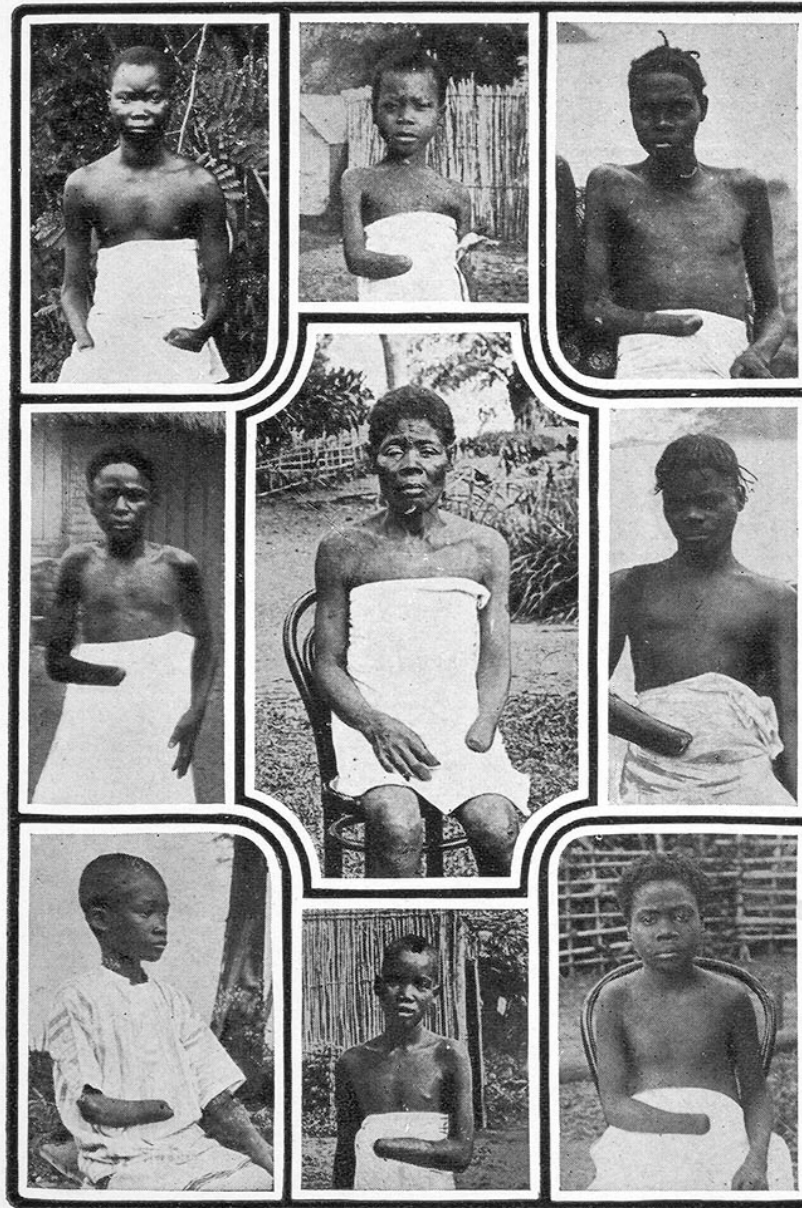


Exposing an Unfinished Belgian Process of Decolonization

Research project “Genealogy of Amnesia: Rethinking the Past for a New Future of Conviviality”,
Institute for Fine Arts / Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

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FROM PHOTOGRAPHS, CONGO STATE

“The pictures get sneaked around everywhere.”— *Page 40.*

Fig. I 1904, Congo Reform Association by Edmund Dene Morel and Roger Casement: first international protest campaign against exploitation Congo.

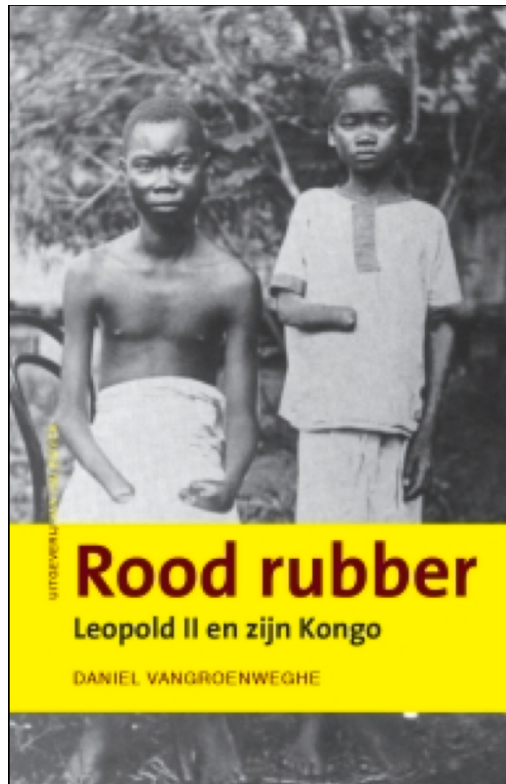


Fig. 2 Red Rubber by Daniel Vangroenweghe, 1985. Revealing the atrocities of King Leopold II's rule.

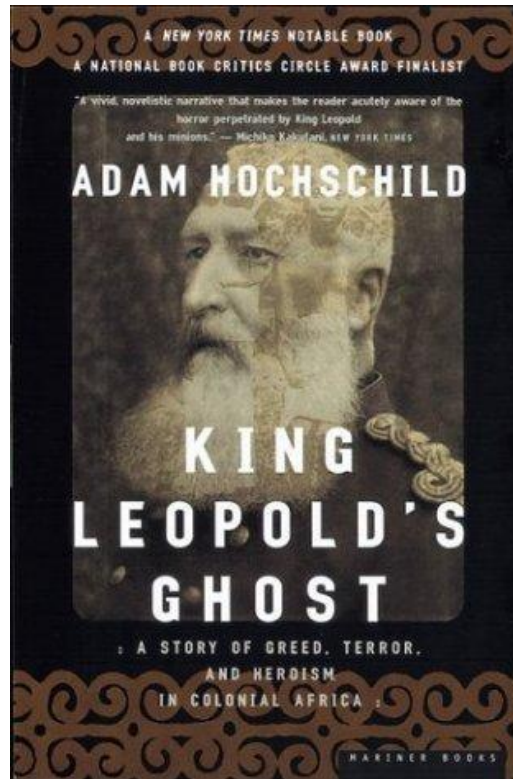


Fig. 3 Adam Hochschild's Leopold's Ghost, 1998. The book raises public awareness in Belgium about the exploitation and the atrocities committed during Congo Free State.

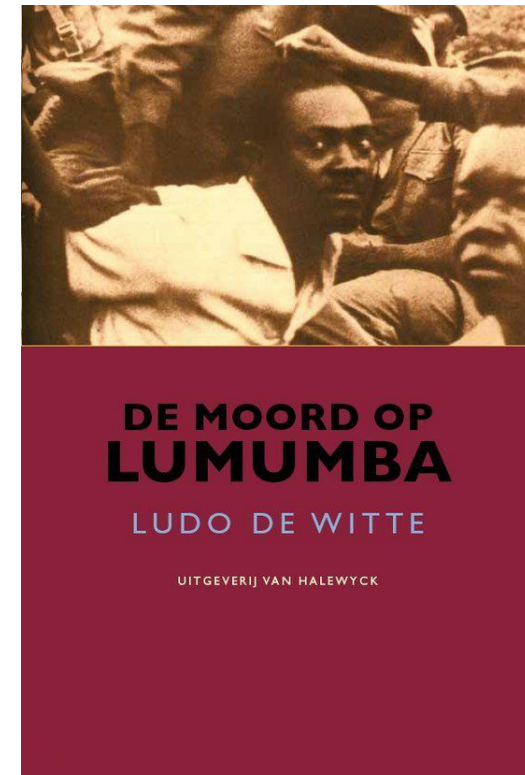


Fig. 4 Ludo De Witte publishes his work on the involvement of Belgian government in the death of Patrice E. Lumumba in 1999. His work is a direct critique on the doctoral thesis of Jacques Brassinne de la Buissière. In his work, Brassinne omits the Belgian responsibility in the execution of Lumumba. He shifts the blame towards the Katangese leaders. (Other authors have written on the Belgian (de)colonisation such as Guy Vantemsche, Bambi Ceuppens, Karel Arnaut, Sarah Demart, etc.)



Fig. 5 Hochschild's and De Witte's books lead to a parliamentary committee of inquiry in the Death of Lumumba in 2001. The committee concludes the 'moral' responsibility of the Belgian government in Lumumba's Death. The government is held responsible for the political (but not the physical) elimination of Lumumba, emphasizing that this elimination could not have taken place without the internal chaos and opposition (photo: session in the federal parliament, with chairman Geert Versnick.)



Fig. 6 Expert Luc De Vos presenting the decoded text during a session of the 'Lumumba commission.'

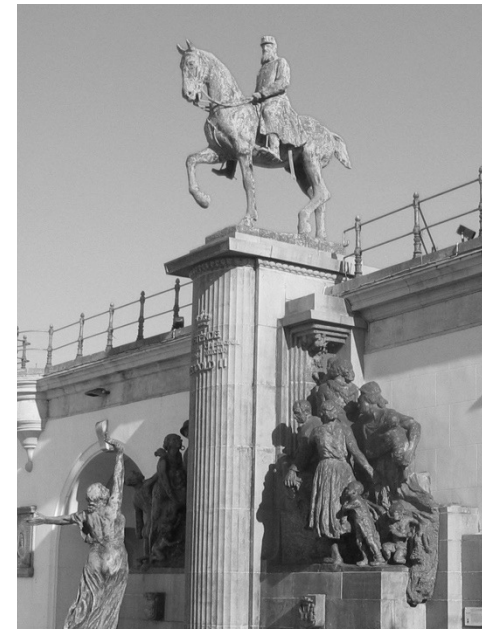


Fig. 7-9 In 2004 Group of activists De Stoete Ostendenoare saw off the hand of a Congolese slave in the statue of Leopold II –the statue is called “Gratitude of the Congolese to the King of liberating them of the slavery of the Arabs”- in the sea town Oostende. The group granted the hand to the Congolese community in Matonge, Brussels. It is named **sikitiko** (“I’m sorry” in Swahili). With this gesture, the action group asked the city of Ostend for a caption with more contextualisation about the crimes and atrocities during Congo Free State.



Fig. 10, 11 Stills of the documentary by Pieter De Vos "Sikitiko" (2010). Reconstruction of the story of the stolen hand, seen through the eyes of a young girl. It was created for the 50th anniversary of Congo's independence.

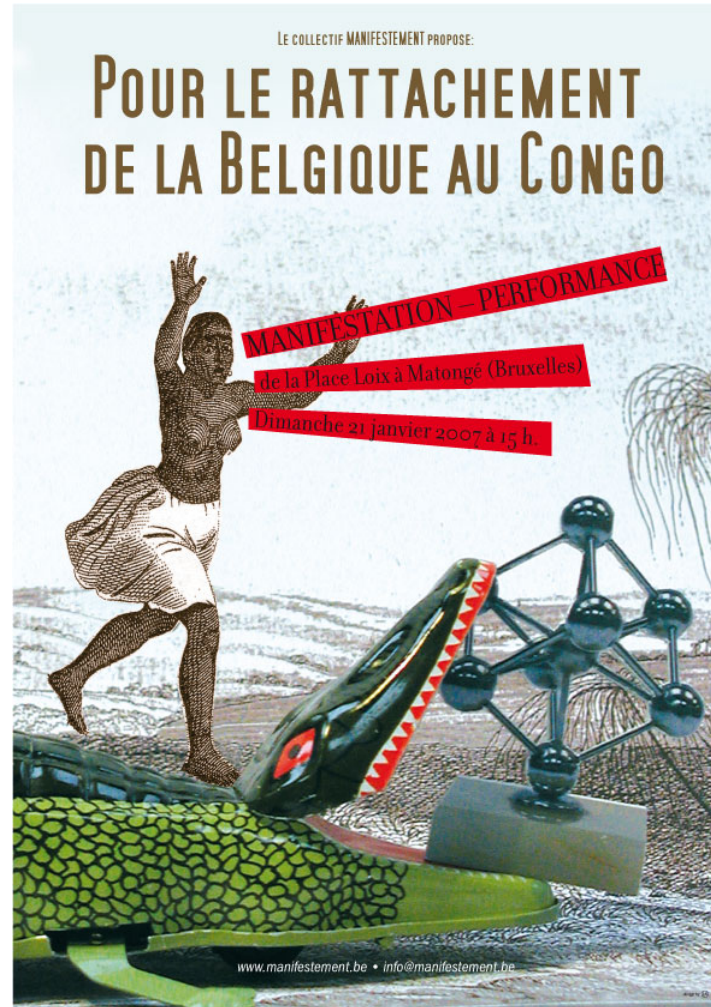


Fig. 12- 14 Performances in Ostend (2006) and in Brussels (2007) "Pour le rattachement de la Belgique au Congo." Brussels activists *Collectif Manifestement* set up performances next to the statues of Leopold II, declaiming the (fictional) re-annexation of Belgium to the Congo. Thereby drawing attention to the actual relationship between the two countries.



Fig. 15 Statue by Congolese artist Freddy Tsimba in Matonge, *Au delà de l'espoir*, Brussels (2007). Made of bullet casings.



Fig. 16 In 2015 a caption next to the colonial statue of missionary Pater De Deken in Wilrijk was placed and paid (!) by the action group *DecolonizeBelgium* after long negotiation with the city council.



Fig. 17 In 2016 (twelve years after the request of *De Stoete Ostendenoare*) the City of Ostend puts a caption with historical contextualisation next to the statue. Nevertheless, it hardly addresses the violence and the crimes of the colonial past. Nor does it reflect on the continuation of structural racism and inequality today.



Fig. 18 September, 9th, 2008. Writer and activist Théophile Giraud daubs the equestrian statue on the *Place du Trône* in Brussels with red paint and gets arrested. This action is followed by other activists who drench the statue with red liquids.

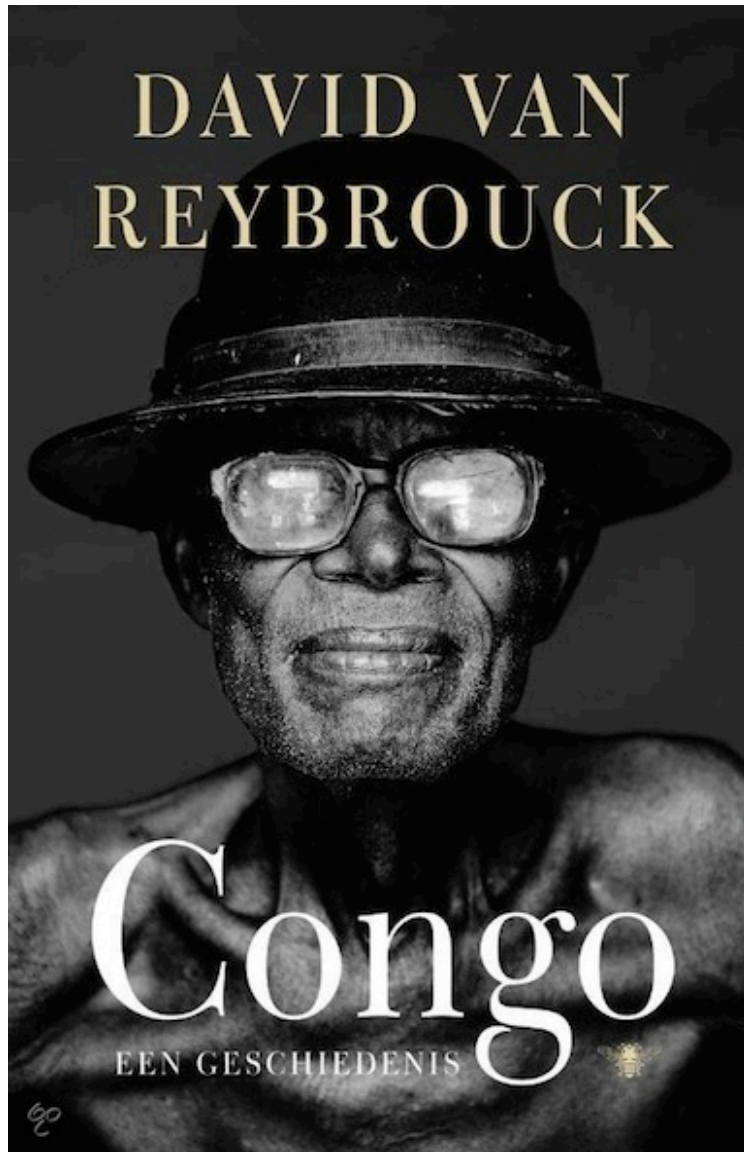


Fig. 19 2010, David Van Reybrouck's novel "Congo". Besides an enthusiastic reception in the media, the book also coped with a lot of critique, among whom Ludo De Witte. He claimed that the book still shows a one-sided perspective on the colonial history of Belgium in the Congo: "the pages which could have placed the Belgian government in a bad daylight seem to be taken out of the book."



Fig. 20-22 Different cities (Oostende, Brussel, Gent, Leuven, Mechelen, Hasselt, Halle en Antwerpen) participated the 17th of January 2018 in a national day of action, emphasizing the urgency to decolonise the Belgian public space. They demanded the removal of colonial symbols and the need for alternative spaces referring to Congolese symbols, such as Patrice Lumumba. (left: Ghent *Labo vzw* replaced the street name of *Leopold II-laan*, by *Patrice Lumumba laan*; right: *Mémoire Coloniale* in Ixelles in Brussels reiterated the claim for a Lumumba Square).





Fig. 24 January, 29th, 2017. Equestrian Statue of Leopold II gets daubed with red liquid. Only shortly after the stolen bust of Leopold II (fig. 26).



Fig. 25 Similar actions have taken place in other cities. Placard on a bust Leopold II, Ghent, 2016.

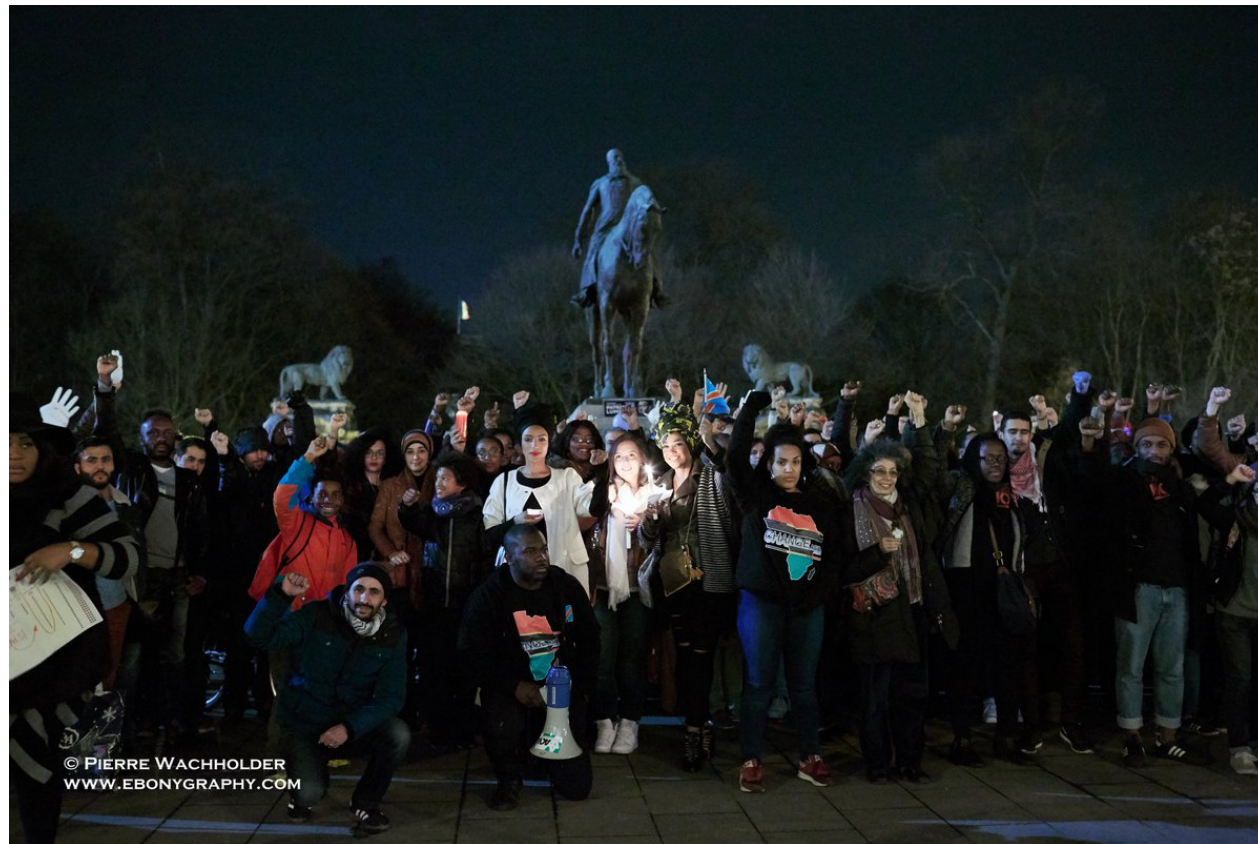


Fig. 26 December 2015, protest against the celebration of the 150th birthday of Leopold II's enthronement, by Geoffroy Coomans de Brachène, Brussels alderman for urban development and heritage. Due to the protest by *Mémoire Coloniale*, *La Nouvelle Voie Anti-Coloniale* en *Change*, the celebration was ultimately cancelled.



Fig. 27 January, 11, 2018: Buste of Leopold II is stolen out of the Dudenpark, Brussels, by *Citoyenne un Espace public Décolonial* (ACED)



Fig. 28 Buste in Dudenpark gets replaced by one made of birdseed.



Fig. 29 *Réorganisation* by Chéri Samba, (2002) living and working in Kinshasa, about the reorganisation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA). Central here is the sculpture of the Aniotu, which depicts Africa as primitive. The artist imagines the Congolese community criticizing the colonial nature of the RMCA. Since December 2013 the museum is being renovated.



Fig. 30 In 2017 artists Vesna Faassen en Lukas Verdijk published the book “Wanneer we spreken over kolonisatie/Quand on parle de la colonisation.” This book is the first Dutch translation of Congolese historians giving another perspective on the colonisation of the Congo.



Fig. 31, 32 The solo-exhibition “On Monumental Silences” in January 2017 of Ibrahim Mahama, curated by Antonia Alampi. In his performance Mahama opens the discussion on the still very present colonial monuments in the Belgian public space. He made a replica in rubber (to refer to the exploitation of rubber in the Congo) and one in clay, which the public could transform during the performance.



Fig. 33 November 2016, a replica of the pedestal of the equestrian statue of Leopold II on Place du Trône in Brussels. It is an installation of Rob Jacobs and Anne Reijniers: "This wooden pedestal wants to question the representation of the colonial past in our cities, and open up a space for conversation about the continuation of colonial structures in the present."



Fig. 34 “The Congo Tribunal,” 2015, documentary and installation by Milo Rau. Rau organised a fictional civil tribunal in Bukavu in East-Congo and in Berlin, one month later. In this tribunal Rau wanted to reflect on backgrounds and causes of the Congo war. The war found its origins in the Rwanda Genocide and has been going on for over twenty years. The economic interests in mineral commodities are one of the main causes of the continuation of the war. The complicities of foreign (Western) countries and companies in this economic war were critically addressed in the court. Other artists have addressed the issue of the (de)colonisation in different ways,, such as Renzo Martens, Sarah Vanagt, Sammy Baloji, Luc Tuymans, Vincent Meessen, Sven Augustijnen, Sarah Morris, Maarten Vanden Eynde, Otobang Nkanga, etc. .

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Fig. 1 Alice Harris, *Mutilated Congolese children and adults* (c. 1900-1905) — in Belgian colonial Congo Free State (present day Democratic Republic of the Congo), before 1905.

Source: Mark Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule*, Boston: The P. R. Warren Co., 1905, Second Edition.

Fig. 2- 4 Red Rubber (Daniel Vangroenweghe), King Leopold's Ghost (Adam Hochschild), The Death of Lumumba (Ludo De Witte)

Source: "Rood Rubber. Leopold II en zijn Congo," Last visited March, 29, 2018: <https://www.bol.com/nl/f/rood-rubber/36251843/?country=BE> ; "King Leopold's Ghost. A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism", Last visited March, 29, 2018: https://www.bol.com/nl/p/king-leopold-s-ghost/1001004000061965/?suggestionType=featured_product&suggestedFor=king%20leo&originalSearchContext=books_all&originalSection=books; "De Moord op Lumumba," Last visited March, 29, 2018: <https://www.bol.com/nl/p/de-moord-op-lumumba/666853457/?country=BE>

Fig. 5-6 Parliamentary commission on the death of Lumumba, 2001: session in the parliament with chairman Geert Versnick (fig. 5); expert Luc De Vos (fig. 6).

Source: Bevernage, Berber. 2012. "Geschiedenis in Overheidsopdracht: Wetenschap, Ethiek En Politiek in De Belgische Lumumba-commissie." *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis* 125 (1): 80, 91.

Fig. 7 The cut of hand by the *Stoete Ostendenoare* of one of the Congolese men in the statue of Leopold II in Ostend.

Source: "Out of the Ivory Tower," *Sint-Lukas*, last visited 28 March 2018: http://etopia.sintlucas.be/3.14/Matherealisations_2012.htm.

Fig. 8 Cut of hand by De Stoete Ostendenoare.

Source: "Sikitiko: Het ruiterstandbeeld van Leopold II in Oostende," *A.V.R.U.G Afrika-Vereniging van de Universiteit Gent*, last visited 28 March 2018: <http://cas1.elis.ugent.be/avrug/erfgoed/sikitiko/sikitiko.htm>.

Fig. 9 Statue of Leopold II in Ostend.

Source: "Statue of Leopold II in Ostend, 1931, by Alfred Courtens (1889-1967) and Antoine Courtens (1899-1969)," last visited 28 March 2018: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statue_LeopoldII_Ostende.jpg.

Fig. 10, 11 Stills of the documentary "Sikitiko" by Pieter De Vos, 2010.

Source: “De Helden van de Kolonisatie,” *Faro*, last visited 28 March 2018: <https://faro.be/erfgoeddag/nieuws/de-helden-van-de-kolonisatie>.

Fig. 12- 14 Performance “Pour le rattachement de la Belgique au Congo” by *Collectif Manifestement* in Brussels and Ostend, 2007.

Source: “POUR LE RATTACHEMENT DE LA BELGIQUE AU CONGO
Manifeste du retour au bercail,” *Collectif Manifestement*, last visited 28 March 2018: <https://manifestement.be/manifestations/2007/t>

Fig. 15 Statue *Au delà de l'espoir*, by Freddy Tsimba, Matonge, Brussels.

Source: Freddy Tsimba, last visited 28 March 2018: <http://www.freddytsimba.com/gallery/au-dela-de-lespoir/>

Fig. 16 Caption by *DecolonizeBelgium*, Wilrijk, 2015.

Source: Luk Luyten, “Plakkaat geeft duiding bij standbeeld Pater De Deken,” *Gazet van Antwerpen*, last visited March 29, 2018: https://www.gva.be/cnt/bllu_01692468/plakkaat-geeft-duiding-bij-standbeeld-pater-de-deken

Fig. 17 Caption in Ostend, 2016.

Source: Photograph author.

Fig. 18 Théophile Giraud daubs equestrian Statue (Place du Trône, Brussels, 2008).

Source: “Incontrare Kurtz,” last visited March, 27, 2018: <https://www.moduscc.it/le-storie/incontrare-kurtz-19258-122716/>.

Fig. 19 David Van Reybrouck’s Congo, 2010.

Source: “Congo, een geschiedenis,” *Bol.com*, last visited March, 27: <https://www.bol.com/nl/p/congo-een-geschiedenis/1001004010970623/?country=BE>.

Fig. 20 Action *DecolonizeMyCity* of *Labo vzw*, Ghent, January 17, 2018.

Source: Frederik Sadones, 2018.

Fig. 21 Placard Place Patrice Lumumba

Source: “Krijgt Elsene een Lumumbaplein,” *Bruzz*, last visited March, 30: <https://www.bruzz.be/samenleving/krijgt-elsene-een-lumumbaplein-2013-07-31>.

Fig. 22 *Mémoire Coloniale* in Ixelles, claiming a Place Patrice Lumumba.

Source: "Décolonisation: y aura-t-il un jour une "place Lumumba" à Ixelles?," *Rtbf*, last visited March 29, 2018: https://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail_decolonisation-y-aura-t-il-un-jour-une-place-lumumba-a-ixelles?id=9814528.

Fig. 23 Futur Place Lumumba, Google Maps.

Source: "Omstreden Lumumba Plein al zichtbaar op Google Maps," *Knack*, last visited March 29, 2018: <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/omstreden-lumumbaplein-in-brussel-al-zichtbaar-op-google-maps/article-normal-590011.html>

Fig. 24 Leopold II daubed in red liquid, Place du Trône, Brussels, 2018.

Source: "Beeld van koning Leopold II alweer besmeurd door vandalen," *HLN*, last visited March 29, 2018: <https://www.hln.be/regio/brussel/beeld-van-koning-leopold-ii-alweer-besmeurd-door-vandalen~a76b8ff1/>.

Fig. 25 Placard with "Mass Murder" on a bust of Leopold II in Ghent.

Source: "Sorry voor alles, Congo?" *De Standaard*, last visited March 29, 2018: http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20160929_02493235.

Fig. 26 Protest on Place du Trône in Brussels, december 2015.

Source: Pierre Wachholder, "Happygraphy," *Twitter*, last visited March 29, 2018: <https://twitter.com/happygraphy/status/677643176371478528>.

Fig. 27 Stolen bust Leopold II, Dudenpark, 2018.

Source: "Buste Leopold II gestolen uit het Dudenpark," *Bruzz*, last visited March 29, 2018: <https://www.bruzz.be/samenleving/buste-leopold-ii-verdwenen-uit-dudenpark-2018-01-11>

Fig. 28 Bust Leopold II Dudenpark replaced by birdseed replica, 2018.

Source: "Leopold II-buste van vogelzaad in Dudenpark," *Bruzz*, last visited March 29, 2018: <https://www.bruzz.be/awel-merci/leopold-ii-buste-van-vogelzaad-dudenpark-2018-01-12>

Fig. 29 Painting Chéri Samba, Royal Museum of Central Africa, 2002.

Source: “*Reorganisation* van Chéri Samba,” *Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika*, last visited March 29, 2018: http://www.africamuseum.be/home/treasures/cherisamba_aug14?set_language=nl&cl=nl

Fig. 30 “Wanneer we spreken over kolonisatie/Quand on parle de la colonisation,” by Vesna Faassen en Lukas Verdijk.

Source: “Wanneer we spreken over kolonisatie/Quand on parle de la colonisation,” *Vesna Faassen en Lukas Verdijk*, last visited March 29, 2018: <http://faassen-verdijk.com/installation-wanneer-we-spreken-over-kolonisatie-quand-on-parle-de-la-colonisation/>

Fig. 31 - 32 Performance *On Monumental Silences* by Ibrahim Mahama in Kunsthall Extra City, 2018.

Source: Mark Rietveld, “On Monumental Silences,” *Kunsthall Extra City*, last visited March 29, 2018: <http://extracitykunsthall.org/en/exhibitions/on-monumental-silences>.

Fig. 33 Installation by Rob Jacobs and Anne Reijniers, *Échangeur*, Brussels, Beursplein.

Source: “Installation,” *Échangeur*, last visited March 29, 2018: <http://www.echangeur.be/pedestal>.

Fig. 34 “The Congo Tribunal,” installation and documentary of Milo Rau, 2015.

Source: “THE CONGO TRIBUNAL - MILO RAU IN AANWEZIGHEID VAN DE REGISSEUR,” *Bozar*, last visited March 29, 2018: <https://www.bozar.be/nl/activities/136904-the-congo-tribunal---milo-rau>

Bio/ Marte Van Hassel

Marte Van Hassel is an art historian. In her research, she experiments with the borders between theory and practice and wants to establish a collaboration between academics, artists and activists. She is involved in the organisations ***Hand in Hand against racism*** vzw en ***Labo vzw***. On January, the 17th she participated in the national day of action in context of ***DecolonizeMyCity***, and organised the regional event in Leuven. Together with Stella Nyanchama she published '***Tijd voor Nieuwe Monumenten***' ('Time for New Monuments') in rekto:verso, a conversation about the solo exhibition of Ibrahim Mahama in ExtraCity. Van Hassel studied art history in Leuven, Berlin and Ghent. She graduated in July 2017 with a master thesis about the performativity of colonial monuments and the role of artistic interventions in the postcolonial public space.