

# Leopold's Legacy

The resistance against King Leopold II's brutal reign over his colony the Congo Free State (CFS), originated in Antwerp harbour in the 1890s. Edmund Dene Morel (an official at the Elder Dempster shipping company) started his initial campaign against slavery and the misuse of Congo after he observed a fortune in rubber returning from the colony, while only guns and manacles were being sent in return. Over the years, this grew into the first international humanitarian campaign to use photography in its cause.

I started working on *Leopold's Legacy* more than five years ago after returning from Sri Lanka, where I had photographed the remains of three decades of civil war and the monuments that were quickly erected in its aftermath, thus reflecting on the influence of British colonial rule on the conflict. When visiting Belgium, I was struck by the presence of colonial monuments in public spaces. They were hidden in plain sight. I passed them on a daily basis, without being aware of their meaning and history. When I began photographing colonial monuments and researching Belgian colonial history, I took a documentary approach, which was fuelled by my interest in how colonial histories and certain truths are

represented and inscribed in cityscapes. Along the way, my project turned into visual research on the various forms of representation of the colonial history of Congo in Belgium, including additional topics such as architecture, street names, historical postcards and collage sculptures for alternative monuments.

The launch of *Leopold's Legacy* coincides with a wave of anti-racism protests that has swept the globe following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The protests have once again stirred up arguments about how society deals with colonial monuments. All over Belgium, statues of Leopold II have become targets of activists' actions against racism, leading to the removal of some colonial monuments, - for example, in the city of Ekeren.

In my artist's contribution for TRIGGER platform, I am revisiting the book and partly unpublished visual material with a focus on colonial remnants, relics and monuments in the city of Antwerp, to clarify existing links in the publication and establish new layers of meaning between its eight chapters.

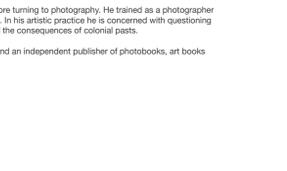
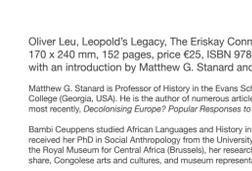
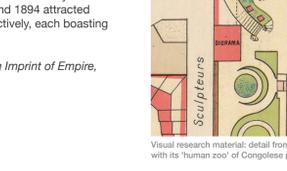
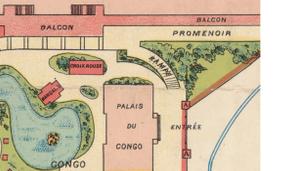
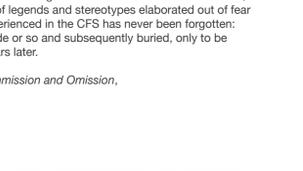
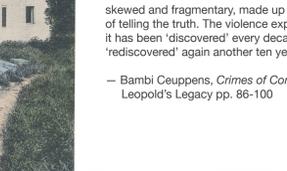
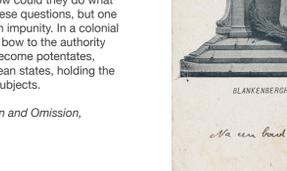
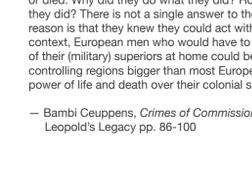
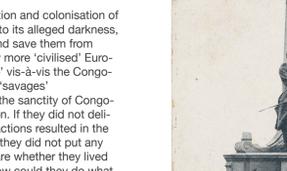
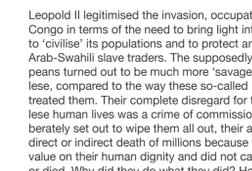
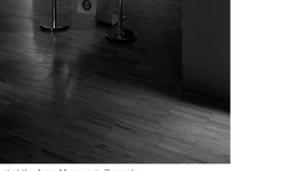
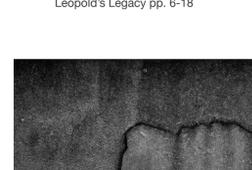
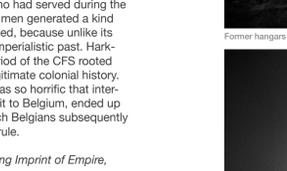
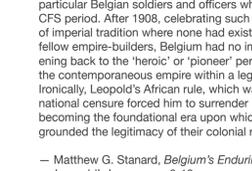
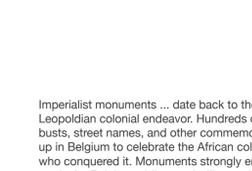
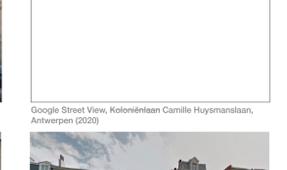


## magnum

BRUSSEL 11/1/2017 © BRUZZ DELEN: f t

## De hangjongeren van beeldhouwkunst

om 05:00 door Dirk Martens - Print - Corrigeer



Imperialist monuments ... date back to the very first years of the Leopoldian colonial endeavor. Hundreds of plaques, statues, busts, street names, and other commemorative markers were put up in Belgium to celebrate the African colony and to honor those who conquered it. Monuments strongly emphasized the military, in particular Belgian soldiers and officers who had served during the CFS period. After 1908, celebrating such men generated a kind of imperial tradition where none had existed, because unlike its fellow empire-builders, Belgium had no imperialistic past. Harkening back to the 'heroic' or 'pioneer' period of the CFS, the contemporary empire within a legitimate colonial history, ironically, Leopold's African rule, which was so horrific that international censure forced him to surrender it to Belgium, ended up becoming the foundational era upon which Belgians subsequently grounded the legitimacy of their colonial rule.

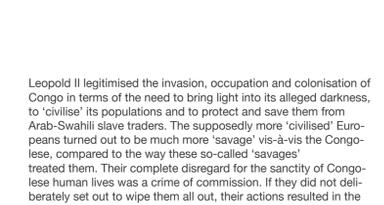
— Matthew G. Stancard, *Belgium's Enduring Imprint of Empire, Leopold's Legacy* pp. 6-18



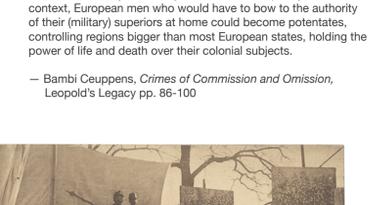
Detail of the monument to King Leopold II, Halle near Brussels

Leopold II legitimized the invasion, occupation and colonisation of Congo in terms of the need to bring light into its alleged darkness, to 'civilise' its populations and to protect and save them from Arab-Swahili slave traders. The supposedly more 'civilised' Europeans turned out to be much more 'savage' vis-à-vis the Congolese, compared to the way these so-called 'savages' treated them. Their complete disregard for the sanctity of Congolese human lives was a crime of commission. If they did not deliberately set out to wipe them all out, their actions resulted in the direct or indirect death of millions because they did not put any value on their human dignity and did not care whether they lived or died. Why did they do what they did? How could they do what they did? There is not a single answer to these questions, but one reason is that they knew they could act with impunity. In a colonial context, European men who would have to bow to the authority of their (military) superiors at home could become potentates, controlling regions bigger than most European states, holding the power of life and death over their colonial subjects.

— Bambi Ceuppens, *Crimes of Commission and Omission, Leopold's Legacy* pp. 86-100



Historical re-enactment of the Fête militaire, Apotheose de Lippens at the Beverloo military camp (postcard sent in 1914)



De Bruynee-Lippens Monument in Blankenberge



Congolese graves next to the church of Teruren



19/12/2018 om 22:04 door Michel Van Mullem - Print - Corrigeer



Until 1998, when the Dutch and French translations of *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, written by American journalist Adam Hochschild, were published, it was widely argued that the violence that occurred in the CFS was the subject of colonial amnesia or historical taboo in Belgium. I consider it more useful to argue that it has long been affected by what French historian Benjamin Stora has called a cloistered remembering: 'cloistered memories' are truncated, skewed and fragmentary, made up of legends and stereotypes elaborated out of fear of telling the truth. The violence experienced in the CFS has never been forgotten: it has been 'discovered' every decade or so and subsequently buried, only to be 'rediscovered' again another ten years later.

— Bambi Ceuppens, *Crimes of Commission and Omission, Leopold's Legacy* pp. 86-100

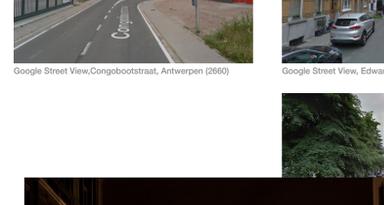


Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerpen 2020



Among the most remarkable displays of colonialism in Belgium between 1885 and 1908 were to be found at the country's world's fairs. Two exhibitions in Antwerp in 1885 and 1894 attracted 3.5 million and 3 to 5 million visitors, respectively, each boasting a section *coloniale*.

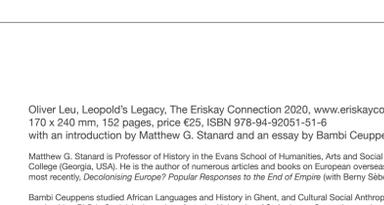
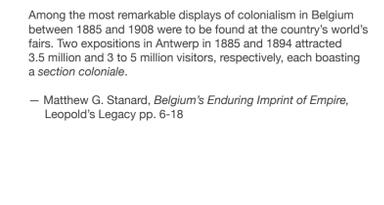
— Matthew G. Stancard, *Belgium's Enduring Imprint of Empire, Leopold's Legacy* pp. 6-18



Visual research material: anti-racism protests at Leopold II monuments in Belgium, June 2020



Visual research material: detail from a 1894 universal exposition map showing the section coloniale with its 'human zoo' of Congolese people in front of the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp



King Leopold II bust at the Army Museum in Brussels

Former hangars close to old Antwerp. South railway station (now demolished)

Google Street View, Beschavingstraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Kolenielaan Camille Huysmanslaan, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, General Cabrastraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Ryckmansstraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Coquilhatstraat, Antwerpen (2000)

Google Street View, Stanleystraat, Antwerpen (2018)

Google Street View, Luitlens Lippenslaan, Antwerpen (2140)

Google Street View, Van Kerckhovestraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Sergeant de Bruyneestraat, Antwerpen (2140)

Google Street View, Lambermontstraat, Antwerpen (2000)

Google Street View, Pater de Dekenstraat, Antwerpen (2010)

Google Street View, Congedooisstraat, Antwerpen (2860)

Google Street View, Edward Pecheersstraat, Antwerpen (2000)

Google Street View, Korte Kongostraat, Antwerpen (2060)

Google Street View, Baron Joostenstraat, Antwerpen (2018)

Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerpen 2020

Visual research material: detail from a 1894 universal exposition map showing the section coloniale with its 'human zoo' of Congolese people in front of the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp

Visual research material: anti-racism protests at Leopold II monuments in Belgium, June 2020

Visual research material: pedestal from the monument to Baron Francis Dhanis in the bushes at the former Koloniële Hogeschool in Antwerp (top) — Two remaining figures at the Middelheim Park (left)

Google Street View, Baron d'Harlausaan, Antwerpen (2000)

Google Street View, General Cabrastraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Stanleystraat, Antwerpen (2018)

Google Street View, Luitlens Lippenslaan, Antwerpen (2140)

Google Street View, Van Kerckhovestraat, Antwerpen (2020)

Google Street View, Van Kerck