

**'Central Africa and Belgium: Empire and Postcolonial Resonance'** [University of Warwick, School of Modern Languages & Cultures – supported by the Institute of Advanced Studies] – 17-18 September 2020

All welcome – link to workshop: [LinkToWorkshop](#)

## Programme

### Thursday 17 September

9.30 – 9.50 **Pierre-Philippe Fraiture** (University of Warwick)

#### **'Introduction'**

10.00-10.35 **Yvette Hutchison** (University of Warwick)

#### **'Performative Challenges to Belgium's Colonial Amnesia: Monuments, Museums and Resonant Spaces'**

10.40-11.15 **Dónal Hassett** (University of Cork)

#### **'Must Leopold Fall? The Renovation of the AfricaMuseum and Belgium's Place in International Debates on the Decolonisation of Public Heritage'**

11.30-12.05 **Nicki Hitchcott** (University of St Andrews)

#### **'Imperial Fictions: Belgian Novels about Rwanda'**

12.10-12.45 **Sky Herington** (University of Warwick)

#### **“'Depuis la Flamandchourie”: Legacies of Belgian Colonialism in Sony Labou Tansi's Writing'**

1.30-2.05 **Maëline Le Lay** (IFRA, Nairobi)

#### **'Landscaping and Escaping the Colony in Mudimbe's, Ruti's and Nayigiziki's Works'**

2.10.-2.45 **Hannah Grayson** (University of Stirling)

#### **'Récit d'enfance, récit de distance : Distancing in Gaël Faye's *Petit Pays*'**

### Friday 18 September

9.30-10.05 **Reuben Loffman** (Queen Mary University of London)

#### **'Living in the Ruins of Empire: The Persistence of 'Grey' Colonial Architecture in Kongolo, Tanganyika, DR-Congo'**

10.10-10.45 **Sarah Arens** (University of St Andrews)

#### **'Putting "Agriculture" back into "Culture": World Fairs, Contact Zones, and Postcolonial Resonances in Belgium'**

11.00-11.35 **Sammy Baloji** (Independent artist)

Title: TBC

11.40-12.15: **Bambi Ceuppens** (Royal Museum for Central Africa)

### **'The Congoscene at the time of the Congocene'**

1.00-1.35 **Catherine Gilbert** (Newcastle University)

### **'Genocide Education in Francophone Schools in Belgium'**

1.40-2.15: **Rob Burroughs** (Leeds Beckett University)

### **'Inside Congo House: Britain and Central Africa in History and Memory'**

2.20-2.55: **Brian Murray** (King's College London)

### **'The Journeys of 'Kalulu' and Saleh Bin Osman: African Travellers in the Archive of Exploration'**

3.05-3.20 Pierre-Philippe Fraiture

**'Concluding remarks' – looking ahead.**

### **Rationale of Workshop**

Belgium had once an empire in Central Africa. The historical processes informing this imperial presence – the foundation of the Congo Free State (CFS) in 1885, its demise, the emergence of the Belgian Congo in 1908 and the subsequent absorption of 'Ruanda-Urundi' by Belgium under the aegis of the League of Nations in 1922 - are well-documented and have generated a voluminous collection of responses in all fields of knowledge and human activities. This workshop will reflect on this colonial past but, more crucially, appraise the many post-colonial traces and legacies of this past in Belgium, the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi. The post-colonial period and the independence of the Congo (1960) and that of Burundi and Rwanda in 1962 did not herald a completely new era but marked, more prosaically, the beginning of decolonization. This process, which is unarguably still unfolding *now*, cannot be univocally defined and one of the chief aims of this workshop will be to explore how this contested notion has shaped cultural debates and responses in the geographical areas under scrutiny. It would be an understatement to say that this post-colonial period has been marked by violence. Real violence as tragically exemplified by the continuous string of civil wars, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and genocides; but also, cultural and epistemological violence as political emancipation did not elicit the expected cultural autonomy.

This period has witnessed the rise and often the fall of extraordinary and larger-than-life political figures such as Mobutu, Patrice Lumumba, Pierre Mulélé, Prince Louis Rwagasore, Laurent and Joseph Kabila, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, Juvénal Habyarimana and Alexis Kagame. It has also coincided with cultural experiments in the field of literature, thought, music and in the arts and the emergence, in Central Africa and in the diaspora, of formidably creative individuals and (public) intellectuals like Sony Labou Tansi, VY Mudimbe, Papa Wendo, and Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu. At the same time, Central African cultures have continued to attract the attention of scholars and have, in fact, often been mobilized to develop original empirical and theoretical research as illustrated by the works by Jan Vansina, Johannes Fabian, Colette Braeckman, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Filip De Boeck, David Van Reybrouck, Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, and Nancy Hunt. In the wake of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, other important statements have appeared, not only to account for this unfathomable tragedy (see the vast corpus of novels, films and testimonies on this event) but also to re-appraise

distant events such as Leopold's anti-slavery campaign, the Red Rubber Scandal, the publication of *Tintin au Congo*, the assassination of Lumumba in addition to the role and significance of the Museum of Tervuren in a post-colonial Belgium.

Sixty years after the independence of most sub-Saharan African former colonies, this workshop aims to explore the enduring influence of this Belgian colonial past in Belgium, its former colonial domains and beyond. We will attempt to privilege here cultural issues pertaining to the emergence of critical voices, whether intellectuals in the human sciences (e.g. history and anthropology), novelists, playwrights, musicians, artists, art critics, journalists, and art curators; and, as already indicated above, favour particular past and/or contemporary events through which the many intertwinements between Central Africa and Belgium can be examined.