rose Hunt, who uses similar documentary sources in her most recent work.

To avoid technological determinism, Macola subsumes technology to politics (despite a clear appreciation of gun technology). Thus, while his intention is to show how technologies and social relations 'transform one another' (p. 16), the latter gains precedence. Macola also claims to explore the cultural and symbolic role of guns. However, he does not consider supernatural understandings of guns important. He correctly asserts that 'spiritual appraisals of guns' need to be 'located in a much broader understanding of social structures – one which, of course, encompasses religious manifestations but is by no means confined to them' (p. 15). Still, this reader hoped that the book would grapple with more emic and less secular-centric perspectives.

Macola's book is made up of a judicious choice of contrasting polities. But while quantitative data is perhaps not available, the main bearers of imported guns by the late nineteenth century were probably the mobile mercenaries of the region: Luso-African Mambari traders, the Ruga Ruga mercenaries, and the Swahili caravan retainers, the Waungwana. Instead of the warriors of the interior polities, Macola could have followed these mobile traders and invaders. Furthermore, while Macola describes the incorporation of some of the Yeke and Ngoni warriors into colonial armies, he does not focus on the guns within the armies themselves. The reader learns little of African–European–Arab exchanges in gun knowledge, use and culture. For these reasons, there is less emphasis on hybridity than on distinct polities, essentially the precursors of the colonial 'tribes' that emerged after their collapse. The framework remains that of the political history first outlined in Vansina's *Kingdoms of the Savanna*.

Like Richard Reid, Macola joins the violent upheavals of the nineteenth century to postcolonial wars. The general point is well taken, although when applied it can be more controversial than it appears at first glance. As an illustration, Macola concludes by drawing connections between the gun societies of pre-colonial South-Central Africa to late twentieth-century warfare in East-Central Africa. But what of South-Central Africa itself, from the Katangan *gendarmerie*, recently investigated by Miles Larmer, to the containment of violence in post-colonial Zambia?

Macola's book is a major achievement in complicating the standard narratives of politics and technology. The historical consequences of precolonial gun cultures remain to be elaborated, however. To do so we might need an ontological sensibility, a sense of how people imbued guns with meanings that surpassed their military and political functions.

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