

Workshop

The Congo Free State across Languages, Media and Cultures : What archives and collections have to say.

October 18th 2017

History and Politics Service at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium
NWO project with Open University
Co organized with the Center "Ecritures", Université de Lorraine

Scientific committee: P. Van Schuylenbergh & M. Leduc-Grimaldi (RMCA), P. Halen (U. Lorraine); Sarah de Mul (Open U. of the Netherlands)

Abstract

Launched at Uppsala University in September 2014, 'The Congo Free State across Languages, Media and Cultures' is a research initiative funded by the NWO (the Netherlands), Uppsala University, the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, and Leeds Beckett University. This workshop is the last opportunity for the partners involved in the project to develop and share their findings with the public and peers.

This symposium explores the Congo Free State under Leopold II (1885-1908) as a space of transnational encounter through an analysis of its representation across languages, media and cultures. As such, the collections and archives focusing on this period of time, or revisiting the memory of this period at a much later period bring to light new considerations, and help to better envision the impact memory and history may have on specific groups across Europe and Northern America. Though the RMCA is closed for renovation, the workshop will be held at the Museum, offering the audience a key opportunity to discuss specific issues, and scrutinize various types of collections including manuscript archives dating prior 1908, movies, photographs, paintings, sculptures etc. connected to the Congo Free State period or recalling its memory. Thus this international workshop, with its scientific European threefold poles, will benefit the collection and current research ongoing at the RMCA as well as strengthen a European network.

9 am: welcome

9,15am: Opening, **Dr G. Gryseels**

Chair1st session: Patricia Van Schuylenbergh RMCA

Abstract

Patricia Van Schuylenbergh holds a PhD in History (2006) and a Master of Arts (Development Aid) (1989) from the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL, Belgium). She is the Head of the Unit "History and Politics" at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. She is co-directing the "Overseas" collection at PIE-Peter Lang editions. Her numerous essays, monographs and books chapters focus

on colonial history, Central Africa, and especially on the history of environment, nature protection, colonial sciences, collections and visual representations. She was also the curator in charge of several exhibitions in Belgium and abroad and was in charge of projects valorising audio-visual collections through digitalization.

9,30

Luis Angel Bernardo y Garcia, State Archives of Belgium Historical archives available to researchers in Belgium on the Congo Free State.

Abstract

My paper will intend to paint a picture of the public and private records available to researchers in Belgium on the Congo Free State. It will evoke the Sources Guide "in construction" carried by the State Archives in Belgium and the Royal Museum for Central Africa. The "Guide to the archives on the colonial history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi, 19th-20th centuries" will become the "archival bible" for all CFS researchers. My paper will focus on the collections from the State Archives in Belgium, the Archives of the Royal Palace and the "African archives" actually kept by the SPF Foreign Affairs.

Bio

Luis Angel Bernardo y Garcia was in charge of the private records at the National Archives in Brussels. Since 2015, he coordinates the transfer of the 11 km of "Africa archives" conserved by Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the National Archives 2 - Joseph Cuvelier repository also in Brussels. The Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the State Archives of Belgium and the Foreign Affairs provides, following the transfer of the 11 km of "Africa archives", the 6 km of historical diplomatic archives as well as 4 km of the Development Cooperation. This vast project must be spread over a decade.

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M. Leduc-Grimaldi, RMCA, Belgium From the Archives: An international team at the service of the Comité du Haut Congo / CFS

Abstract

The various expeditions between 1879 and 1885 ended up in the founding of the Congo Free State financed by the King of the Belgians under the cover of the African International Association. This international scheme was not limited to Belgium but also used by its neighboring countries active in the Scramble for Africa.

During his five-years of "work and exploration", Stanley led an international team hired by the Comité du Haut Congo, in fact Leopold II & Colonel Strauch, his mouthpiece.

A close research in the travellers diaries and correspondence, especially between Stanley and Colonel Strauch let us perceive how the story of a handful of international people laboring for this so-called international enterprize was turned into a national epic.

Bio

Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi holds an MA in History of Art (Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne U.) and her PhD in History in Italy (SMUniv). She is the curator in charge of the Henry M. Stanley Archives and Collection at the Royal Museum for Central Africa since 2006. She published articles in *Revue Histoire de l'Art*, *Etudes photographiques*, *Erreffe*, and *English Studies in Africa*.

She was the curator of "Africa in Images, Stanley I presume?" Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi (2007), and " Dr Livingstone, I presume?" (Belvue Museum, 2013). Her latest exhibition with catalogue was "Going postal: (Hi)story and Philately in Belgium" (Belvue Museum, 2016), with a special section on CFS & Belgian Congo.

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10,30

Pierre-Luc Plasman, Catholic University Louvain la Neuve (in French)
Léopold II et l'administration congolaise aux prises avec leurs contradictions

Abstract

Souvent réduite à l'exploitation outrancière du caoutchouc et des massacres qui l'accompagnent, l'histoire du Congo léopoldien est présentée dans une simple linéarité. L'analyse des politiques et du fonctionnement administratif oblige cependant à revoir non seulement la chronologie de l'ÉIC mais également l'image d'un État colonial à structure pyramidal sur lequel Léopold II règne sans partage. Cette contribution se propose dès lors de mettre à jour les canaux de décisions et d'informations au sein de l'ÉIC en vue, premièrement de mieux saisir les mécanismes de violence de masse, deuxièmement de décrypter les réactions gouvernementales à ce phénomène et enfin de pouvoir discerner l'attitude du Roi devant le système qu'il a initié.

Bio

Pierre-Luc Plasman (1980) : Docteur en histoire de l'UCL, il a défendu sa thèse sur le fonctionnement institutionnel de l'ÉIC et la gestion des violences de masse par les sphères gouvernementales. Collaborateur scientifique de l'Institut de sciences-politiques Louvain-Europe, il a co-dirigé plusieurs ouvrages sur l'histoire coloniale belge, dont notamment : *Afrique belge XIX^e – XX^e siècles. Nouvelles recherches et perspectives en histoire coloniale* avec Patricia Van Schuylenbergh chez Peter Lang en 2014.

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11-11,15 short break

11,15

**Robert Burroughs, Leeds Becket University
African Agency in the Movement for Congo Reform: Behind the Casement Report**

Abstract:

Published in January 1904, Roger Casement's consular report on the Congo Free State was of unique importance in harnessing both official and popular support for the cause of reform of King Leopold II's Congo Free State. It led directly to the formation of E.D. Morel's Congo Reform Association. Though his efforts have been regarded sceptically by apologists for Leopold's colony, Casement has latterly been acknowledged for his decisive intervention as a humanitarian hero. Following Casement's own self-reflections, biographers connect his efforts in central Africa to his nascent Irish nationalism. Moving beyond biographical and author-centred approaches, I will recover the input of Congo-born guides, testifiers and translators in the making of Casement's report. I reframe the production of the 'Casement report' from the angle of various other contributors to it, separating out these narratives, as far as possible, from the consul's own. By identifying the role of African agents in the making of Casement's report, my paper reflects on the eurocentrism of prevailing historical narratives of Congo reform.

Bio:

Dr Rob Burroughs is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies and Humanities at Leeds Beckett University, UK. His next book, *African Testimony in the Movement for Congo Reform*, will be published by Routledge in 2018. Rob has previously published several articles on imperialism and humanitarianism in the nineteenth century, as well as the books *Travel Writing and Atrocities* (2010, paperback 2015) and *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2015, paperback 2017).

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11,15

**Gert De Wolf and Sarah De Mul, Open University of the Netherlands
The Tilkens - Morel correspondence & the 'epistolary pact'**

Abstract

The correspondence between Edmund Dene Morel, co-founder of the Congo Reform Association, and former lieutenant Edouard Tilkens, who served in the 'Force Publique', the armed force and at the same time police department of the Congo Free State is the object of a master paper within the research field of colonial remembrance at Open University The Netherlands. On another level this research explicitly wishes to contribute to the ongoing umbrella research into the Congo Reform Association. The surviving collection of the letters exchanged between the two gentlemen involved has not been subject to thorough research

previously. The central issue in this epistolary exchange is the negotiation about the sale of compromising documents for the Congo Free State that came into possession of Tilkens.

For the structuring of this research was relied upon some relevant concepts of epistolary criticism from prof. Janet Gurkin Altman from the University of Iowa and prof. Liz Stanley from the University of Edinburgh & University of Northumbria. As a main research directory is put forward the definition of prof. Altman about the 'epistolary pact' and how this may be useful for a better understanding of the Tilkens – Morel correspondence. The definition of the 'epistolary pact' sounds: 'The call for a response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world'.

The aim of the paper is threefold: First a practical concern whereas the inventory of these letters allow further research from other points of view. Secondly a social-political concern because this research adds to a still better understanding of quite a turbulent period in the course of which the current Congo Democratic Republic was put on the chart as a political-geographical entity, the troubles that arose along this founding of a state still have an impact on the mutual relationship between Belgium and its former colony. Thirdly a literary concern because the epistolary criticism is applied in a non-common manner, what means not to draw a character study of the correspondent(s) but as a means to describe the evolution in the long-distance relationship between the correspondents involved.

As Edmund Dene Morel was a frequent letter writer, this method for analysis could be useful in the analysis of other correspondences in the *Morel Papers* (Archive: British Library of Political and Economic Science).

Bio

Gert De Wolf graduated at Open University of the Netherlands, where he's pursuing a Master of Arts. Previous papers include Hedonistic Materialism – Michel Onfray.

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12,15: Q&A morning session

Lunch break: 1-2pm

Chair2nd Session: Stephen Donovan, Uppsala Universiteit

Bio:

Stephen Donovan is Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Uppsala University. He has been a visiting lecturer at Royal Holloway College, London; the University of Indonesia, Jakarta; and the Norwegian University of Science and

Technology. Donovan has published on the writings of Joseph Conrad, colonial film and travel writing, and the literary legacy of the Congo Free State. He is a co-convenor of the research network sponsored by Riksbanken Jubileumsfond Sweden and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, The Congo Free State Across Language, Culture, Media (2014-2017). He is currently co-editing a multi-author reference volume, *The Congo Free State across the Cultures of Fin-de-siècle Europe*, to be published by Liverpool University Press in 2018. He is also the creator of Conrad First, an online archive of the several hundred periodicals that first serialized Conrad's work.

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2pm

David Gordon, Bowdoin College, USA

Myth Models and the Archives: Kurtz and Prospero in the Historiography of the Congo Free State

Abstract

This presentation considers the myths that inform European and American representations of historical agency in the Congo Free State, in particular those who foment violence (the Kurtz myth) and those who bring peace (the Prospero myth). By interrogating the published works and archival documentation that construct such myths, I also suggest alternative histories. In doing so, the presentation focuses on the Kurtz-like figures of Baron Francis Dhanis and Ngongo Luteta on the one hand and the Prospero-like figure of the African-American missionary William Henry Sheppard on the other. In contrast to the myths, a careful reading of archival evidence shows agents of violence and agents of humanitarianism to be intertwined; humans in their historical contexts rather than their mythical characters influenced eruptions of extreme violence in the Congo Free State.

Bio

David M. Gordon is interested in the history of southern and central African encounters with global forces over the last two centuries: Atlantic and Indian Ocean trading networks, British, Portuguese, and Belgian colonialism, changing property regimes, and Christianity. His most recent book is a collection of sources on apartheid in South Africa, *Apartheid in South Africa: A History in Documents* (2017). His 2012 monograph considers the influence of Christian spirituality on historical agency in Northern Zambia, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Ohio University Press, 2012). Most recently, he has been researching central Africa through the nineteenth century and at the onset of European colonialism, and published journal articles on this project in *Past and Present* and in *Slavery and Abolition*.

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Julien Volper, RMCA, Belgium (in French)

La collection E. Storms : stratégie, gloire militaire et ameublement

Abstract

En 1930, le Musée de Tervuren recevait en donation de nombreux objets provenant de la collection de feu le capitaine Emile Storms. Dans quels contextes ces pièces furent-elles acquises ? Que savons-nous des motivations de collecte de cet officier belge qui fut surnommé en son temps l'Empereur du Tanganyika?

Bio

Julien Volper est titulaire d'un doctorat en Histoire de l'Art (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne). Il est conservateur au service Patrimoines du Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale (Tervuren) et Maître de conférences au Centre d'Anthropologie Culturelle de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles. Il est spécialisé dans l'étude des arts et des cultures anciennes d'Afrique Centrale et plus spécialement de la République Démocratique du Congo.

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3**Maarten Couttenier, RMCA, Belgium**

Archives, Memory and Performance. Tensions of European and African Empire in Bunkeya, Lofoi and Lukafu

Abstract

This paper will first try point out to the richness of colonial archives related to the Congo Free State period: written archives, photographs, film, material objects, etc. This richness is however also limited since colonial archives are inevitably biased. I will argue that by combining archival research with fieldwork and local expertise, historiographies (Vansina 1985) can be compiled, with the inclusion of oral testimonies and performance.

Second, by combing methodological approaches, this paper will deal with the history of the Congo Free State as an encounter between Europeans and Africans, but also between Europeans and Europeans and Africans and Africans. Tensions of empire rose between different colonialisms (Cooper & Stoler 1997), but also coexisted with tensions between African empires (e.g. Sanga and Yeke) and between metropolitan and imperial empires.

Finally, this paper will deal with these tensions and conflicts, or rather its perception and the debate on genocide. With ill-defined definitions, because authors in genocide studies often have limited knowledge on colonial history and vice versa, this debate has recently led to rather non-productive and sterile discussions. However, the debate remains important since it has important consequences in academia and museums.

Bio

Maarten Couttenier, anthropologist and historian, is currently based at the Royal Museum of Central Africa, History and Politics Department.

Main interests: African history, colonial culture, museum history, history of sciences.

- Blanchard P, Couttenier M. Les Zoos humains. *Nouvelles Études Francophones*. 2017;32(1):109–15.

- Couttenier M. 'With the risk of being called retrograde'. Racial Classifications and the Attack on the Aryan Myth by Jean-Baptiste d'Omalius d'Halloy (1783-1875). *Centaurus*. forthcoming.

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3,30-3,45 short break

3,45

Pierre Halen, University of Lorraine, France, Research Center "Ecriture", co-organization

Imagining the posterity of 'Heart of Darkness' in Literature & Movies (in French)

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4,15

Debora Silverman, UCLA, USA

Image-Force:

On the Visual Creation of the Congo Free State in Belgium, 1885-1908

Abstract

How does a conjury become real? By 1884, King Leopold II claimed a vast new realm of his own devising. This “coup de crayon” on a map, as H. M. Stanley called it, became “L’État Indépendant du Congo.” First an international Conference and then Parliament in Belgium authorized the king to become the sovereign of this distant African domain, and the parliament provided the loans to fund it as an arena of investment and extraction. Thus was born what has been called an anomalous “colony without a metropole,” a fictional state owned by the King of the Belgians, ruled by decree, and run from Brussels from 1885-1908.

This paper, part of a book nearing completion, emphasizes how the Congo Free State as a non-settler empire of extraction creates a particular cultural dynamic set off by distance, with the visual arts playing an unusually constitutive role in filling the gap.

Mobilizing archives and collections, the paper proceeds in two parts. Part I presents two examples of what I call “visual incursion and occupation:” the 1877 invention of the Congo Free State flag, and the 1885 design of the CFS seal and coat of arms. In both cases, I identify a “symbolic slippage” from international to national, and from independent to dependent status in the official iconography created in Belgium for the new Congo entity. The third example tracks a visual culture of mapping that circulated in the press, travel accounts, and exhibitions in 1880s and 90s Belgium, suggesting how particular patterns of apprehending the Congo culminated in the form and content of the giant wall maps of the Royal

Congo Museum of 1910.

In Part II I turn to the impact of the Congo Free State on fin-de-siècle high arts, identifying the origins of Belgian Art Nouveau---known as a “*coup de fouet*” or whiplash style---as a specifically Congo nature style in the 1890s, created from Congo raw materials and inspired by Congo motifs. Here I highlight chryselephantine statues and furniture commissioned for the 1897 Tervueren Exhibition that formed a nucleus of the now dispersed Royal Museum collections. I end with selected examples of what I call a Congo lexicon of “imperial modernism” in the design work of Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde after 1892, and the key role played by their patron, Secretary of State of the Congo Edmond Van Eetvelde, in Leopoldian Belgium and on the international stage.

Bio

Debora Silverman received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. From Princeton University. She is Distinguished Professor of History and Art History at UCLA, where she has taught since 1981 and holds the University of California President's Chair in Modern European History, Art and Culture.

Her prize-winning books include

1. *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and the Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America*;
2. *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkshire Conference Prize); and
3. *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (Ralph Waldo Emerson National Prize for Best Book in the Humanities; PEN American Center National Prize for “outstanding writing on the visual arts”).

Professor Silverman has received a number of awards and Fellowships, including the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, the Getty Research Institute Scholars' Fellowship, a Historical Studies Member at The Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, the Marta Weeks Senior Fellow award at the Stanford Center for the Humanities, and a Cullman Center Fellowship at the New York Public Library. Professor Silverman is an elected Member of the American Academy of Art and Sciences.

Professor Silverman's recent publications explore the impact of the Congo Free State on Belgian modernism; Art Nouveau's “whiplash style” as “Congo Style;” the cultural history of violence, and the politics of memory in Belgium. Her book nearing completion is entitled *Art of Darkness*.

These articles include:

- “Boundaries: Bourgeois Belgium and Emile Verhaeren’s Tentacular Modernism,” *Modern Intellectual History*, Summer 2017;
- “Diasporas of Art: History, The Tervuren Royal Museum for Central Africa, and the Politics of Memory in Belgium, 1885-2014,” *The Journal of Modern History* (87:3), September, 2015: 615-667.
- “Ensor’s Panache: James Ensor, the Army, and the Congo in Belgium, 1887,” Chicago Art Institute, Exhibition Research Catalogue, 2014:
https://publications.artic.edu/ensor/reader/temptationstanthony#section/289/289_anchor Click Table of Contents, then “The Temptation in Context,” then Debora Silverman, “Ensor’s Panache.”
- “Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism,” (three parts)

I, II, III," in *West 86th, The Bard Journal for Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture*, Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Spring 2013; (123 pages).

- "Marketing Thanatos: The Horror of Damien Hirst," *American Imago*, Fall 2011;
- "*Modernité Sans Frontières?*: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of the Belgian Avant-Garde in King Leopold's Belgium, 1885-1909," *American Imago*, Spring 2011 (90 pages).

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4,45

Bambi Ceuppens, RMCA, Belgium

The Congo Free State in the renovated display at the RMCA (2018 and on)

Abstract

The colonial past remains a contested topic in Belgian public debate and in the relations between Belgium and its former colony and protectorates. This paper will address what role the RMCA's new permanent exhibition can play in the circumstances, with particular reference to displays relating to the Congo Free State.

Bio:

Bambi Ceuppens studied African Languages and History at Ghent University and Social Anthropology at the Catholic University of Leuven. She received her PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, taught in the universities of Edinburgh, Manchester and St. Andrews, and was a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University and the Catholic University of Leuven. Currently a senior researcher at the RMCA, Bambi Ceuppens focuses on the colonial history the Congo and Belgium share, Congolese popular and contemporary culture and arts, the Congolese diaspora in Belgium, museum representations of Africa and Africans and autochthony. She was the curator of the exhibition *Indépendance!* In the RMCA in 2010, at the occasion of the 50thanniversary of Congolese independence and co-curator of the exhibition *Congo Art Works: Congolese Popular Painting* with Congolese photographer and artist, Sammy Baloji. For the past two years, she has curated the photographic exhibition africamuseum@matonge in the windows of shops in Matonge, the African neighbourhood in Brussels. She is curator (human sciences) for the new permanent exhibition of the RMCA which is due to open in 2018.

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5,15: Q&A afternoon session